

## ART. VI.—THE PROVIDENTIAL USE OF DREAMS.

And is there care in heaven? and is there love  
 In heavenly spirits to these creatures base,  
 That may compassion of their evils move?  
 There is; but oh! the exceeding grace  
 Of Highest God, that loves His creatures so;  
 And all His works with mercy doth embrace,  
 That blessed angels He sends to and fro,  
 To serve to wicked man—to serve His wicked foe.

SPENSER.

WHAT is a dream? We are told that it is “a psychic phenomenon, in which the spirit with all its activities, transferred into a position of repose, as it were, represents the spectator; and which it annuls as soon as its will, appearing out of inactivity, begins to interfere either by way of restraint or stimulus.” Now in a dream the unconscious will proceeds out of itself as an impulse, which, according to the man’s disposition, expresses itself in various ways, but always more freely and more strongly than in waking life; and the impulse seeks for itself in the world of forms stored up in the waking life an object tallying with its own determination, in the representation of which idea and volition are concerned—a kind of birth-labour. This process is alluded to in Ecclesiasticus xxxiv. 5: *ὡς ὠδινούσης φαντάζεσθαι καρδία*; i.e., “As the heart deviseth to itself forms in travail;” for, according to Scripture, the proper laboratory of the dream is the heart.

But the head is so little unconcerned in dreaming that in the Book of Daniel dreams are even called “visions of the head” (Dan. iv. 5, *visiones capitis*, or *αἱ ὁράσεις τῆς κεφαλῆς*), and therefore forms of the brain; but dependent upon the daily activity of the brain, this relation is somewhat secondary and passive. On the other hand, the activity of the heart is increased; and from the heart—where the roots of thought lie—spring forth dreams formed and coloured by sense. And the Shulamite expresses herself accordingly when beginning to relate a dream: “I slept, but my heart was awake” (Song of Solomon v. 2). So also the spirit of Clytemnestra, in the “Eumenides” of Æschylus, says to the sleeping chorus of furies: *ὁράτε πληγὰς τὰσδε καρδίας ἔθεν* (“See these sword-wounds of my heart, from whom they came”).

The dream is only a phantom of the waking life, and, according to Zophar, one of Job’s three friends, a shadow which flees when one awakes. And therefore Scripture writers often use the melting of a dream at awakening as a favourite image for destruction without trace. For example, Asaph (in Psalm lxxiii. 20: “Like as a dream when one awaketh, so shalt Thou make their image to vanish,” etc.),

and similarly Isa. xxix. 7, 8. And, moreover, emphatic warning is given against trusting in dreams; *e.g.*, Eccles. v. 7: "In the multitude of dreams and words there are divers vanities." The son of Sirach speaks exactly in the same strain when he says: "The hopes of a man void of understanding are vain and false, and dreams lift up fools. Whoso regardeth dreams is like him that catcheth at a shadow and followeth after the wind" (Ecclus. xxxiv. 1-3).

But this prevailing illusory character of dreams has its reverse side. The dream, after all, is a storehouse of experience to which is appropriated, firstly, an intellectual; secondly, an ethical; and thirdly, a spiritual significance far above the unimportance of either appearing or seeming.

I. We may safely say that when the man sleeps his spirit also sleeps, so far as it does not make itself manifest outwardly, as in waking life; just as we read in Scripture that God, as it were, sleeps (Ps. xlv. 23: "Awake! why sleepest Thou, O Lord?" and elsewhere) when He does not meddle in what is happening externally, as might be expected from His righteousness and truth. But, on the other hand, what the Scripture says of God (Ps. cxxi. 4) is also true of the spirit; *i.e.*, that He neither slumbers nor sleeps. As the activity of the soul and of the body only changes its character, and does not cease, still less does that of the spirit. This is forcibly expressed by Hamann in his "Exercitium:" "Uti conditor ab officio suo quievit: attamen pergit operari, æque ac vivere in somno haud cessamus, quamvis per quietam vitam non sentiamus." The only distinction is that in God there is no difference of the consciousness of day and night; whereas to the self-conscious creature its own nature is never so transparent as that of God is to Him. And especially we, who tabernacle in an earthly body, have, as the background of our being, a dim region, out of which our thinking works forth to the daylight, and in which much goes on (particularly in sleep) which we can only learn by looking back afterwards. So we find Wordsworth in his ode entitled "Imitations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," giving expression to the same strain:

Hence, in a season of calm weather,  
 Though inland far we be,  
 Our souls have sight of that immortal sea  
 Which brought us hither;  
 Can in a moment travel thither,—  
 And see the children sport upon the shore,  
 And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

We are justified by experience in believing the statement of the Psalmist (Ps. cxxxvii. 2) that God giveth to His beloved in sleep.

The deep of man's internal nature, into which he sinks in sleep, contains far more than is manifest to himself. It is a general mistake to limit the soul to the extent of its consciousness, for it embraces a far greater abundance of powers and relations than can ordinarily appear in its consciousness. And the *faculty of foreboding* belongs to this abundance—that “*something*” which leads and warns a man, and even anticipates the future—a faculty also which, very often unshackled in the state of sleep, sees *far* in the distant future. This idea is very beautifully expressed by Æschylus in “Eumenides,” 104, etc.:

εὐδουσα γὰρ φρόνη ἔμμασιν λαμπρύνεται  
 ἐν ἡμέρᾳ δὲ μοῖρ' ἀπρόσκοπος φρενῶν;

*i.e.*, “For in *sleep* the spirit is *clear-sighted*, though by *day* the fate of mortals is *hidden from their view*.” So again in the “Choephoreæ,” 280: ἰρῶντα λαμπρὸν ἐν σκότῳ—seeing clearly in darkness. With these we may compare Cicero “De Divinatione,” i. 39: “Cur autem deus dormientes nos moneat, vigilantes negligat?” *i.e.*, now why should God advise us in our sleep, and not instruct us when we are awake? and i. 30: “Quum ergo est somno revocatus animus a societate et contagione corporis, tum meminit præteritorum, presentia cernit, futura prævidet. Jacet enim corpus dormientis ut mortui, viget autem et vivit animus.” *I.e.*, When, therefore, the soul is freed from the company and influence of the body, it remembers events of yesterday, sees those of to-day, and foresees those of to-morrow. For though the sleeper's body is like that of a dead man, yet the soul is alive and active.

For examples of such dreams of presentiment I may mention those of Joseph in his father's house (Gen. xxxvii. 5), which, as became plain to him afterwards (xlii. 9), figuratively predicted his future eminence over the house of Jacob; also the dreams of Pharaoh's chief butler and chief baker (Gen. xl.), which, according to Joseph's interpretation, signified the fate of each; also the dream of the soldier in the camp of the Midianites in Gideon's day (Judges vii. 13). And for the expression “dreams of presentiment” we may refer to Wisdom xviii. 17-19: φαντασῖαι ὀνείρων τοῦτο προσηγήνευσαν.

We should be careful to note here that *not* one of these dreams is particularly noted as *divinely sent*; and we need no other origin for them than that natural gift of insight innate in the soul, so variously distributed to individuals and races, which slumbers when the man is wakeful and wakes up when he sleeps. As the Spanish physician Huarte rightly says: “As there are men who excel others in remembering bygone or past events, or in the perception of the present, so there are also men who excel others in representing to them-

selves the future." And as the representation of the future is often enigmatically expressed, Scripture recognises a science of dream-interpretation—of course bestowed from above. For instance, we learn from Dan. i. 17 that "God made Daniel understand all visions and dreams." (Cf. Gen. xl. 8: "Do not interpretations *belong to God?*" and Gen. xli. 16: "It is not in me; *God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.*")

II. The next important division of dreaming is the *Ethical*. According to the Preacher (Eccles. v. 3), "a dream cometh through the multitude of business;" and further, in the dream our subjectivity, innate and acquired, betrays itself in a natural *truthfulness*, which overpowers the restraint of outward impressions. And so the son of Sirach says (Ecclus. xxxiv. 3): τούτο κατὰ τούτων ὄρασις ἑνυπνίων κατέναντι προσώπου ὁμοιωμα προσώπου; *i.e.*, "The vision of dreams is the resemblance of one thing to another, even as the likeness of a face to a face." And not merely the constitution and contents of *the soul*, but also those of *the spirit*, come to view in the dream. What is the character of the dreamer? Is he of a fleshly or lustful tendency? Then we may say of him what St. Paul says of a dead man (so far as the actual sinning ceases) in his Epistle to the Romans (vi. 7): ὁ ἀποθανὼν δεδικαίωται ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας; *i.e.*, "The dead man has been *judicially* released—not from the charge or penalty—but from the power and capacity of sin." (Cf. Ecclus. xxvi. 29: οὐ δικαιοθήσεται κάπηλος ἀπὸ ἁμαρτίας.) But as soon as ever the dreaming is made one with the sleep, *then* the spirit suffers and is degraded towards the soul; and from the soul's selfishness—selfish impulses—and unrest quickened by selfishness, all kinds of sinful images arise in it, which the dreamer is ashamed of when he awakens. And on account of them even the dreamer is sometimes disturbed by remorse on account of these images, and especially on account of those dreaming forms which emanate from sensual desires, which will be all the more unchaste and masterful the less the man strives against them in a waking state.<sup>1</sup> Our own consciences must agree with the judgment, and the whole of antiquity is unanimous in its condemnation of these filthy dreamers that defile the flesh (Jude 8). These lustful dreams show this very clearly—that the spirit has let go the reins of government over the body and its appetites.

III. The third important aspect of dreaming is the *spiritual*. Dreams may become the department and means of a direct

<sup>1</sup> Modern philosophy considers these lustful dreams as free from guilt; but Scripture unequivocally decides otherwise, and condemns the lustful dreamer as unclean for the ensuing day (Lev. xv. 16), and even banishes the soldier from the camp (Deut. xxiii. 10). Why? Because the spirit is disgraced in having lost its *royalty*.

and special intercourse between God and man; and in this view we may fairly divide dreams into (a) dreams of conscience and (b) dreams of revelation.

(a) *Dreams of Conscience.*—The witness of conscience may make itself objective, and in the dream-life may expand into inwardly perceptible transactions between God and man. For instance, we read in Genesis how God appeared threatening and warning Abimelech (xx.) and Laban (xxxii.) by night in dreams; and the wife of Pontius Pilatus warned her husband against being concerned in the crucifixion of the Just One, by reason of the fright she had received in a dream: πολλὰ γὰρ ἔπαθον σήμερον κατ' ὄναρ δι' αὐτόν (Matt. xxvii. 19). Such an occurrence, with the purpose of settling the conviction of the sinfulness of man, is the vision of the night with the spirit's voice which Eliphaz the Temanite describes in Job iv. 12-21. And in chapter xxxiii. of that book, referring to Job's utterance in chapter vii., Elihu describes such experience of the sleeping man as may kindle repentance; e.g., "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed, then He uncovereth the ear of men, and sealeth warnings to them, to release man from crime, and to withdraw arrogance from man." Dreams, or even dreamlike visions, which overtake a man in the nightly perception, force upon him self-knowledge, self-consideration, and draw him back from the edge of the precipice. They stamp upon his heart indelibly the call to repentance, and seal the work of grace that brings him round by chastisement from destruction and ruin.

(b) *Dreams of Revelation.*—There are, moreover, dreams by which God's special will is made known to man by the voice of God Himself, or of an angel, in such a manner that it could not be known to him by God's written Word; and dreams, too, by means of which *future* events are made *present* to man; i.e., events, the foresight of which lies beyond the faculty of presentiment. But Holy Writ, which has throughout its pages and for its purpose a personal dealing of man with the personal God, lays claim to a recognition of such dreams of revelation as those in which God and man stand in presence of one another as *I* and *thou*. The Spirit of God, also, applies ideas and conceptions, which man has collected naturally during waking life, to give him a pertinent and forcible knowledge of the future, and even perhaps of eternity. The means of representation here is of course human, but the thing represented and its origin are divine.

Dreams which bear in themselves proof of their Divine origin are a link in the chain of the temporal working out of

the plan of redemption. Of such we find a great many in Scripture. For example, we may mention the dreams of Jacob in Bethel (Gen. xxviii. 12) and in Haran (Gen. xxxi. 10-13); the dream of Solomon in Gibeon (1 Kings iii. 5); the dreams of Joseph, the espoused husband of Mary (Matt. i. 2); the nightly visions of Paul (Acts xvi. 9; xviii. 9, etc.), if they were received by the Apostle during sleep. In those dreams that bear upon the manner of life, God is at times replying to sincere inquirers (1 Sam. xxviii. 6). And examples of dreams that concern the future are those of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel (Dan. ii., iv., vii., viii., x., etc.), and probably those of Pharaoh also (Gen. xli.).

No doubt waking visions must be distinguished from these prophetic dream-visions, since the seer—whether by day, as Ezekiel (viii. 1), or Daniel (x. 7), or Stephen (Acts vii. 55), or Peter (x. 9); or by night, as Zachariah (Luke i.), or Paul (Acts xvi. 9)—receives them in a waking state.

But Scripture is so fully conscious of, even in dreams, phantoms of the heart assuming the appearance of Divine revelation, that it distinctly warns us of them, and gives us the distinguishing criteria; (*e.g.*, Deut. xiii. 2; xviii. 20; Gal. i. 8). For that is the very blinding and deception of the false prophets, in whose dreams the fleshly wishes and hopes of the people whom they are beguiling are embodied (Jer. xxix. 8).

It is argued by Moses Amyraldus that all Divine communications by dreams carry with them their own authentication, as being self-discriminating from everything else. The dream and its Divine origin and sanction seem to have been given together in consciousness, so that there was no place left for the operation of the judgment—just as the wind and its direction are felt at one and the same time.

Again, it should be noticed that neither God nor good angel ever gave a dream which was not to answer some moral, didactic, benevolent, or grand economical purpose. The aimless prurience that would pry into futurity—the impertinent curiosity that irrationally set itself up as an end to itself, never received the slightest honour or encouragement, nor set in motion the meanest of the heavenly hierarchy. Amyraldus, paraphrasing and grouping together the tests given in the Bible, ruled that one proof of a dream's Divine origin was that it conveyed intimations of such things as it was competent for *God* only to know and to reveal. Of the aforementioned dreams it will be observed that they were not sent capriciously or without a purpose; and that, if not to the dreamer himself, then to some more worthy person, the solution of the dream was given at (for practical ends) the

same time as the dream itself. Further, they bore this Divine mark—that no rules of the *quasi-science* of interpretation could avail to detect their meaning. “God was His own interpreter,” and He Himself made clear their message and meaning.

And now, has God ceased to reveal Himself and His will by means of dreams? Of course, the question of power can only be answered in one way. The *unanimous* voice must be that He *could* so reveal Himself if He would. The *general* voice is that it is *possible* that He does. The *more restricted* opinion is that He *does*. And there is an inner circle of persons who profess to have personal evidence not of the possibility only, nor even of the probability, but of the actuality of such illuminations. And while in the endless and countless occurrence of dreams it would be strange if some did not come true—on the principle of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*—yet there is no room for the scorner to sit down and laugh at men who appeal to beneficial results in morals and religion as an evidence that dream-agency is not yet effete in the economy of God.

In conclusion, there may be—I believe there are—occasional dreams, which are specially sent for some purpose worthy of Him in Whose hands our life and all its operations are; but I feel persuaded that they are extremely rare, and when they come they carry with them their own *credentials*—their own convictions and their own lessons.

J. H. WHITEHEAD.

ALDERLEY EDGE,  
MANCHESTER.

---

## A Hymn of Patience.

---

JOB xxiii. 8-10.

---

STRANGELY He works; I cannot trace  
 His secret plan;  
 He hides it in some distant place  
 From poor, weak man.  
 Backward I look, or forward strain  
 My weary eyes;  
 To right—to left—but all in vain;  
 No stars arise!  
 'Tis dark behind me and before,  
 Clouds ev'rywhere!  
 My sorrow seemeth almost more  
 Than I can bear: