

MOUNT ETNA.

[One of the most celebrated volcanic mountains in Europe is that of Etna, or *Ætna*, situated in the north-eastern district of the rich island of Sicily, adjoining the sea-coast, near Catania. It is now known to the Sicilian peasants as *Mongibello*—a name made up of the Italian *Monte* and the Arabic *jibel*, both words signifying a mountain—but to most European nations it is familiar as Etna. It is the loftiest mountain in Southern Europe, rising to an elevation of 10,874 feet above the sea; its circumference at its base measures not less than 90 miles, so that its mass would completely occupy more than one English county. It is a central volcano—that is, an isolated and lonely mountain—its limits on the east being defined by the Mediterranean, on the south and west by the river Simeto and Giarretta (the ancient *Symaethus*), and on the north by the valley of Alcantara, which, like a deep gulf, separates it from the mountain-groups of Northern Sicily.

Etna is an active volcano. We know from evident geological data that its eruptions must have commenced before the historical age; and since the beginning of human records they have followed one another at irregular but frequent intervals. Diodorus asserts that the Sicanians were driven from their ancient settlements in the eastern part of the island by its numerous and destructive outbursts. On this statement considerable doubt not unnaturally rests; but, at all events, as early as the days of Hesiod its eruptions had attracted the attention and excited the wonder of the Greeks. Pindar would almost seem to have been an eye-witness of them, from the force and truth with which he describes the torrents of fire that burst from its innermost caverns, and the rolling sheets of crimson flame that kindled the darkness of night with their deep glow, and obscured the day with their clouds of smoke. *Æschylus* has also a fine allusion to the "rivers of fire which with ravenous jaws devoured the smiling Sicily."* *Thucydides* records an eruption which occurred in B.C. 425, the sixth year of the first Peloponnesian War, but he speaks of it as

* [Pindar, "Pyth," i. 40; *Æschylus*, "Prometh. Vincit," 368.]