

'Tis an old story, truly ; but I remember as if it had been yesterday, how my Saturday employments were changed, and how the vagrant, careless fancies of the schoolboy passed into the settled purposes that have moulded the man. I had passed a Saturday afternoon alone, and next day as usual met my comrades at church. On comparing notes, I found that the previous afternoon they had set out for some lime-quarries, about four miles off, and had returned laden with wonders—plants of strange form, with scales, teeth, and bones of uncouth fishes, all embedded in the heart of the stone, and drawn out of a subterranean territory of almost fabulous extent and gloom. Could anything more marvellous have been suggested to a youthful fancy? The caverns of the Genii, even that of the Wonderful Lamp, seemed not more to be coveted. At least the new cave had this great advantage over the old ones, that I was sure it was really true ; a faint suspicion having begun to arise that, possibly, after all, the Eastern caverns might have no more tangible existence than on the pages of the story-book. But here, only four miles from my own door, was a real cavern, mysterious beyond the power of my friends to describe, inhabited by living men who toiled like gnomes, with murky faces and little lamps on their foreheads, driving waggons, and blasting open the rock in vast and seemingly impenetrable galleries, where the sullen reverberations boomed as it were for miles among endless gigantic pillars and sheets of Stygian water that stretched away deep and dark into fathomless gloom. And in that rock, wrapped up in its substance like mummies in their cerements, lay heaps of plants of wondrous kinds ; some resembled those of our woods and streams, but there were many, the like to which my companions declared that even in our longest rambles they had never seen on bank,