

upper parts of the mountain, and encounters any of these hills, the stream is divided, and flows round them so as to elevate the gently sloping grounds from which they rise. In this manner a deduction is often made at once of twenty or thirty feet, or even more, from their height. Thus, one of the minor cones, called Monte Peluso, was diminished in altitude by a great lava stream which encircled it in 1444; and another current has recently taken the same course—yet this hill still remains four or five hundred feet high.

There is a cone called Monte Nucilla near Nicolosi, round the base of which several successive currents have flowed, and showers of ashes have fallen, since the time of history, till at last, during an eruption in 1536, the surrounding plain was so raised, that the top of the cone alone was left projecting above the general level. Monte Nero, situated above the Grotta dell' Capre, was in 1766 almost submerged by a current: and Monte Capreolo afforded, in the year 1669, a curious example of one of the last stages of obliteration; for a lava stream, descending on a high ridge which had been built up by the continued superposition of successive lavas, flowed directly into the crater, and nearly filled it. The lava, therefore, of each new lateral cone tends to detract from the relative height of lower cones above their base: so that the flanks of Etna, sloping with a gentle inclination, envelop in succession a great multitude of minor volcanos, while new ones spring up from time to time.

Early eruptions of Etna. — Etna appears to have been in activity from the earliest times of tradition; for Diodorus Siculus mentions an eruption which caused a district to be deserted by the Sicani before the Trojan war. Thucydides informs us, that in the sixth year of the Peloponnesian war, or in the spring of the year 425 B. C., a lava stream ravaged the environs of Catania, and this, he says, was the third eruption which had happened in Sicily since the colonization of that island by the Greeks*. The second of the three eruptions alluded to by the historian took place in the year 475 B. C., and was that so poetically described by Pindar, two years afterwards, in his first Pythian ode:—

κίων
 Δ' ουρανία συνεχέει
 Νιφθεσσ' Αίτνα, πανέτερος
 Χιονος οξείας τιθηνα.

In these and the seven verses which follow, a graphic description is given of Etna, such as it appeared five centuries before the Christian era, and such as it has been seen when in eruption in modern times. The poet is only making a passing allusion to the Sicilian volcano, as the mountain under which Typhœus lay buried, yet by a few touches of his master hand every striking feature of the scene has been faithfully portrayed. We are told of “the snowy Etna, the pillar of heaven,—the nurse of everlasting frost, in whose deep caverns lie concealed the fountains of unapproachable fire—a

* Book iii., at the end.