

In Bed with a Serpent.

[FROM CAMPBELL'S ROUGH RECOLLECTIONS.]

I might have slept some four or five hours, and a dreamless and satisfying sleep it was; but certain it is—let scoldists say what they will, and sleepies throw doubts by hand on the assertions of metaphysicians—that, before I awoke and in my dreamless slumber I had a visible perception of peril, a consciousness of the hovering presence of death! How to describe my feelings I know not; but, as we have all read and heard that, if the eyes of a watcher are steadily fixed on the countenance of a sleeper for a certain length of time the slumberer will be sure to start up, awakened by the mysterious magnetism of a recalcitrant principle of clairvoyance, so it was that, with shut eyes and dreamless up senses, an inward ability was conferred upon me to detect the living presence of danger near me, to see, though sleepfallen, the formless shape of a mysterious horror crouching beside me; and as, if the peril that was my night mate was of a nature to be quickened into fatal activity by any motion on my part, I felt in my very stupor the critical necessity of lying quite still, so that, when I lay awake and felt that, as I lay with my face towards the tent, there was a thick, heavy, cold, creeping thing on my chest, I stirred not, nor uttered a word of panic.

Danger and fear may occasionally dull the senses and paralyze the faculties, but they more frequently sharpen both; and, ere I could twice wink my eyes I was broad awake and aware that, coiling and coiling itself up into a circle of twists, an enormous serpent was on my breast. When I tell you that the whole of my chest, and even that of my stomach, were covered with the cold, scaly proportions of the reptile, you will own that it must have been one of considerable size. What my thoughts were, so made up of abhorrence, dread, and the expectation, nay, assurance of speedy death that must follow any movement on my part, I can never hope to tell in language sufficiently distinct and vivid to convey their full force. It was evident the loathsome creature had at length settled itself to sleep; and I felt thankful that attracted by my breath, it had not approached the upper part of my throat. It became quite still, and its weighty pressure—its first clammy clittiness becoming gradually (so it seemed to me) of a burning heat—and the odious, indescribable odor which exhaled from its body and pervaded the whole air, so overwhelmed me that it was only by a severe struggle I preserved myself from shrieking.

As it was, a cold sweat burst from every pore; I could hear the beating of my heart; and I felt, to my increased dismay, that the palsy of terror had begun to agitate my limbs. It will wake, thought I, and then all is over! At that juncture, something—it might have been a wall-lizard, or a large beetle—fell from the ceiling on my left arm, which lay stretched at my side. The snake, uncoiling its head, raised itself with a low hiss, and then, for the first time, I saw it, saw the hood, the terrible crest glittering in the moonshine. It was a Gobra di Capello! Standing my eyes to exclude the dreadful spectacle, I lay all most fainting until again all was quiet. Had its fiery glance encountered mine, all would have been over; but, apparently, it was once more asleep, and presently I heard the Lascar moving about, undoing the fastenings of the tent and striking a light. A thought suddenly struck me, and with an impulse I could ascribe to nothing short of desperation, though its effects were so providential, I uttered in a loud but sepulchral tone, 'Kulassi! Lascar! Sahib'—the instantaneous response, and my heart beat quicker at the success of my attempt.

I lay still again, for the reptile, evidently roused, made a movement, and its head, as I suppose, fell upon my naked arm. Oh God! the agony of that moment, when suppressed tremor almost gave way to madness. I debated with myself whether I should again endeavor to attract the attention of the Kulassi, or remain perfectly quiet or whether it would not be better than either to start up at once and shake the disgusting burden from me. But the latter suggestion was at once abandoned, because of the assurance I felt that it would prove fatal; impeded by the heavy coils of the creature, weak and nervous from excitement, I could not escape its fangs. Again, therefore, I spoke with the hollow but distinct accents which arise from the throat when the speaker is afraid to move a muscle. 'Kulassi chragh! Lascar, a lantern! Latah own, sabib, I am bringing it, sir. There was then a sound of clanking metal; light, advancing, flushed across the roof of the veranda, and at the noise of coming steps, in one after one its terrible coils unwinding, the grisly monster glided away from my body; and the last sounds that struck my sense of hearing were the 'Ya illahi, semp!—Oh God! a snake!—of the Lascar; for I leaped away for the first time in my life!

Woman's Power.—It is related of a certain New England divine, who flourished not many years ago, and whose matrimonial relations are supposed not to have been of the most agreeable kind; that one Sabbath morning, while reading in his congregation the parable of the sower, in Luke xiv, in which occurs this passage: 'and another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them, I pray thee to have me excused; and another said, I have married a wife and therefore cannot come,'—he suddenly paused at the end of this verse, drew off his spectacles, and looking around on his hearers, said with emphasis, 'the fact is, my brethren, one woman can draw a man further from the kingdom of heaven than five yoke of oxen.'

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