

DREAMS

Among the many natural phenomena which perplex scientists and baffle individuals who are continually seeking for the reasons of everything, there is, I think, none which is stranger or more inexplicable than that of dreams. In the class of dreams I do not include the insipid, vain imaginings which are known as day dreams; I refer, rather, to those scenes or visions which pass before the mind when the body is peacefully slumbering, and rebuilding the tissues destroyed by the day's toil. Everyone has experienced these Morphean images, for who has not been transported with joy, or convulsed with terror, at some time, during a dream which was portrayed so vividly as to excite these emotions?

The cause or reason of dreams has, to my knowledge, never been satisfactorily explained. True, many reasons have been given for them, and some, perhaps, with a grounding of truth. I remember well that our grandmother often warned us, as children, to desist from making away with that last, tempting piece of pie or rosy apple, lest "going to bed with a full stomach" should engender that dread animal known as night-mare. Of course, I did not at that time see any relation between dreams and night-mares. Indeed, I remember, that often, on being told that I had had night-mare the previous night, I used to wonder just how my equine visitor behaved when he, or rather she, was with me, and was rather proud than otherwise of my gift of creating these creatures by such a pleasant medium as over-eating. Later, however, when I learned that a night-mare is only a type of violent dream, I accepted the explanation that dreams were caused by gastric disturbance, but could not understand just how this disorder could produce such an effect upon the mentality as is created by dreams. My difficulty is still unsolved.

Obscure as is the cause of dreams, their presentation is still more obscure and wonderful, for in them our mind may go back over considerable space of time and in some part of our intellect find a little incident, long forgotten, which will be the subject, if it may be so called, of our dream. It may sometimes be presented in a new manner, but very often we are shown that incident with every part of the original happening so faithfully presented,

that it remains clear in our memory when we awake. We may often see faces which, when awake, we could not recognize, persons whom we have not seen for years, and have perhaps completely forgotten, yet, when they appear in our dream, we instantly recognize them, and every lineament of those faces is stamped clearly on our memory. Sometimes, too, in dreams we find ourselves repeating, in conversation with our fellow phantoms, words or sentences which we may have heard someone else using, long before; or perhaps we may quote lines we have read, long abstract passages, which we have seen and made little or no attempt to memorize, yet in our dreams we can repeat them as glibly as a star actor speaking his lines. What can be the explanation of this? Does it not seem that this forgotten incident or these lines are buried in some dark corner of our sub-conscious minds, and come forth only through some unknown mental stimulus, and not at our bidding, or that our memory is active and far more efficient when we are asleep than during our waking hours?

Another type of dream is that which presents incidents that we have never witnessed, and it is in connection with such dreams that some persons claim the gift of prophetic power. The characters which move in them are generally known persons, each of whom is very clearly depicted, in the guise in which we are familiar with them. That these incidents sometimes materialize is true, but that such a coincidence shows prophetic power on the part of the dreamer, I am not prepared to say. To relate dreams, foretelling dire events to happen in the future, is a favorite pastime of many persons of a pessimistic turn of mind, and perhaps the fact that such events rarely take place is sufficient cause for the contempt in which the majority of people hold such dreams and dreamers. However, to my mind, it does not seem entirely impossible that our minds, while the body is sleeping, should be so affected by some telepathic process, that the above phenomenon should take place, but the idea that it is the effect of some occult or supernatural power is unworthy of being entertained.

Our minds are most affected, however, by the dream which excites some great emotion in our being, such as joy, sorrow, or terror, especially the last-named. Such hallucinations or night-mares were more common in our

childhood days, and how firmly such dreams gripped our imaginations! What terror was excited in us by a dream of some incident connected with ghosts or lions or some such horrible bugbear, the product of a fevered imagination! Even when we would awaken, the horror still persisted, until we were assured that we were in no immediate danger from these phantom terrors. The dream in which grief is predominant is, likewise, productive of unpleasant sensations, for often when we are plunged, in dreams, into scenes which are replete with grief and sorrowful associations, and we awake to find them only hallucinations, we heave a sigh of sincere relief.

The pleasant dream, however, produces the opposite effect upon our minds, and instead of relief at its conclusion, we experience regret. In such a dream, how pleasing are the scenes through which we pass, when, surrounded by the conditions and characters which we most appreciate, we exist in a veritable Elysium of contentment, doing the deeds we have always most desired to do, (the execution of which is often realized in dreams only,) and generally, living the life which we consider the ideal of happiness. Then, presto, a door slams, or a bell rings, and, from this blissful region, we are again transported into the world of realities. How disillusioned we are when we look around upon a comparatively cheerless scene! And, strive as we may, we cannot again pick up the threads of our dream, but are forced to bid good-bye forever to that particular haven of joy, with the realization, however, that the happiness experienced by far outweighed the disappointment occasioned by its loss.

Scientists tell us that our dreams are characteristic of our waking thoughts and states, and that in them we are never out of character, or act as different beings. To this, I think, we might further add, that during dreams, we have a fuller freedom, and that instead of acting as other beings, it is then only that we act as our real selves, when we are not bound by the fetters of convention, which are an inevitable part of our association with our fellow-men.

D. MacI., '32

The first degree of folly is to think one's self wise;
the next to tell others so; third to despise all council.