

kind, have devoted a portion of their time to the investigation of natural phenomena. These men have attempted to explain those things which others have considered as the secrets of Almighty Intelligence, and have delighted themselves with the contemplation of the beauty of created existence, and the wisdom displayed in its formation. But those who have been unimpressed by nature in her periods of repose, have been attracted by her appearance in the moment of sublime excitement. The accuracy of this remark will be admitted by those who have never beheld a more violent convulsion than that produced by a passing thunder-storm, and still more by those who have seen mountains themselves shaken and rent by the impetuous action of subterranean fires. The importance which men attribute to uncommon appearances, and particularly to those of a fearful character has been the means of supplying us with an ample fund of information concerning the states and effects of those volcanic mountains which exist in countries inhabited by, or known to, those whom we designate the ancients.

The phenomena which precede volcanic eruptions always present, wherever they may occur, a great similarity of character, though they may vary in their intensity. The energy chiefly depends upon the force required to open a passage for the liquefied mass, and the attendant gaseous fluids. If the vent of an habitual volcano be much obstructed by the accumulation of lava in the fissure through which ejection has taken place, a greater power will be required than would be otherwise necessary, as the fissure must be re-opened and the lava elevated; and if it be necessary to form an entirely new vent, a still greater force must be brought into action, and that in proportion to the solidity, position, and weight of the superposed mass. There is not, we believe, a single instance within the range of historical records, in which a new vent has been formed in a country never before the seat of volcanic action. It is not uncommon to hear of the eruption of volcanoes that have been for centuries inactive, nor is it improbable that entirely new vents are sometimes formed in those situations where the same power has been before exerted. In both these cases, the great obstruction presented to the volcanic agent by superposed rocks has been removed by former eruptions, and therefore but little increase of power is required to force a passage for the melted materials.