

as immersed in cinders; but the first historian who alludes to them by name is Dion Cassius*, who flourished about a century and a half after Pliny. He appears to have derived his information from the traditions of the inhabitants, and to have recorded, without discrimination, all the facts and fables which he could collect. He tells us, "that during the eruption a multitude of men of superhuman stature, resembling giants, appeared, sometimes on the mountain, and sometimes in the environs—that stones and smoke were thrown out, the sun was hidden, and then the giants seemed to rise again, while the sounds of trumpets were heard, &c. &c.; and finally," he relates, "two entire cities, Herculaneum and Pompeii, were buried under showers of ashes, while all the people were sitting in the theatre." That many of these circumstances were invented, would have been obvious, even without the aid of Pliny's letters; and the examination of Herculaneum and Pompeii enables us to prove, that none of the people were destroyed in the theatres, and, indeed, that there were very few of the inhabitants who did not escape from both cities. Yet some lives were lost, and there was ample foundation for the tale in its most essential particulars.

This case may serve as a caution to the geologist, who has frequent occasion to weigh, in like manner, negative evidence derived from the silence of eminent writers, against the obscure but positive testimony of popular traditions. Some authors, for example, would have us call in question the reality of the Ogygian deluge, because Homer and Hesiod say nothing of it. But they were poets, not historians, and they lived many centuries after the latest date assigned to the catastrophe. Had they even lived at the time of that flood, we might still contend that their silence ought, no more than Pliny's, to avail against the authority of tradition, however much exaggeration we may impute to the traditional narrative of the event.

It does not appear that in the year 79 any lava flowed from Vesuvius; the ejected substances, perhaps, consisted entirely of lapilli, sand, and fragments of older lava, as when Monte Nuovo was thrown up in 1538. The first era at which we have authentic accounts of the flowing of a stream of lava, is the year 1036, which is the seventh eruption from the revival of the fires of the volcano. A few years afterwards, in 1049, another eruption is mentioned, and another in 1138 (or 1139), after which a great pause ensued of 168 years. During this long interval of repose, two minor vents opened at distant points. First, it is on tradition that an eruption took place from the Solfatara in the year 1198, during the reign of Frederick II., Emperor of Germany; and although no circumstantial detail of the event has reached us from those dark ages, we may receive the fact without hesitation.† Nothing more, however, can be attributed to this eruption, as Mr. Scrope observes, than the discharge of a light

* Hist. Rom. lib. lxxvi.

† The earliest authority, says Mr. Forbes, given for this fact, appears to be

Capaccio, quoted in the Terra Tremante of Bonito.—Edin. Journ. of Sci. &c., No. i., new series, p. 127. July, 1829.