

BERGESTRAUME.

M. TATHAM.

"And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers"

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There is nothing very odd in a mountaineer dreaming about mountains. I suppose that fishermen in their sleep stand by the side of streams and haul out a rapid succession of large and luscious trout, and that golfers watch their tee shots achieve a perfect parabola and drop on the green and trickle, if not into the hole, at any rate near enough to cause no anxiety about the second shot. Only the other night I came down a steep and rugged mountain rather like the north face of Glyder Fach by a technique which I had mysteriously but proudly acquired, which consisted of placing both feet together and descending in a perfectly controlled glissade over rock and scree.

It isn't about the casual mountain dream that I am concerned. It is much more alarming than that, for after all, any respectable climber can make an occasional somnial ascent or descent without giving the psycho-analysts anything to shake their heads over. What worries me is that I have a succession of two distinct mountain dreams, both of which have their variations but are based on two quite definite and separate themes. Each of these recurs at differing intervals, sometimes after gaps of months or even years. But by now I know them so well that once I have embarked on either of them I foresee the end, and what is more I rather dread it.

The first dream is about a mountain which I am going to climb with someone to whom I am anxious to introduce it. I know it quite well, and it is indeed a very notable if slightly sinister mountain. Sometimes it is a rock peak of a castellated shape, the top of which is accessible only by a very abrupt chimney, of which I am slightly afraid though I am sure that I can again conquer it. A variant is a mighty snow and ice peak which, I can remember, towers into the sky and can only be surmounted by a particularly villainous razor ridge. But when I take my friend through the approaches, up the valleys and over the foothills, even right up to a glacier, somehow or other I fail to discover the famous peak.

I am certain that it is there somewhere, just round the next corner perhaps, but it eludes me and the dream ends with a confession of failure, with a sense of something rather perilous that one wished to do, or perhaps that one wished to have done, and an intense feeling of frustration. That is dream number one—the Elusive Peak.

Dream number two has quite a different theme. The mountain is there all right, and there is no difficulty in finding it. There is one place on it with a sickening drop on either side which can only be conquered by an incredibly acrobatic and quite unjustifiable feat. If I am not climbing alone, I am at least leading and I surmount the *mauvais pas* with a kind of desperation but nevertheless successfully. The angle then eases off, and as one approaches the top one is surprised to find that the mountain flattens out into a grassy moorland until the scenery becomes quite ordinary and one suddenly discovers houses and streets and shops and people. And then one realises that one has done something extremely foolish, for one has at great peril merely come up to a town built on high ground by a route which no one else would think of taking, and one has to admit that it is perfectly possible to go back again to the valley by the next bus. That is dream number two—the Unnecessary Climb.

I don't think there is any connection between these two themes. They both have a slightly nightmarish tinge; in both there is a sense of foreboding and awe accompanied by an uncanny feeling that it has all happened before. But the basic idea is quite different. In the one case it is a failure to find and accomplish something, in the other a perilous accomplishment for which there is no need. So I can only suppose that they are founded on two quite separate incidents in my early life, two quite distinct inhibitions or frustrations or complexes. I have an uncomfortable feeling that I must have done some rather lurid thing in the dim and forgotten past, or, what is even more deplorable, two rather lurid things.

Is there a psycho-analyst in the Association?

He that mounts the precipices wonders how he came thither, and doubts how he shall return. . . . His walk is an adventure and his departure an escape. He has a kind of turbulent pleasure, between fright and admiration.

—Dr. Samuel Johnson.