



FIGURE 9.11.

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In this painting by Charles R. Knight, two specimens of the dinosaur *Stegosaurus* are shown foraging for food in an area now called southeastern Wyoming. (Courtesy Field Museum of Natural History Chicago.)

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must have been formidable weapons. The great bony frill around the base of its neck probably served for protection. *Triceratops* is thought to have had a relatively large brain, about a kilogram (2.2 lbs.) in weight. In spite of this relative intelligence, huge size, and protective armor, it was not spared in the coming disaster.

### WHAT HAPPENED TO THE DINOSAURS?

The fossil record reveals that there have been several major extinctions of life forms over geologic time. None is so dramatic or so widespread as the mass exterminations that took place at the end of the Mesozoic era 63 million years ago. The dinosaur reign that had lasted for 140 million years fell with a resounding crash. The dinosaurs disappeared from the land, seas, and air. Only their fossilized bones and tracks remain as witness to their once-dominant place in geologic history.

Why did they vanish? There are numerous hypotheses and explanations. While none is completely satisfactory, it is worthwhile to review some of the major suggestions. Unsolved mysteries are far more fascinating than solved cases. We can also review some of the things about the dynamic processes of our planet in the investigation.