

a varying altitude of from 1000 to 3200 feet. Ridges of hard lava are encrusted on this wall; it is supposed they were formed by injection from beneath into fissures opened in the previously existing rock.

By some authorities the Val del Bove is regarded as an extinct crater. Sir Charles Lyell, however, ascribes its formation either to the subsidence of a considerable portion of the mountain, or to the long-continued action of water.*

The aspect of the summit—

“ The charred, blackened, melancholy waste,
Crowned by the awful peak, Etna's great mouth,
Round which the sullen vapour rolls”—

is described as singularly impressive. It is possible to reach the very brink of the crater, and to look down into its awful depths—to survey its chaos of black scoræ, and fragments of lava, basalt, and sulphur—the lava boiling and seething below, like oil in a gigantic caldron! In 1834, Elie de Beaumont and Leopold von Buch examined the small active mouth which forms the culminating point—the apex—of the mountain.

“ It was for all of us,” says Elie de Beaumont, “ a moment of surprise very difficult to describe, when we found ourselves suddenly on the margin, not of the great crater, but of a nearly circular gulf, from 260 to 330 feet in diameter, which lies contiguous to the great crater for a small portion of its circumference. Our glances plunged eagerly into this nearly cylindrical funnel, but it was in vain we sought there the secret of the volcanic energy (*la volcanicité*). The nearly horizontal strata which are conspicuously marked upon its almost vertical sides only revealed to us the structure of the upper cone. In endeavouring to count them successively, we saw them gradually lost in the complete obscurity of the bottom. From the gloomy depths not a sound issued; they gave forth nothing but whitish vapours, slightly sulphurous, and principally composed of steam. The melancholy aspect of the black and silent abyss in which our gaze was lost; its obscure and buried sides, along which wound, monotonously and heavily, immense wreaths of vapour of a sad and grayish tint; the great crater on which this narrow gulf abutted, and in which the confused accumulation of substances of various colours, yellow, and gray, and red, seemed the very image of chaos;—all combined to form a funereal and sepulchral scene, whose wild and dreary impression was further increased by the chill morning air and a light cold breeze from the north-east.”

* [Sir C. Lyell, “ Principles of Geology,” bk. ii., c. 26.]