

" Ætna with her voice of fear
 In weltering chaos thunders near.
 Now pitchy clouds she bellows forth
 Of cinders red and vapours swarth,
 And from her caverns lifts on high
 Live balls of flame that lick the sky :
 Now with more dire convulsion flings
 Disploded rocks, her heart's rent strings
 And lava torrents hurls to-day,
 A burning gulf of fiery spray."

Here we recognize the characteristic phenomena of a volcanic outburst : showers of ashes, fire-balls, clouds of smoke, ejected rocks, and streams of lava.

To account for these wonders, the poets resorted to the agency of Fable, and described them as produced by the violent struggles of the giant Typhoeus—Enceladus, according to some—to relieve himself of the weight flung upon him by Zeus after the war between the gods and Titans.

" 'Tis said Enceladus' huge frame,
 Heart-stricken by the avenging flame,
 Is prisoned here, and underneath
 Gaspethrough each vent his sulphurous breath :
 And still as his tired side shifts round,
 Trinacria echoes to the sound
 Through all its length, while clouds of smoke
 The living soul of ether choke." *

The natural features of the mountain were the same in ancient times as in our own. In winter its higher grounds were covered with snow ; a contrast to its fiery interior which the poets made the most of. Its mid-regions were clothed in immense forests, from which the Syracusan tyrant Dionysius procured the materials for the vast fleet he constructed in B.C. 399. The lower slopes abounded in rich meadows and prolific vineyards, the decomposition of the volcanic ashes producing a soil particularly well adapted for the cultivation of the vine. The summit, according to Strabo, was a level plain of about twenty stadia in circumference, enclosed by a narrow ridge, like a wall or rampart, and consisting of deep and burning sands. Out of the centre rose a small, bare, and rugged hillock, overhung by a cloud or canopy of smoke, not less than two hundred feet in height. But its aspect, says Strabo,† was constantly changing ; sometimes you might see a single crater, sometimes two or more. The ascent of the mountain was by no means an unusual enterprise, and we are told that it was undertaken by the Emperor Hadrian for the purpose of seeing from its lofty watch-tower the glories of an Italian sunrise.‡ At a point about 1400 feet below the summit are still extant the remains of a Roman work, commonly known as the *Torre del Filosofo*, generally associated with the memory of Empedocles ; but more probably dating from the epoch of Hadrian's ascent.

In the name Ætna, philologists recognize a reference to the volcanic character

* [Virgil, " Æneid," iii , *ut suprâ.*] † [Strabo, bk. vi., pp. 269, 273, 274.]

‡ [Spartianus, "Hadrian," 13.]