A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

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Dreams 3: Dreams and crime

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WHAT IS THE ASSOCIATION of dreams with crime? I have questioned insane criminals about their dreams in connection with specific crimes, and although there is always some reserve about admitting revelations in connection with criminal acts, I find that they dream much as do other people.

In this class, there is a considerable difficulty in proving their hidden personal secrets, and in overcoming the resistance of the so-called "censor". In these cases, the conscious and the unconscious cannot easily be brought together, and a clue to their desires, impulses, or wishes is extremely difficult to ascertain. Moreover, this class is not an easy one to investigate; many of the criminal classes being mentally defective, although some are only morally so, especially as regards prudential considerations for they cannot postpone present pleasure for future good; they are easily tempted, and easily yield, and they have a diminished emotional as well as intellectual endowment. The "criminal type" is impulsive, and though they may not be insane they have often a psychopathic inheritance and tendencies. Their psycho-anthropological characters may be summarized as egotistic and anti-social, and they are not easy material for the psychological analyst.

The discovery of crime through a dream when the dreamer has by his own dream given himself away, is unknown to me in real life, and this is supported by the extensive experience of Dr WC Sullivan. Dr Leonard Guthrie reminds me of the story of the murder of Maria Martin, by Corder, in 1827, when dreams lead to the discovery of the victim's body. As he also points out, there are numerous instances of murders having been discovered and avenged by the appearance of the murdered person's ghost. Shakespeare presents two instances in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. *The Bells*, in which Irving represented the miller Mathias, exemplifies a drama in which the murderer is being continually haunted by the dream-sound of the sleigh-bells, and in Tom Hood's *Dream of Eugene Aram*, "the unknown facts of guilty acts are seen in dreams from God". The usher, Eugene Aram, dreamed of the murder he had committed, and related it long afterwards to the boy, "the horrid thing pursues my soul, it stands before me now; "that very night two stern-faced men set out from Lynn, and Eugene Aram walked between with gyves upon his wrists". The suggestion here made connects the dream with the murderer's arrest.

Hack Tuke relates a remarkable instance of a man dreaming that he had performed an act which rendered him liable to legal consequences, and for which he had been arrested. On awaking, he was greatly relieved to find it was only a dream, but in the course of two or three days he committed the act in an insane condition of mind. He was arrested and brought before the court for trial, but was released to the care of his friends.

There is no record of psycho-analysis assisting in nor leading to the detection of crime, not even crimes relating to sex, for which the Freudians claim a peculiar affinity.

It will be admitted that a most puzzling terminology has arisen from the efforts made by medical psychologists to analyse dreams. If the dreamer fails to recognize the new and strange scenes in which the manifest dream is situated, this is owing to its "dramatization" and if the characters are unrecognizable, there is "distortion". Should the chief character be given a subordinate position, there is a "displacement," but not infrequently there occurs a fusion of the characters, which is "condensation." When the ideas in a dream become detached from their usual association and are "converted" into some other psychic sphere, then they are being "sublimated" into some obsession or delusion. Hysteria, for instance, is the "conversion" of a repressed idea into some motor and sensory discharge, and if only the idea can be disclosed to the sufferer and by her disregarded, the result is claimed as a cure obtained by a "cathartic," a word which is meant to signify suggestion, auto-hypnosis, or, as more recently hinted, "auto-gnosis."

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It is most welcome that the revival of interest in dreams should have awakened the psychologist, the physiologist, and the philosopher, but one realizes that progress must be at the expense of some long-held views or traditions. Unfortunately, in this instance – if progress can be claimed – it is at the expense of some cherished proprieties. Indeed, I venture to think there has been an unnecessary pandering to the lower instincts of men and women on the part of those who describe themselves as psycho-analysts. I believe that in the full pursuit of this craft there has been a distinct over-stepping of the decencies of sex, on the part of some who have worked upon these investigations. The foreign teachers who have been responsible for employing these "sex-mad methods" to reveal the unconscious mind, have, so far as this country is concerned, already received the recognition of a posthumous notice of their labours, and it would not be incorrect to state that among psychiatrists – in this country at any rate – Freudism is dead.

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