

CALABRIA, 1783.

Alas for Sicily ! rude fragments now
 Lie scattered where the shapely column stood.
 Her palaces are dust. In all her streets
 The voice of singing and the sprightly chord
 Are silent. Revelry and dance and show
 Suffer a syncope and solemn pause,
 While God performs upon the trembling stage
 Of his own works his dreadful part alone.
 From the extremest point
 Of elevation down into the abyss,
 His wrath is busy and his frown is felt.
 The rocks fall headlong and the valleys rise,
 The rivers die into offensive pools,
 And, charged with putrid verdure, breathe a gross
 And mortal nuisance into all the air.
 What solid was, by transformation strange
 Grows fluid, and the fixed and rooted earth,
 Tormented into billows, heaves and swells,
 Or with vortiginous and hideous whirl
 Sucks down its prey insatiable. Immense
 The tumult and the overthrow, the pangs
 And agonies of human and of brute
 Multitudes, fugitive on every side,
 And fugitive in vain. The sylvan scene
 Migrates uplifted, and with all its soil
 Alighting in far distant fields, finds out
 A new possessor, and survives the change.

COWPER, *The Task*.*

Calabria is that country so justly famous in ancient history—that *Magna Græcia*—where Pythagoras, surrounded by his disciples, cultivated the arts and sciences ; and which, at a later period, becoming the battle-field of the heroic Spartacus, saw the great servile insurrection of 71 B.C., after long menacing the safety of the Roman government, crushed by the vigorous exertions of Crassus.

Calabria is at too short a distance from the volcano of Etna not to have been exposed in all ages to shocks from earthquakes. In 1693, it was visited by a severe disaster. According to a medal struck in memory of the event, the number of victims on this occasion amounted to one hundred thousand.

The convulsions which, less than a century afterwards—in 1783—shattered Calabria and the eastern districts of Sicily, proved scarcely less fatal, since out of 365 or 370 villages then flourishing in Upper Calabria, 192 were entirely ruined, and 92 more or less gravely damaged.†

* [Cowper published his *Task* in 1785, about two years after the occurrence of the catastrophe which he has so powerfully depicted in the passage quoted above.]

† “Description historique et géographique de la ville de Messine, et détails météorologiques du désastre que cette ville vient d'éprouver (le 5 février 1783) par le tremblement de terre, avec des notes curieuses et intéressantes sur la Calabre altérieure, la Sicile, et les îles de Lipari” (ed. 4to, Paris, 1783), p. 18. [As a corrective of the highly-coloured statements of this treatise, the reader should turn to Mr. Mallet's “Neapolitan Earthquake of 1857” (edit. London, 1862), where some of them are incidentally examined.]