

DAVID SWAN.

BY NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE.

We can be but partially acquainted even with the events which naturally influence our course through life, and our final destiny. There are innumerable other events, if such they may be called, which come close upon us, yet pass away without actual results, or even betraying their near approach, by the reflection of any light or shadow across our minds. Could we know all the vicissitudes of our fortunes, life would be too full of hope and fear, exultation or disappointment, to afford us a single hour of true serenity. This idea may be illustrated by a page from the secret history of David Swan.

We have nothing to do with David, until we find him at the age of twenty, on the high road from his native place to the city of Boston, where his uncle, a small dealer in the grocery line, was to take him behind the counter. Be it enough to say, that he was a native of New Hampshire, born of respectable parents, and had received an ordinary school education, with a classic finish by a year at Gilmanton Academy. After journeying on foot from sunrise till nearly noon of a summer's day, his weariness and increasing heat determined him to sit down in the first convenient shade, and await the coming up of the stage coach. As if planted on purpose for him, there soon appeared a little tuft of maples, with a delightful recess in the midst, and such a fresh bubbling spring, that it seemed never to have sparkled for any wayfarer but David Swan. Virgin or not, he kissed it with his thirsty lips, and then flung himself along the brink, pillowing his head upon some shirts and a pair of pantaloons, tied up in a striped cotton handkerchief. The sunbeams could not reach him; the dust did not yet rise from the road, after the heavy rain of yesterday, and his grassy hair suited the young man better than a bed of down. The spring murmured drowsily beside him; the branches waved dreamily across the blue sky, overhead, and a deep sleep, perchance hiding dreams within its depths, fell upon David Swan. But we are to relate events which he did not dream of.

While he lay sound asleep in the shade, other people were wide awake, and passed to and fro, afoot, on horseback, and in all sorts of vehicles, along the sunny road by his bed chamber. Some looked neither to the right hand nor to the left, and knew not that he was there; some merely glanced that way, without admitting the slumberer among the busy thoughts; some laughed to see how soundly he slept; and several, whose hearts were brimming full of scorn, ejected their venomous superfluity on David Swan. A middle-aged widow, when nearer, also was near; thrust her head a little way into the recess, and vowed that the charming fellow looked charming in his sleep. A temperance lecturer saw him, and wrought poor David into the texture of his evening's discourse, as an awful instance of dead drunkenness by the road side. But censure, praise, merriment, scorn, and indifference, were all one, or rather all nothing to David Swan.

He had slept only a few moments, when a brown carriage drawn by a handsome pair of horses, bowed easily along, and was brought to a stand still, nearly in front of David's resting place. A hach-pia had fallen out, and permitted one of the wheels to fly off. The damage was slight, and merely a momentary alarm to an elderly merchant and his wife, who were returning to Boston in their carriage. While the coachman and a servant were replacing the wheel, the lady and gentleman sheltered themselves beneath the maple trees, and there espied the bubbling fountain, and David Swan asleep beside it. Impressed with the awe which the humblest sleeper usually sheds around him, the merchant trod as lightly as the gnat would allow; and his spouse took good heed not to rustle her silk gown, lest David should start up all of a sudden.

'How soundly he sleeps!' whispered the old gentleman. 'From what depth he draws that easy breath! Such sleep as that brought on without an opiate, would be worth more to me than half my income; for it would support health, and an untroubled mind.'

'And youth, besides,' said the lady. 'Healthy and quiet age does not sleep thus. Our slumber is no more like his, than our wakefulness.'

The longer they looked, the more did this elderly couple feel interested in the unknown youth, to whom the way side and the maple shade were as a secret chamber with the rich gloom of damask curtains brooding over him. Perceiving that a stray sunbeam glimmered down his face, the lady contrived to twist a branch aside, so as to intercept it. And having done this little act of kindness, she began to feel like a mother to him.

'Providence seems to have laid him here,' whispered she to her husband, 'and to have brought us hither to find him, after our disappointment in our cousin's son. Methinks I can see a likeness to our departed Henry. Shall we waken him?'

'To what purpose?' said the merchant, hesitating. 'We know nothing of the youth's character.'

'That open countenance!' replied his wife, in the same hushed voice, yet earnestly. 'This innocent sleep!'

While these whispers were passing, the sleeper's heart did not

throb, nor his breath become agitated, nor his features betray the least token of interest. Yet fortune was bending over him, just ready to let fall a burthen of gold. The old merchant had lost his only son, and had no heir to his wealth, except a distant relative, with whose conduct he was dissatisfied. In such a case, people sometimes do stranger things than to act the magician, and awaken a young man to splendor who had fell asleep in poverty.

'Shall we not waken him?' repeated the lady persuasively.

'The coach is all ready sir,' said the servant behind.

The old couple started, reddened, and hurried away, mutually wondering that they should ever have dreamed of doing any thing so very ridiculous. The merchant threw himself back in the carriage, and occupied his mind with the plan of a magnificent asylum for unfortunate men of business. Meanwhile David Swan enjoyed his nap.

The carriage could not have gone above a mile or two, when a pretty young girl came along with a tripping pace, which shewed precisely how her little heart was dancing in her bosom. She turned aside into the shelter of the maple trees, and there found a young man asleep beside the spring. Blushing as red as any rose, that she should have intruded into a gentleman's bed chamber, she was about to make her escape on tiptoe. But there was a peril nearer the sleeper. A monster of a bee had been wandering overhead—buzz, buzz, buzz—now among the leaves, now flashing through the strips of sunshine, and now lost in the dark shade, till finally he appeared to be settling on the eyelid of David Swan. The sting of a bee is sometimes deadly. As free-hearted as she was innocent, the girl attacked the intruder with her handkerchief, brushed him soundly, and drove him from beneath the maple shade. How sweet a picture! This good deed accomplished, with quickened breath, and a deeper blush, she stole a glance at the youthful stranger, for whom she had been battling with a dragon in the air.

'He is handsome!' thought she, and blushed redder yet.

How could it be that no dream of bliss grew so strong within him, that shattered by its very strength, it should part asunder and allow him to perceive the girl among its phantoms? Why, at least did no smile of welcome brighten upon his face? She was come, the maid whose soul, according to the old and beautiful idea, had been severed from his own, and whom, in all his vague but passionate desires, he yearned to meet. Her, only, could he love with a perfect love—him, only, could she receive into the depths of her heart—and now her image was faintly blushing in the fountain, by his side; should it pass away, its happy lustre would never gleam upon his life again.

'How sound he sleeps!' murmured the girl.

She departed, but did not trip along the road so lightly as when she came.

Now, this girl's father was a thriving country merchant in the neighborhood, and happened at that identical time, to be looking out for just such a young man as David Swan. Had David formed a way side acquaintance with the daughter, he would have become the father's clerk, and all else in natural succession. So here again, had good fortune—the best of fortunes—stolen so near, that her garments brushed against him; and he knew nothing of the matter.

The girl was hardly out of sight, when two men turned aside beneath the maple shade. Both had dark faces, set off by cloth caps, which were down askant over their brows. The dresses were shabby, yet had a certain smartness. These were a couple of rascals, who got their living by whatever the evil one sent them, and now, in the interim of other business, had staked the jointed profits of their next pieces of villainy on a game of cards, which was to have been decided here under the trees. But, finding David asleep by the spring, one of the rogues whispered to his fellow:—

'Hist!—See that bundle under his head!'

The other villain nodded, winked and jeered.

'I'll bet you a horn of brandy,' said the first, 'that the chap has either a pocket book, or a snug little hoard of small change, stowed away amongst his shirts. And if not there, we shall find it in his pantaloons pocket.'

'But how if he wakes?' said the other.

His companion thrust aside his waistcoat, pointed to the handle of a dirk, and nodded.

'So he it!' muttered the second villain.

They approached the unconscious David, and while one pointed the dagger towards his heart, the other began to search the bundle beneath his head. Their two faces, grim, wrinkled, and ghastly with guilt, and fear, bent over their victim, looking horribly enough to be mistaken for fiends, should he suddenly awake. Nay, had the villains glanced aside into the spring, even they would hardly have known themselves as reflected there. But David Swan had never known a more tranquil aspect, even when asleep on his mother's breast.

'I must take away the bundle,' whispered one.

'If he stirs, I'll strike,' whispered the other.

But, at this moment, a dog, scenting along the ground, came in beneath the maple trees, and gazed alternately at each of these wicked men, and then at the quiet sleeper. He then lapped out of the fountain.

'Pshaw!' said one villain. 'We can do nothing now. The dog's master must be close behind.'

The man with the dagger, thrust back the weapon into his bosom, and drew forth a pocket pistol, but not of that kind which kills by a single discharge. It was a flask of liquor, with a block-tin tumbler screwed upon the mouth. Each drank a comfortable dram, and left the spot with so many jests, and such laughter at their unaccomplished wickedness, that they might be said to have gone their way rejoicing. In a few hours, they had forgotten the whole affair, nor once imagined that the recording angel had written down the crime of murder against their souls, in letters as durable as eternity. As for David Swan, he still slept quietly, neither conscious of the shadow of death when it hung over him, nor of the glory of renewed life, when that shadow was withdrawn.

He slept, but no longer so quietly as at first. An hour's repose had snatched, from his elastic frame, the weariness with which many hours of toil had burthened it. Now he stirred—now moved his lips, without a sound—now, in an inward tone, to the noonday spectress of his dream. But a noise of wheels came rattling louder and louder along the road, until it dashed through the dispersing mist of David's slumber—and there was the stage coach. He started up with all his ideas about him.

'Halloo, driver!—Take a passenger?' shouted he.

'Room on top!' answered the driver.

Up mounted David, and howled away merrily towards Boston, without so much as a parting glance at that fountain of dreamlike vicissitude. He knew not that a phantom of wealth had thrown a golden hue upon its waters—nor that one of love had sighed softly to their murmur—nor that one of death had threatened to crimson them with his blood—all in the brief hour since he lay down to sleep. Sleeping or waking, we hear not the airy footsteps of the strange things that almost happen. Does it not argue a superintending Providence, that, while viewless and unexpected events thrust themselves continually athwart our path, there should still be regularity enough in mortal life, to render foresight even partially available.

HOW FOXES GATHER CROW'S EGGS.—A rare place is a menagerie, both for exhibition of the animals observed, and the human observing. Various are the drolleries in each which pass before the keeper. 'Have you such an animal as a Prock in your menagerie?' said a backwoods' wag to the President of a western itinerating 'institute' of wild animals. 'No; never heard of him, what sort of a critter is he?'—'He is a Wisconsin varmint, which it is difficult sufficiently adequate for to describe. He is exceedingly fleet—in fact, very much so. He has four legs,—two short ones on one side, and two long ones on the other. He always grazes on an inclined plane; and the way they catch him is curious. They head him, make him turn round, and this brings his long legs on the up hill side; consequence of which, his short legs an't no account. He falls down, rolls over and over, and is mighty soon caught.' The apparently credulous President offered a handsome sum for a live specimen; and proceeded to hoax the naturalist in return, while he was deeply interested in a cage of playful foxes. 'Them animals,' said he, 'comes from Ireland, a cold country, north of Canada, a piece. They are very fond of crow's eggs, which they steal from the precipices on the sea side. They are cunning critters, very. When they come to a spot where they expect to find a batch of nests, they make a ring, and begin to wrestle, to see which is the strongest. When they find out, the stoutest goes to the edge of the precipice, takes his neighbor's tail, in his teeth, and he takes another, and so on, till the string is long enough to hang over and reach the eggs, which are then handed up from one to another, (our greedy listener forget to ask how,) until they arrive in safety at the top! The 'prock' fabulist retired, filled with amazement at the marvellous vulpine string.—*Knickerbocker*.

A lady consulted St. Francis of Sales on the lawfulness of using rouge. 'Why,' said he, 'some pious men object to it; others see no harm in it; I will hold a middle course, and allow you to use it on one cheek.'

COMING TO THE POINT.—'Madam,' said an old man, 'have you any water in the house, that you can give a poor man a drink of beer, though I like cider best, and should like a little whiskey. Very seldom get no cider at all at home—my orchard is very small, consisting only of one scattering tree.'

ADVICE.—If I were to venture any advice in any case it would be my best. The sacred duty of an adviser (one of the most inviolable that exists) would lead me towards a real enemy to act as if my best friend were the party concerned.—*Burke*.

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