

the forerunner and the warning (if that warning could have been understood) of the first eruption of Vesuvius on record, which followed sixteen years afterwards in the year 79. Before that time none of the ancients had any notion of its being a volcano, though Pompeii itself is paved with its lava. The crater was probably filled, or at least the bottom occupied, by a lake; and we read of it as the stronghold of the rebel chief Spartacus, who, when lured there by the Roman army, escaped with his followers by clambering up the steep sides by the help of the wild vines that festooned them. The ground since the first earthquake in 63 had often been shaken by slight shocks, when at length, in August 79, they became more numerous and violent, and, on the night preceding the eruption, so tremendous as to threaten everything with destruction. A morning of comparative repose succeeded, and the terrified inhabitants of those devoted towns no doubt breathed more freely, and hoped the worst was over; when, about one o'clock in the afternoon, the Elder Pliny, who was stationed in command of the Roman fleet at Misenum in full view of Vesuvius, beheld a huge black cloud ascending from the mountain, which, "rising slowly always higher," at last spread out aloft like the head of one of those picturesque flat-topped pines which form such an ornament of the Italian landscape. The meaning of such a phenomenon was to Pliny and to every one a mystery. We know now too well what it imports, and they were not long left in doubt. From that cloud descended stones, ashes, and pumice; and the cloud