

reflected light will have seen, on a miniature scale, as Mr. Babbage remarks, an exact resemblance of the plain which formed, on the occasion of the philosopher's visit, the bottom of the great Vesuvian crater.

As the morning advanced, the light increased; and sometime before sunrise the adventurers had completed the circuit of the crater. Then followed that magnificent spectacle—sunrise from the top of a lofty mountain.

Mr. Babbage now began to speculate upon the means of securing a nearer view of the little miniature volcano in action at one corner of the gulf beneath him.

The two explorers had brought with them a supply of ropes, and, in their tour round the crater, had carefully marked every dike of congealed lava by which the massive cone was split. These presented buttresses, with frequent ledges, or huge steps, by which they hoped, with the aid of their ropes, to let themselves down into the subjacent Tartarus.

On consulting their chief guide, they found him unwilling to dare the attempt, and more disposed to remain with the other guides on the upper edge of the crater. Nor was this an unsatisfactory arrangement, on the whole; because it left a responsible person to keep the other guides in order, and also sufficient force to raise up the adventurers bodily by the ropes, should such a course become needful.

They were compelled, by the abrupt incline of the rocky buttresses, to have recourse to ropes; but any attempt to traverse the steep slopes of light ashes and fine sand would have been far more dangerous, from the risk of being engulfed in them.

Having thoroughly examined the several disadvantages of these rough-hewn, irregular, and Titanic stairs, one was selected as offering the greatest facilities for the descent into the crater. Mr. Babbage was scarcely "in trim" for his work: he was encumbered with one of Troughton's heavy barometers strapped on his back; looking much like Cupid's quiver, but certainly heavier! In his pocket he carried an excellent box sextant; and in a rough kind of basket two or three thermometers, a measuring tape, and a glass bottle enclosed in a leather case—commonly called "a pocket-pistol"—accompanied by a few biscuits.

They began the descent by two ropes, each steadied above by a couple of guides. The adventurers first planted their feet wherever they could find a vantage-point; then, holding on to the rope, sprang down to the next ledge. In this manner they proceeded, step by step, until they gained the last projection of the dike, when nothing more remained but to let themselves slide down the long steep incline of smooth shifting sand. Fortunately it was not very deep, and was underlaid by some solid material. Mr. Babbage soon found it was impossible to stand; he therefore took his seat on the moving mass, which evidently intended to accompany them in their journey. At first, to Mr. Babbage's great dismay, he was relieved from the care of his barometer, of which the sliding sand immediately took charge. However, both the barometer and its owner accomplished the rapid descent in safety, and Mr. Babbage and his companion found themselves standing on the burning plain.

The area of this plain was perfectly flat, and of an elliptical form. Its surface consisted of a black scoriaceous rock, reticulated with ditches from one to three