

of the mountain; it comes from the same root as *αἶθερ*, to burn. But the poets identify it with a nymph, Aetna, the daughter of Uranus and Gaea, or of Briareus and Gaea, who, it is said, acted as arbitrator between Hephaestus and Demeter respecting the possession of Sicily.* According to Euripides, it was in the recesses of Ætna that Hephaestus and the Cyclops forged the thunderbolts of Zeus.

One of the latest traditions of the mountain associates it with the Sicilian philosopher Empedocles, who was said to have perished in its flames; having cast himself into its crater that men might know nothing of his death, and suppose him to have been removed from the earth like a divine being. But the mountain having cast forth the philosopher's sandals, his fictitious immortality was thus exposed. Such is the story told by Lucian: not only is its absurdity self-evident, but we have the direct testimony of Aristotle that Empedocles died a natural death at the age of sixty.

On the old legend Mr. Matthew Arnold has based a semi-dramatic poem of much beauty, from which we borrow a description of Etna, equally remarkable for its fidelity to nature and its charms of language. It refers to the woody region of the mountain:—†

"The track winds down to the clear stream
To cross the sparkling shallows; there
The cattle love to gather, on their way
To the high mountain pastures, and to stay,
Till the rough cow-herds drive them past,
Knee-deep in the cool ford; for 'tis the last
Of all the woody, high, well-watered dells
On Etna; and the beam
Of noon is broken there by chestnut boughs
Down its steep, verdant sides; the air
Is freshened by the leaping stream, which throws
Eternal showers of spray on the mossed roots
Of trees, and veins of turf, and long dark shoots
Of ivy-plants, and fragrant hanging bells
Of hyacinths, and on late anemones,
That muffle its wet banks; but glade,
And stream, and sward, and chestnut-trees
End here; Etna beyond, in the broad glare
Of the hot noon, without a shade,
Slope behind slope, up to the peak, lies bare;
The peak, round which the white clouds play."

The country immediately surrounding the mighty base of Etna is everywhere covered with lava, and everywhere presents abundant traces of past volcanic action. The mountain-sides are also furrowed with broad currents of lava; the more recent, fearfully black and portentous; the more ancient, either partially or wholly decomposed, and thickly clothed with vegetation.

* [Article "Ætna," in Dr. Smith's "Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography."]

† [Matthew Arnold, "Empedocles on Etna," pp. 16, 17.]