

only the third since the Greek colonization of the island. The fourth is mentioned by Diodorus as taking place shortly before B.C. 396, and ravaging so considerable a tract of the country between Taormenium and Catania, that the Carthaginian general Mago was arrested in his march along the coast.\* History is thenceforth silent until B.C. 140, though we can hardly suppose two centuries and a half to have elapsed without any signs of volcanic activity. If such were the case, in B.C. 140, 135, 126, and 120, the mountain more than compensated for its previous inertness; the outburst in the last-named year almost destroyed the city of Catania. Eruptions also took place in B.C. 49 and B.C. 44, the latter immediately preceding the death of Cæsar, and being accordingly represented by Virgil as a portent of that disaster.†

“ Nor was the fact told by the sun alone :  
Earth, air, and seas, with prodigies were signed,  
And birds obscure, and howling dogs divined.  
What rocks did Ætna's bellowing mouth expire  
From her torn entrails; and what floods of fire ! ”

These eruptions appear to have been of a tremendously violent character, and to have completely desolated the whole eastern side of the mountain.

Another convulsion is recorded in B.C. 38, and one in B.C. 32, which was accompanied by a great torrent of lava. We read of only two more during the later years of the Roman Empire—one in the reign of Vespasian, A.D. 70; and the other in that of Decius, A.D. 251; and Orosius, who wrote early in the fifth century, speaks of Ætna as in his time having become comparatively quiescent.

That these eruptions were equal in violence to any which have occurred in modern days, may reasonably be inferred from the descriptions recorded by ancient authorities. Livy speaks of ashes and hot sand carried in clouds as far as Rhegium; and Pliny of bellowing noises being heard in the remotest parts of Sicily. The following picture, which we borrow from the third book of Virgil's “Æneid,” would serve for any recent eruption in all its impressive details:— ‡

\* [Diodorus, xiv. 59.]

† [Virgil, “Æneid,” iii. 570–577.]

‡ [Professor Conington's Translation, pp. 93, 94.]