

Dreams and Mythology.

Dreams are to our waking thoughts much like echoes to music; but their reverberation are so partial, so varied, so complex, that it is almost in vain we seek among the notes of consciousness for the echoes of the dream. If we could by any means ascertain on what principle our dreams for a given night are arranged, and why one idea more than another furnishes their cue, it would be comparatively easy to follow out the chain of associations by which they unroll themselves afterwards, and to note the singular ease and delicacy whereby subordinate topics, recently wafted across our minds, are seized and woven into the network of the dream. But the reason why from among the five thousand thoughts of the day we revert at night especially to thoughts number two and four, instead of to thoughts number three and six, or any other in the list, is obviously impossible to conjecture. We can but observe that the echo of the one note has been caught and of the others lost amid the obscure caverns of the memory. Certain broad rules, however, may be remarked as obtaining generally regarding the topics of dreams. In the first place, if we have any present considerable physical sensation or pain, such as may be produced by a wound, or a fit of indigestion, or hunger, or an unaccustomed sound, we are pretty sure to dream of it in preference to any subject of mental interest only. Again, if we have merely a slight sensation of uneasiness, insufficient to cause a dream, it will yet be enough to color a dream, otherwise suggested, with a disagreeable hue. Failing to have a dream suggested to it by present physical sensations, the brain seems to revert to the subjects of thought of the previous day, or of some former period of life, and to take up one or other of them as a theme on which to play variations. As before remarked, the grounds of choice among all such subjects cannot be ascertained; but the predilection of Morpheus for those which we have not in our waking hours thought most interesting is noticeable. Very rarely indeed do our dreams take up the matter which has most engrossed us for hours before we sleep. A wholesome law of variety comes into play; and the brain seems to decide: "I have had enough of politics, or Greek, or fox-hunting, for this time. Now I will amuse myself quite differently." Very often, perhaps we may say generally, it pounces upon some transient thought which has flown like a swallow across it by daylight, and insists on holding it fast through the night. Only when our attention has more or less transgressed the bounds of health, and we have been morbidly excited about it, does the main topic of the day's interests recur to us in dreaming at night; and that it should do so ought, I imagine, always to serve as a warning that we have strained our mental power a little too far. Lastly, there are dreams whose origin is not in any past thought, but in some sentiment vivid and prevailing enough to make itself dumbly felt even in sleep.

The subject of a dream being as we must now suppose, suggested to the brain on some such principles as the above the next thing to be noted is, how does the brain treat its theme when it has got it? Does it dryly reflect upon it, as we are wont to do awake? Or does it pursue a course wholly foreign to the laws of waking thoughts? It does, I conceive, neither one nor the other, but treats its theme, whenever it is possible to do so, according to a certain very important though obscure law of thought, whose actions we are apt to ignore. We have been accustomed to consider the myth-creating power of the human mind as one specially belonging

to the earlier stages of growth of society and of the individual. It will throw, I think, a rather curious light on the subject, if we discover that this instinct exists in every one of us, and exerts itself with more or less energy through the whole of our lives. In hours of waking consciousness, indeed, it is suppressed, or has only the narrowest range of exercise; as in the tendency, noticeable in all persons not of the strictest veracity, to supplement an incomplete anecdote with explanatory incidents, or to throw a slightly known story into the dramatic form, with dialogues constructed out of their consciousness. But such small play of the myth-making faculty is nothing compared to its achievements during sleep. The instant that daylight and common sense are excluded, the fairy work begins. At the very least, half our dreams (unless I greatly err) are nothing else than myths formed by unconscious cerebration, on the same approved principles whereby Greece and India and Scandinavia gave to us the stories which we were once pleased to set apart as "mythology" proper. Have we not here, then, evidence that there is a real law of the human mind causing us constantly to compose ingenious fables explanatory of the phenomena around us—a law which only sinks into abeyance in the waking hours of persons in whom the reason has been highly cultivated, but which resumes its sway even over their well-tutored brains when they sleep?—*Francis Power Cobbe.*

Death from Passion.

Cases in which death results from the physical excitement consequent on mental passion are, according to the *Lancet*, not uncommon. A recent instance has again called attention to the matter. Unfortunately, those persons who are prone to sudden and overwhelming outbursts of ill temper do not, as a rule, recognize their propensity or realize the perils to which it exposes them; while the stupid idea that such deaths as occur in passion, and which are directly caused by it, ought to be ascribed to "the visitation of God," tends to divert attention to the common sense lesson which such deaths should teach. It is most unwise to allow the mind to excite the brain and body to such extent as to endanger life itself. We do not sufficiently appreciate the need and value of mental discipline as a corrective of bad habits and preventive of disturbances by which happiness, and life itself, are often jeopardized.

A Home-made Fountain Pen.

Take two ordinary steel pens of the same pattern and insert them in the common holder. The inner pen will be the writing pen. Between this and the outer pen will be held a supply of ink, when they are once dipped into the inkstand, that will last to write several pages of manuscript. It is not necessary that the points of the two pens should be very near together, but if the flow of ink is not rapid enough the points may be brought nearer by a bit of thread or a minute rubber band.

"Political parties," says John Bright in a recent letter, "seem to me unavoidable in a free country; but, in my view, there is a higher law to which we should submit. I condemned our warlike policy thirty years ago—I condemn it now—and I left the Government on their Egyptian blunder. Mr. Bright added that he did not, therefore, leave the party with which he has been so long connected. But he hoped that the party would "become wiser."