

an excellent soil for vines. He recognised the truly volcanic nature of the whole district from Etna to the Phlegraean Fields, under which Typhon, as Pindar sang, lay crushed on his burning bed.¹ In his excellent account of the ascent of Etna, Strabo compares the molten lava to a kind of black mud which, liquefied in the craters, is ejected from them and flows down the sides of the mountain, cooling and congealing in its descent, until it becomes a motionless dark rock like millstone.²

Strabo, however, made no advance on his predecessors in regard to an explanation of the nature and cause of volcanic action, which he continued to attribute to the force of winds pent up within the earth. He alludes to the connection between the state of the weather and volcanic energy at the Lipari Isles, already noticed by previous writers—a connection which, so far as it exists, doubtless tended to confirm the popular attribution of the eruptions to the escape of subterranean wind. The most important remark of this geographer in regard to volcanic action is undoubtedly his observation that the district around the Strait of Messina seldom suffers much from earthquakes, whereas formerly, before the volcanic orifices of this region were opened up, so as to allow of the escape of the fire smouldering within the earth and of the imprisoned wind, water and burning masses, the ground was convulsed with frightful earthquakes. The doctrine that volcanoes are safety valves, which was once thought to be a modern idea, is thus at least as old as the beginning of the Christian era.

¹ Book vi. i. 5.

² vi. ii. 3, 8.