

Dreams.

— ASTRA.

—Thou land of dreams!

A world thou art of mysterious gleams,
Of startling voices and sounds of strife,
A world of the dead in their hues of life.

What is a dream?—what is the word, and what the thing? Etymologically the word has a scant history. In the English language and its Teutonic relatives it is a simple and radical one. One or two attempts at classical derivation may be noticed, but none can give any satisfactory root.

It will be enough for us to exhibit a few forms from which the affinities of our word *dream* may be understood, and from which it may be concluded that a settlement of ethnological precedence carries with it, in this case, a decision of philological priority. Dream is an Anglo-Saxon noun, in Saxon *Dream*, and in both languages having a primary meaning of melody, joy or gladness. The Dutch form is *Droom*, and in German *Traum*. Dismissing the word with these few examples, we may in a single sentence epitomize all the current definitions of the thing. For all men are so well agreed upon this matter, that it is rather their expressions vary, than that their ideas are dissimilar. We shall find enough contrariety of opinion by and by; but it will not be now and here. Every lexicographer, from the time of Suidas, has consented that an ordinary dream is the intellectual activity of a sleeping person which leaves its traces in the waking condition.

Dreaming would seem to be an abnormal operation of the mind; the result of a want of thoroughness—of that absolute unconsciousness which is the characteristic of ideal repose; of a certain preponderance of particular faculties, a certain default of symmetry in antecedent mental activity; or again, of physiological functions of the bodily organisms, hindered, disturbed

or overdone. The causes of dreaming are thus shown to be as numerous as the several faculties of the mind, the feelings of the soul, the functions of the body, and the several accidents to which any of these are liable; nay, infinitely more numerous, being as multitudinous as the combinations of which these are capable.

Dreams are accustomed to take shape and character, as we have said, from a limitless variety of circumstances; yet, freakish as they appear, they are not altogether the children of accident and inconsequence. Even when the connection cannot readily be traced, or cannot be traced at all, there is reason to infer from our experience of other members of the family, that a connection does exist between the dream and the then or former state of the body, or condition of the mind, or both, such as, if it were ascertained, would give intelligibility to the form and complexion of the dream. In short, the two principal sources, or—seeing that final causes have an ugly habit of hiding themselves away out of sight—as we should rather say, the influences that modify our dreams are (1) our present bodily sensations, and especially the internal state of the physical system; and (2) our previous waking thoughts, dispositions and prevalent states of mind.

Under the influence of the first, a hard bed or an uncomfortable position will cause a dream of fractured bones, or become suggestive of the torture rack or the wheel. The throat, let us say, is tightly compressed by a too affectionate button, and the dream will very likely be of a struggle with a burglar, or of an elite lynching party in the far west and subsequent perpendicular suffocation. A very hearty supper lies heavy on the conscience and the digestion, and the dream assumes the shape of nightmare; fiends and furies squat cross-legged upon you, just below the diaphragm, like the seven little tailors many times multiplied; or the ghost of the defunct Jumbo dances a hornpipe upon your much-enduring stomach. A mustard plaster suggests the delightful sensation of being flayed alive; a slight scalp-wound and a bandaged head call up the touching associations of a tomahawk; and a bottle of hot water

at the feet will make the dreamer believe that he is walking arm in arm with Satan, who uses him conjointly with his spear——

"To support uneasy steps
Over the burning marle,"

which Milton assigns him for a promenade.

A sudden noise, if it does not positively awaken the sleeper to the extent of allowing him to understand the real cause, will, to the partially aroused sensorium, resemble the report of a gun, and at once his martial ardor places him before Santiago, where he can "seek the bubble reputation in the cannon's mouth," or with a well timed shot send the Spanish fleet to a watery grave.

This strange proclivity of the dreamer to exaggerate and misinterpret sensations or impressions compels me to doubt the efficacy of suggestion during sleep. There is a possibility that the suggested thoughts will be acted upon automatically when they are thus administered. It is quite as probable that they will be distorted in the sleeper's mind and wreak more harm than they will do good.

It is not by any means without precedent that the earliest symptoms of unsuspected disease may be afforded by the kindly hints of dreams, which are modified by the greater susceptibility of the system to internal impressions. This providential phenomenon is the result of concentration and exclusion, just as we see the senses of hearing and touch eminently developed in the blind—a fact of which we take advantage when we close our eyes whilst listening to some heart-moving or heart-composing melody.

(To be continued.)

Life is the best thing we can possibly make of it. It is dull and dismal and heavy if a man lose his temper; it is glowing with promise and satisfaction if he is not ashamed of his emotions.—*George William Curtis.*