

BOOK NIGHT

"SUCH STUFF AS DREAMS ARE MADE ON"

AS THAT PARTY of "lusty gentlemen," on that fateful night in Verona, was about to set forth upon what proved to some of its members to be the great adventure of their lives, and fraught with melancholy and tragic consequences, Romeo remarked, "I dreamt a dream tonight;" to which Mercutio responded "And so did I." "Well," Romeo asked, "what was yours?" "That dreamers often lie." "In bed asleep," added Romeo, "where they do dream things true." I am interested not so much in Mercutio's description of "Queen Mab" which followed, as in the conclusion indicated — that when this atomic instigator of dream touches the relaxed chords, each instrument gives out harmonies (or discords) after its own waking nature: thus,

"Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of
love;
O'er courtiers' knees, that dream on curtsies
straight;

CLUB PAPERS

O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees:
O'er ladies' lips, who straight on kisses dream;

Tickling a parson's nose that lies asleep,
Then dreams he of another benefice;
Sometimes she driveth o'er a soldier's neck,
And then dreams he of cutting foreign throats"
etc., etc.

until Romeo cries, "Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace!
Thou talkest of nothing." "True," answered
Mercutio, "I talk of dreams; which are the children
of an idle brain —."

I shall not argue as to the relative fertility of the
dream soil in a static or a dynamic brain field, but I
fain would note that there is complete correspond-
ence between the subject matter of the dreams I am
about to record and my own waking thoughts and
activities.

As to Mercutio's remark "that dreamers often
lie" — well, dreamers, especially waking dreamers,
often are possessed of imagination; but neither this
element nor that of conscious embroidery attaches
to what I am about to set down; that is, to the dream
portion which, in both cases, presented itself vividly
to my sleeping vision and remains vivid in my wak-
ing memory. The experience would seem to answer
affirmatively the question as to whether or no dreams

are ever coherent and, even, as to whether real "jokes" are perpetrated in dreams. In the first instance cited I was conscious that I was indulging in a "pleasantry," and in the dream I laughed in hearty enjoyment. In the second instance I am not so certain that I was conscious of making a pun, but I felt a glow of satisfaction in having said something "pat." However, not until after I had analyzed my dream and had identified the complexes, did I appreciate how altogether pat the answer was. Without further prelude, then, let me establish a background against which to sketch the outline of my earlier dream.

I was, once upon a time, superintending the construction of two summer cottages designed by my firm for clients in a North Shore suburb. The structures were underpinned with cedar posts which were set in holes dug in the ground. To insure drainage the bottom of each hole was filled with small field stones worn smooth and rounded by the elements.

I spent the week-end now and again with friends living in the suburb, and had gone with them upon occasion to the service in the Presbyterian Church, presided over by a plump, intense little Dominie who had a habit of screwing his face to his notes upon the desk, while at intervals he viewed his congregation through squint eyes, peering over the upper rim of his spectacles. His expression of coun-

CLUB PAPERS

tenance, intense and interrogative, always amused me so that perhaps I did not take him or his words as seriously as I should.

Once after visiting the scene of the building operations with my clients I had the dream in which I perpetrated the pleasantry and delivered myself of something in the nature of a pun. On the morning following the night of the dream I asked my brother if he remembered the name of a game we used to play as boys, the game in which one boy strove to "bowl" out of a shallow hole in the earth a stone rolled in by another boy. He told me the name, the one I had used in my dream; a name which I had not had in mind for many a long year. This was the dream:

On a beautiful Sunday morning the families of my clients and I, a jolly party, were at the site of the future cottages rolling stones into the holes which had been dug for the underpinning. In turn we would cast a stone and try to displace one which had found lodgment in a hole. At this juncture along came the Dominie who eyed us for a few moments in his intense pulpit fashion and then asked solemnly, "Are you remembering the Sabbath Day to keep it holy?" As the others appeared reticent it devolved upon me to make answer, and, shying the "dornick" I held in my hand, I said, "Yes! don't you see? We are remembering to keep it

Holey-Bowley," a pleasantry the dream people all seemed thoroughly to enjoy.

A more elaborate pattern must be woven into the background of the dream which came to me on a night early in February, 1920. Very vivid and definite it was, involving several "complexes" and relating itself directly to experiences and to mental operations of the recent past. I hastily sketch the background.

In May of 1919 I attended the convention of the American Institute of Architects in Nashville, Tenn. The good people of the town entertained the visiting architects at a barbecue at the "Hermitage" which was reached by automobile. This will account for the "banquet complex" in the dream. Now, I have sometimes been inclined to question the absolute validity of Ralph Waldo Emerson's theory of the identity of the processes of Art and Nature, and the philosophy underlying the manifestations of each, as implied, at least, in his rare poem, "The Problem," from which I quote:

"The hand that rounded Peter's dome,
And groined the aisles of Christian Rome,
Wrought in a sad sincerity;
Himself from God he could not free."

CLUB PAPERS

Note particularly the last line. And again farther on in the poem:

“ These temples grew as grows the grass.”

Abbeys, Temples, Pyramids, Shrines, —

“ Nature gladly gave them place,
Adopted them into her race,
And granted them an equal date
With Andes and with Ararat.”

As I had quoted these last lines and discussed their content in print fairly recently, the relationship of this matter to the “subject complex” of the dream conversation is readily traced. On the evening of the Friday preceding the night of my dream, my brother and I had visited the studio of an artist who exhibited to us several paintings of brilliantly colored cliffs and “architectonic” masses in the landscape of the Far West; — weird, entrancing things they were. Upon arriving at home after this visit, my brother, for purposes of comparison, produced his colored photographs of the Dolomites together with architectural subjects, upon the characteristic beauty of which he discoursed with enthusiasm, indicating the while various features in detail. The bearing of all this on what follows will

become apparent; and against the background I have now laid in, the outlines of the second dream will stand in clear relief.

The dream: I found myself on one bright morning in an automobile, in company with a half dozen other architects, on a foraging expedition near Rockford, Ill. We had set out to gather some ears of green corn which were to be roasted in the husk for a forthcoming banquet of our guild. We procured the desired provender at the farm of the Emersons (relatives of Ralph Waldo, though the relationship was not specifically noted in the dream) who, recognizing in us kindred spirits, invited us into the house to join them in the noonday meal. We accepted and immediately the talk turned on art topics. One of the younger ladies of the family went to a cabinet in the well appointed drawing room and thence brought a number of colored photographs of the Dolomites and of the Grand Canyon, together with photographs of architectural subjects. (The colors stood out vividly in my dream.) Certain of the photographs, the natural subjects in her left hand and the architectural in the right hand, were held up for inspection by a gentle old lady seated in a low divan around which the little party was gathered.

As I looked down upon her face from my standing position I was distressed to notice that her silken gray hair was rather sparse and that there was a flat

CLUB PAPERS

black mole on her right temple. She spoke with animation and, pointing out the details or tracing the outlines of the objects in the photographs, which she held in one hand, with a corner of one of the photographs she held in the other, said: "Now I get no sort of sense of relationship between these masses and details and this or these!" indicating in turn the face of a cliff or a mountain and the façade of a cathedral or a palace. "They seem totally unrelated; I perceive no correspondence between them."

"It is altogether natural and proper that you should perceive none," said I; "for these," indicating the natural objects, "are the product and manifestation of blind forces — blind, unknowing, unconscious forces working to an unseen and unknowable end; while these," I continued, indicating the architectural subjects, "are the works of a consciously directed and knowing force moving unerringly toward a pre-determined and desired goal." This explanation seemed to satisfy the others, as it did me.

Suddenly the dear old lady looked up and asked a question which seemed not at all to break the sequence, "Which process, do you think, is the more tedious?"

"Ah! Madam," I answered, out of my knowledge and appreciation of nature and the arts, "no

element of tedium, nor, for that matter, of *Te Deum*, enters into either of the processes! ”

This answer so evidently rounded out the subject that the dream faded immediately into nothingness, and, upon waking, I rehearsed it to my brother substantially in the form in which I have here set it down.

Now, with a transition quite as gradual as that through which my dream lady reached her last question, I am led to wonder if the “processes” underlying the structure of such dreams as the foregoing — barring the humor, which never consciously (?) enters into spiritualistic presentations — may not account for many of the manifestations which accompany the very recent if not altogether present hysterical search into the “beyond,”* as they have accompanied all similar search in other and similar periods of stress. May it not well be that, impelled by wills stronger than his own, or self-hypnotized into a state of ready acquiescence and response, the subject projects his subconscious being against a background of real experience woven of anguish, hope, despair, love and longing, and dreams dreams or has them dreamed for him — the effect in both cases being similar — the vision seeming real while the

* Lodge and Conan Doyle at that time were very much in the public eye.

CLUB PAPERS

condition lasts? Too rarely does the subject awaken to the reality, while all too often the glory of the dream, translated into waking speech, is dissipated in a vapor of banality or incoherency. As to these dreams which I have just recorded, the "glory" may never have enveloped them, though that they are characterized by a certain "freshness" will hardly be denied.