

GOTHIC BOURNES

**EXAMPLE OF A SINGULAR DREAM
AND CORRESPONDING EVENT
(1787)**

TRANSCRIPTION BY

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PRODESSE ET DELECTARE
E PLURIBUS UNUM.

By SYLVANUS URBAN, *Gent.*

L O N D O N :

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Example of a singular Dream and corresponding Event

[1062]

Mr. URBAN,

Dec. 7.

THE curiosity of mankind has been often excited on the subject of dreams; the lower people in all coun[1063]tries are inclined to regard them with reverence and awe; but the opinions of the more enlightened classes of men have been at great variance with respect to this phænomenon [sic]. Some have been led to consider dreams as one species of proof, that there is existing within us a principle independent of the material frame. The vivid appearance of objects, the new and surprising combinations formed, the exertions of the passions, the regular trains of reasoning, the play of the imagination, seem occasionally to be as much realized in the state of slumber, as when awake and in motion. It may be assumed as a certain fact, that almost every man has, at some one period or other of his life, experienced in sleep a consciousness of every action he could have performed when awake. He travels over extended regions; he runs, walks, rides with freedom and agility, and not unfrequently seems endued with new and superior powers; he soars aloft, and is wafted through the air, or, gently descending, he glides through the waters, and with such perfect command and security, that, when he awakens, he is hardly persuaded it was but a dream. In opposition to these observations it is urged, that exactly similar effects are produced from disease; such is its influence in numberless cases, that the subject seems just as forcibly prepossessed as from any ideas that could be received from actual impression. Persons insane will persevere in exercises beyond their usual strength, seeming all the while never to entertain a doubt but that they are moving in carriages, on horseback, performing military exercise and evolutions, or buried in philosophical experiments. Multitudes of such instances will readily occur; and it is argued, that as the mind, in those examples, is evidently not disengaged from the controul [sic] of the body, so neither, in the other, is there any reason to suppose it different, the circumstance of sleep and insensibility being something not unlike disease, a state of suspension of many of the active powers.

Some philosophers imagine that the mind never remains inert, that successions of ideas incessantly present themselves, and thought is always employed. With respect, however, to this notion, it may be alledged, [sic] that it is highly improbable that dreams, which, according to the supposition, must perpetually occur, should be so seldom and so faintly recollected. To this it may be answered, that the same thing happens when we are awake. Let any person try to recall the whole train of ideas that has passed through his mind during twelve hours that he has been stirring about in the ordinary business of the day; he will be able to remember particular essential transactions; but, if he attempts to recover the mass of ideas that filled his mind for that portion of time, or even only a considerable part of the time, he will find it impracticable labour; he will in vain endeavour to trace the connection of his ideas; the same

broken confused assemblage will be perceived, even by him who possesses the most retentive memory, as when he first awakens with that imperfect consciousness that is usually termed a dream. Were we to commit to writing, in the minutest manner, every idea our remembrance then suggested, it would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to collect such a number as would employ one hour to read over.

The popular belief, that dreams are a kind of preternatural admonition, meant to direct our conduct, is a notion extremely dangerous. As nothing can be more ill-founded, it ought to be strenuously combated. Innumerable reasons might be offered; but it will be sufficient to say, that it is inconsistent with the general design of Providence, it would overturn the principles that regulate society. The benign intention of the Author of Nature is in no instance more eminently displayed than in with-holding [sic] from us the certain knowledge of future events. Were it otherwise constituted, man would be the most miserable of beings; he would become indifferent to every action, and incapable of exertion; overwhelmed with the terrors of impending misfortune, he would endure the misery of criminals awaiting the moment of execution.¹ The proof unanswerable and decisive, that dreams are not to be considered as prognostics, is, that no example can be produced of their successful effect, either in pointing out means of preventing harm, or facilitating benefit. Certain instances may be alledged, where the conformity of a dream with some subsequent event may have been remarkable; but we may venture to assert, that such discoveries have generally happened after the facts, and that fancy and ingenuity have had the chief share in tracing the resemblance, or finding out the explanation.

[1064] If it be granted that thought never stops, and that the mind is perpetually employed; the wonder should rather be, that so few cases of similitude have been recorded. If millions of the human species through the whole extent of time have been, during their state of slumber, continually subject to dream; perhaps the calculators of chances would be apt to maintain, that near coincidences have probably happened much more frequently than they have been either noticed or recollected.

Amongst the various histories of singular dreams and corresponding events, we have lately heard of one, which seems to merit being rescued from oblivion. Its authenticity will appear from the relation; and we may surely pronounce, that a more extraordinary concurrence of fortuitous and accidental circumstances can scarcely be produced, or paralleled.

One Adam Rogers, a creditable and decent person, a man of good sense and repute, who kept a public-house at Portlaw, a small hamlet, nine or ten miles from Waterford, in the kingdom of Ireland, dreamed one night that he saw two men at a particular green spot on the adjoining mountain, one of them a small sickly looking man, the other remarkably strong and large. He then saw the little man murder the other, and he awoke in great agitation. The circumstances of the dream were so distinct and forcible, that he continued much affected by them. He related them to his wife, and also to several neighbours, next morning. In some time he went out coursing with greyhounds, accompanied, amongst others, by one Mr. Browne, the Roman Catholick [sic] priest of the parish. He soon stopped at the above-mentioned particular green spot on the mountain, and, calling to Mr. Browne, pointed it out to him, and told him

¹ Here, the introduction anticipates the outcome of the story.

what had appeared in his dream. During the remainder of the day he thought little more about it. Next morning he was extremely startled at seeing two strangers enter his house, about eleven o'clock in the forenoon. He immediately ran into an inner room, and desired his wife to take particular notice, for they were precisely the two men that he had seen in his dream. When they had consulted with one another, their apprehensions were alarmed for the little weakly man, though contrary to the appearance in the dream. After the strangers had taken some refreshment, and were about to depart, in order to prosecute their journey, Rogers earnestly endeavoured to dissuade the little man from quitting his house, and going on with his fellow-traveller. He assured him, that if he would remain with him that day, he would accompany him to Carrick the next morning, that being the town to which the travellers were proceeding. He was unwilling and ashamed to tell the cause of his being so solicitous to separate him from his companion. But, as he observed that Hickey, which was the name of the little man, seemed to be quiet and gentle in his deportment, and had money about him, and that the other had a ferocious bad countenance, the dream still recurred to him. He dreaded that something fatal would happen; and he wished, at all events, to keep them asunder. However, the humane precautions of Rogers proved ineffectual; for Caulfield, such was the other's name, prevailed upon Hickey to continue with him on their way to Carrick, declaring that, as they had long travelled together, they should not part, but remain together until he should see Hickey safely arrive at the habitation of his friends. The wife of Rogers was much dissatisfied when she found they were gone, and blamed her husband exceedingly for not being absolutely peremptory in detaining Hickey.

About an hour after they left Portlaw, in a lonely part of the mountain, just near the place observed by Rogers in his dream, Caulfield took the opportunity of murdering his companion. It appeared afterwards, from his own account of the horrid transaction, that, as they were getting over a ditch, he struck Hickey on the back part of his head with a stone; and, when he fell down into the trench, in consequence of the blow, Caulfield gave him several stabs with a knife, and cut his throat so deeply that the head was observed to be almost severed from the body. He then rifled Hickey's pockets of all the money in them, took part of his cloaths, [sic] and every thing else of value about him, and afterwards proceeded on his way to Carrick. He had not been long gone when the body, still warm, was discovered by some labourers who were returning to their work from dinner.

The report of the murder soon reached to Portlaw. Rogers and his wife went to the place, and instantly knew the body of him whom they had in vain [1065] endeavoured to dissuade from going on with his treacherous companion. They at once spoke out their suspicions that the murder was perpetrated by the fellow-traveller of the deceased. An immediate search was made, and Caulfield was apprehended at Waterford the second day after. He was brought to trial at the ensuing assizes,² and convicted of the fact. It appeared on the trial, amongst other circumstances, that when he arrived at Carrick, he hired a horse, and a boy to conduct him, not by the usual road, but by that which runs on the North side of the river Suir, to Waterford, intending to take his passage in the first ship from thence to Newfoundland. The boy took notice of some blood on his shirt, and Caulfield gave him half a crown to promise not to speak

² The courts of assizes were the higher criminal court in Ireland outside Dublin prior to 1924 (Wikipedia.com).

of it. Rogers proved, not only that Hickey was seen last in company with Caulfield, but that a pair of new shoes which Hickey wore had been found on the feet of Caulfield when he was apprehended; and that a pair of old shoes which he had on at Rogers's house were upon Hickey's feet when the body was found. He described with great exactness every article of their cloaths. Caulfield, on the cross-examination, shrewdly asked him from the dock, Whether³ it was not very extraordinary that he, who kept a public-house, should take such particular notice of the dress of a stranger, accidentally calling there? Rogers, in his answer, said, he had a very particular reason, but was ashamed to mention it. The court and prisoner insisting on his declaring it, he gave a circumstantial narrative of his dream, called upon Mr. Browne the priest, then in the court, to corroborate his testimony, and said, that his wife had severely reproached him for permitting Hickey to leave their house, when he knew that, in the short footway to Carrick, they must necessarily pass by the green spot in the mountain which had appeared in his dream. A number of witnesses came forward; and the proofs were so strong, that the jury, without hesitation, found the pannell⁴ guilty.—It was remarked, as a singularity, that he happened to be tried and sentenced by his namesake, Sir George Caulfield, at that time lord chief justice of the King's Bench, which office he resigned in the Summer of the year 1760.⁵

After sentence, Caulfield confessed the fact. It came out, that Hickey had been in the West Indies two and twenty years; but falling into a bad state of health, he was returning to his native country, Ireland, bringing with him some money his industry had acquired. The vessel on board which he took his passage was, by stress of weather, driven into Minehead. He there met with Frederick Caulfield, an Irish sailor, who was poor, and much distressed for cloaths and common necessaries. Hickey, compassionating his poverty, and finding he was his countryman, relieved his wants, and an intimacy commenced between them. They agreed to go to Ireland together; and it was remarked on their passage, that Caulfield spoke contemptuously, and often said, it was a pity such a puny fellow as Hickey should have money, and he himself be without a shilling. They landed at Waterford, at which place they stayed some days, Caulfield being all the time supported by Hickey, who bought there some cloaths for him. The assizes being held in the town during that time, it was afterwards recollected that they were both at the Court-house, and attended the whole of a trial of a shoemaker, who was convicted of the murder of his wife. But this made no impression on the hardened mind of Caulfield; for the very next day he perpetrated the same crime on the road betwixt Waterford and Carrick-on-Suir, near which town Hickey's relations lived.

He walked to the gallows with firm step, and undaunted countenance. He spoke to the multitude who surrounded him; and, in the course of his address, mentioned that he had been bred at a charter-school, from which he was taken, as an apprenticed servant, by William Izod, Esq. of the county of Kilkenny. From this station he ran away on being corrected for some

³ Presumably uppercase *Whether* indicates that a quote is being reproduced, although indirectly. There is no other instance of this irregular use of uppercase letters in the text, nor do any quotation marks appear.

⁴ Archaic spelling for *panel*. Instead of referring to the panel of judges, however, the word seems to be referring to the person on trial, Caulfield.

⁵ A coincidence similar to those which the narrator adduces as proof of the unreliability of dreams.

faults, and had been absent from Ireland six years.—He confessed also, that he had several times intended to murder Hickey on the road between Waterford and Portlaw; which, though in general not a road much frequented, yet people at that time continually coming in sight prevented him.

Being frustrated in all his schemes, the sudden and total disappointment threw him, probably, into an indifference for life. Some tempers are so stubborn and rugged, that nothing can affect them but immediate sensation. If to this be united the darkest ignorance, [1066] death, to such characters, will hardly seem terrible, because they can form no conception of what it is, and still less of the consequences that may follow.

Yours, &c A. LL.