

The vast scale and violence of the volcanic operations in Campania, in the olden time, has been a theme of declamation, and has been contrasted with the comparative state of quiescence of this delightful region in the modern era. Instead of inferring, from analogy, that the ancient Vesuvius was always at rest when the craters of the Phlegræan Fields were burning,—that each cone rose in succession,—and that many years, and often centuries, of repose intervened between different eruptions,—*geologists seem to have generally conjectured that the whole group sprung up from the ground at once, like the soldiers of Cadmus when he sowed the dragon's teeth. As well might they endeavour to persuade us that on these Phlegræan Fields, as the poets feigned, the giants warred with Jove, ere yet the puny race of mortals were in being.*

Modern eruptions of Vesuvius.—For nearly a century after the birth of Monte Nuovo, Vesuvius continued in a state of tranquillity. There had then been no violent eruption for 492 years; and it appears that the crater was then exactly in the condition of the present extinct volcano of Astroni, near Naples. Bracini, who visited Vesuvius not long before the eruption of 1631, gives the following interesting description of the interior:—"The crater was five miles in circumference, and about a thousand paces deep: its sides were covered with brushwood, and at the bottom there was a plain on which cattle grazed. In the woody parts wild boars frequently harboured. In one part of the plain, covered with ashes, were three small pools, one filled with hot and bitter water, another salter than the sea, and a third hot, but tasteless."* But at length these forests and grassy plains were consumed, being suddenly blown into the air, and their ashes scattered to the winds. In December, 1631, seven streams of lava poured at once from the crater, and overflowed several villages on the flanks and at the foot of the mountain. Resina, partly built over the ancient site of Herculaneum, was consumed by the fiery torrent. Great floods of mud were as destructive as the lava itself,—no uncommon occurrence during these catastrophes; for such is the violence of rains produced by the evolutions of aqueous vapour, that torrents of water descend the cone, and, becoming charged with impalpable volcanic dust, and rolling along loose ashes, acquire sufficient consistency to deserve their ordinary appellation of "aqueous lavas."

A brief period of repose ensued, which lasted only until the year 1666, from which time to the present there has been a constant series of eruptions, with rarely an interval of rest exceeding ten years. During these three centuries, no irregular volcanic agency has convulsed other points in this district. Brieslak remarked, that such irregular convulsions had occurred in the Bay of Naples in every second century; as, for example, the eruption of the Solfatara, in the twelfth; of the lava of Arso, in Ischia, in the fourteenth;

* Hamilton's *Campi Phlegræi*, folio, vol. i. p. 62.; and Brieslak, *Campanie*, tome i. p. 186.