

or brake, or hill;—fishes, too, there were, with strong massive scales, very different from our trouts and minnows. Some of the spiny fins, indeed, just a little resembled our foe the “beardie.” Very likely (thought I), the Genius of the cave being a sensible fellow, has resolved to preserve his trout, and so with a murrain on the beardies has buried them bodily in the rock.

But above all, in these dark subterranean recesses lurked the remains of gigantic reptiles; and one of the quarrymen possessed a terrific tusk and some fragmentary scales, which he would have sold to my friends could their joint purse have supplied the stipulated price.

My interest in the tale, of course, increased at every new incident; but when they came to talk of reptiles, the exuberant fancy could contain itself no longer. “Dragons! dragons!” I shouted, and rubbed my hands in an ecstasy of delight. “Dragons, boys, be sure they are, that have been turned into stone by the magic of some old necromancer.”

They had found too, in great abundance, what they had been told were “coprolites”—that is, as we afterwards learnt, the petrified excrement of ancient fishes. “*Copperlites*,” thought I, nay, perchance it might be *gold*; for who ever read of such a famous cavern with petrified forests, fishes, and dragons, that had not besides huge treasures of yellow gold?

So there and then we planned an excursion for the following Saturday. The days that intervened stretched themselves somehow to an interminable length. It seemed the longest week of my life, even though every sleeping and waking hour was crowded with visions of the wondrous cavern. At length the long expected morning dawned, and soon brightened up into a clear, calm autumnal day.