A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

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Dreams 2: Prophetic dreams

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Many persons have endeavoured to read into dreams some hidden meaning whilst others consider them to be only a confused and jumbled record of sleep-memories unworthy of serious reflection. Possibly the truth in regard to dreams lies between these two extremes of undue scepticism and a too facile credence. Here are two unusually prophetic dreams.

A murder in Canada

The following, sent to me by Dr Leonard Guthrie, relates the experience of a credible witness, EWM, a distinguished scientist and FRS who had lived in Canada. He writes:

An Englishman and an American clubbed together to try to reach the Klondyke goldfield by the overland trail, i.e. by going due north from the prairies, instead of following the usual course of crossing by the Canadian Pacific Railway to Vancouver, then taking a steamer up the coast to Sitka, and crossing back over the mountains via White Horse Pass.

After the pair had passed on their journey what the American judged to be the outposts of civilisation, he shot the Englishman while he lay asleep. He tried to destroy his body by burning it, rifled through his baggage, taking everything of value, and abandoned his trip.

When he was questioned as to what had become of his companion, the American replied that he himself had become discouraged and had given up the expedition, but that the Englishman had pushed on.

But there was an encampment of Indians close to the spot where the crime had been committed. The old chief saw two men come north and encamp; in the night, he heard a shot and saw one man go south. He went to the camp, saw the body, and informed the nearest post of NW Mounted Police. They tailed the murderer, and arrested him before he could escape across the US border. He was brought to Regina.

Meanwhile, the brother of the murdered man in England had a dream in which he saw his absent brother lying dead and bloody on the ground. He came down next morning very depressed, told his dream, and announced his intention of going straight out to Canada to see if anything had happened to his brother.

He arrived out there as the trial of the murderer was progressing. He identified several articles in the possession of the murderer as the property of his late brother. The murderer was hanged at Regina.

The House of Commons assassination of 1812

The second dream of a prophetic nature relates to the assassination of Spencer Perceval, Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer. It is recorded in the *Book of Days* (I, 617). It was the dream of Mr John Williams of Sarrier House, near Redruth, in Cornwall. He died in 1841, and was described in the *Gentleman's Magazine* as a man of the highest integrity.

On the night after the assassination, when the facts could not have been known to him by any ordinary means, he dreamt that he was in the Lobby of the House of Commons, although he had never been there in his life. He saw a short, small man enter, dressed in a blue coat and a white waistcoat. Immediately after him entered another man in a brown coat with yellow buttons. The latter drew out a pistol and shot the former, who instantly fell, blood pouring from a wound a little below the left breast.

In his dream, Mr Williams heard the report of the pistol, saw the blood flow out and stain the waistcoat, and he noticed the colour of the victim's face change. He further saw the murderer seized, and observed his countenance. When asking, in the dream, who had been shot, he was told "the Chancellor". Perceval was Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time.

Mr Williams then awoke and mentioned the matter to his wife, who made light of it. At her suggestion he went to sleep again, but dreamt the same dream a second time, and then a third. After this, between 1 and 2 a.m., he got up and dressed.

In the afternoon of the next day he went to Falmouth, and related his dream again to Mr Tucker, of Tremanton Castle, and his wife. Mr Tucker replied that the description was like Perceval – although Mr Williams had never seen Perceval, nor had anything to do with him.

Just then the news of the assassination reached Truro, which was seven miles away. Six weeks after the event, Mr Williams went to London and to the House of Commons. He recognized the Lobby, the exact spot where Perceval fell, and the dress of both men in the dream corresponded precisely with those actually worn at the time.

Whether we regard dreams as in any way prophetic or not, it is remarkable, when we consider the enormous number of dreams, that there are not more than occasional coincidences. The successes only are noted, while the failures as to prophecy have been forgotten. The careful study of the mental life, normal and morbid, has been the work of modern science, which has elucidated and solved many of the dream combinations by the acceptance of that intimate union which exists between mind and body. It has been found that the chaotic play of images in dreams is able to throw much light upon the normal mental processes and upon the laws which are observable in the working of the mind during the waking state. Hence the justification of a claim for those who study dreams today, truly to be called "interpreters," for they investigate upon the solid and substantial ground of science the intimate and fundamental activities of the human mind in health and disease, without the need of resorting to supernatural agencies as in former days.

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