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A DREAM

I had been confined to the house, during a fortnight, with an intermittent fever. It is one of the properties of this disorder to produce troubled and unquiet slumbers, and even waking fantasies, that present to the eye the grim heads of beasts and monsters; and the most grotesque and horrible caricatures of the human countenance, which seem perpetually to be making mouths and grinning at the patient. As the fever ran high in the day, I was constantly troubled with these phantasmagoria at night; and, waking or sleeping, incessantly under the dominion of the night-mare.

The dream that haunted my imagination last night was so extraordinary, that I could not resist an inclination to record it upon paper.

I found myself in the centre of a large and well cultivated plain, watered by a noble river, the dead flat of the landscape interspersed with woods and houses, while towns and villages appeared in the distance. While I stood musing alone, and marvelling where, and in what country I might be, I was joined by a plain dignified-looking man, whose majestic countenance bore the stamp of melancholy, and of secret care. On asking the stranger’s name, he told me he was the unfortunate Gustavus, the exiled and dethroned King of Sweden; and that he was travelling to regain his kingdom. His was a name which I could not hear when waking without emotion, and my interest was not a little excited in the royal stranger, as I replied — “I am an English woman, seeking fame in the world.” — “Ha!” returned he, taking me by the hand, and looking earnestly in my face, “is that your business? Well, we ...
our journey together — follow me.”

So saying, he turned into a rough and narrow path, which I had great difficulty in traversing, as it was full of fragments of rock, and deep pools of water. Several times I stopped, fearful of proceeding further; but my guide waved me forward, exclaiming, in a lively voice, “Courage! this is the way of the world, persevere to the end, and we shall overcome the world.” As he said this, I observed an immense ridge, or bank of earth, rising before us, which bounded the plain in a level line, as far as the eye could reach. The bank appeared sloping, at a distance, and easy of access; but, the nearer we approached, the more tremendous the ascent became, till the ridge seemed rising perpendicularly to the clouds. A deadly fear crept over me — I shuddered, and drew back. “Your path lies over this bank,” said the King; “you have gone too far to recede, and must either stay here and perish, or go forward with me.”

With trouble and anguish I began to ascend the bank, pausing every moment to take breath. My companion was more fortunate: he continued to proceed, with a slow yet steady pace, and often put back his hand to help me along; but, while I put one step forward, I seemed to slide two or three steps back. At last, stopping, and wringing my hands, I said I could go no farther. “Take time,” returned the ex-monarch, “patience will overcome every difficulty. The world will not surely treat you as harshly as it has treated me. — Take this knife,” he continued, “and scoop a hole in the bank; and, when you have placed one foot in this artificial step, make another above it, and in time you will reach the top.” I followed his advice, laboured indefatigably at the bank, and at last had the satisfaction of seeing my royal guide on the top of the ridge. He stood for a few minutes, and looked earnestly upon me as I toiled up the ascent: then, crying out that his kingdom was won, he disappeared on the other side. With much pain and fatigue, I reached the summit of the bank, anticipating a happy termination of my journey in the Swedish monarch’s dominions; but what were my horror and dismay, on beholding, on the other side, a wide and trackless ocean, stretching away into infinity,
and bounded on every side, excepting that of the bank on which I stood, by the horizon! Not a sail — not even a floating plank — relieved the dreary monotony of the scene I turned from the cheerless prospect, bewildered, and sick at heart, to look back upon the fertile plain I had quitted; but there a new object of terror met my eyes. The fields, the houses, the woods and river, all had vanished, and been swallowed up in a vast interminable ocean, like the one on which I had just looked, that seemed rapidly advancing. The bank now shook and tottered beneath the repeated shocks of the boisterous waves. The narrow isthmus at length seemed gradually sinking beneath my feet; and, in the extremity of my despair, I called loudly on heaven to save me. I beheld at my side a giant, whose extended arms were stretched over these two vast oceans, while his head and shoulders seemed to uphold the heavens, and support the massy frame of nature by their own stupendous bulk. I fain would have asked this terrific being, whom he was, but astonishment and fear kept me mute. He seemed to divine my thoughts; and, gazing sternly upon me, said, “I am TIME! Between these two vast oceans, I behold the beginning, and the final accomplishment, of all human events. The ocean behind thee is Time that is past; the one from which thou shrinkest with such dismay, is Time that is still to come. When this isthmus shall yield to the constant working of their opposing tides, they will both be blended and lost with me in eternity!” The giant touched me with his hand, and I fell forward into the awful abyss which had swallowed up my companion! The moment the waters received me into their icy bosom, I awoke with a loud shriek.

Frequently I returned thanks to the Almighty, that my terrors had been produced only by a dream, and that time had not passed from me for ever!

_April 16th, 1828_

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