



MANY people, of whom I am one, have from time to time, if they are given to dreaming at all while they are asleep, dreams which somehow seem to be of an entirely different texture from the ordinary nightly imaginings with their blurred outline, the inconsequence of the events that take place therein, and the utter unreality of it all to the waking mind. Every now and then a dream of different stuff is woven in the sleeper's brain: that part of it—the subliminal self, or whatever it may be—which never wholly slumbers, is vividly astir, sends its message through the sleeping brain like bubbles rising in still, placid water, rising equally and sanely to the surface in undisfigured rotundity. Such dreams seem, after one has awoke, to be still actual, and though they are not exactly of the same texture as past realities, they are exactly of the same texture as the conjectured and anticipated future. They do not seem "to have been," but "to be about to be." And when such dreams visit the pillow of the present writer, he puts them down when he wakes, and gets a witness to subscribe his name thereto. The witness, of course, cannot vouch for the vision, but he vouches for the date. Thus, if any of these dreams (the record of them reposes in a red-leather despatch-box) comes true, I shall send such, neatly dated and witnessed, to the Society for Psychical Research, as an authenticated instance of Dream Premonition.

At present they are all still unsent. But of them all there seems to be none so vivid, so likely (remotely, for the Society will have to wait a long time) to come true, as one which visited me a fortnight ago. It still

haunts me with a sense of reality, in comparison with which the ordinary events of to-day seem dim and unsubstantial.

The evening before this vision occurred I had been dining with sober quietude at a small bachelor party in St. James's Street, and walked home afterwards, for the night was caressingly warm and unusually fine, with a friend and contemporary. During dinner we had talked chiefly about the delights of the High Alps as a winter resort. After that we had played bridge in silence, and walking home, we had talked about Switzerland again. I can find in the memory of our conversation and in the events of the evening nothing which could have suggested in the remotest degree (except that I was among old friends) any part of the dream. I parted from my friend at the corner of Albemarle Street, where he lived, went on alone, went straight to bed, and immediately slept. Then I dreamed as follows:—

I was dining at a small bachelor party in St. James's Street, and all those present—it was a party of eight—were well known to me. But our host, a very old friend—the same man with whom I had actually been dining the evening before—had been somewhat silent and preoccupied during dinner, and as we stood about afterwards, before settling down to easy-chairs or cards, I asked him if anything were wrong. He laughed, still rather uneasily, at this.

"No, not that I *know* of," he said with rather marked emphasis. Then he paused a moment. "I don't see why I shouldn't tell you," he said. "It is only that the Superannuation forms for the year have been sent out to-day. I was down at the Home Office this afternoon—Esdaile told me. Well, there are eight of us here, all old friends, and, you know, we are all of us over sixty-five."

Now, though that fact had not suggested itself before, it was quite certainly true, and it was quite certainly as familiar as a truism. We had all of us got old, but the process had been natural and gradual. From which, incidentally, I gather that age comes kindly and quietly. Certainly the truth of his

remark was apparent: there were only bald heads and grey heads present, and from where I stood I could see the reflection of my own in the glass over the mantelpiece, the shiny forehead reaching up to the top of the cranium, gold-rimmed spectacles, and grey eyebrows. Yet this—so vividly natural was the dream—was no sort of shock: that was the "me" to which I was perfectly accustomed.

But his words, I am bound to say, were of

the nature of a shock, for though for the last twelve years I had known that the annual sending out of the Superannuation forms might very intimately affect my contemporaries and me, I do not think I had ever realised it before. The circle of my friends was, I consider, large, though it was all present at that moment in this room, yet a man of seventy-seven who has still seven friends is, I hold, very enviable. But I could ill spare any of them; also, I could ill spare myself. All this passed in a flash, and since the mention of the subject was rather like a deliberate pointing to the Death's Head at a feast, I proceeded to turn my back on it. The Death's Head was there, we all knew that, for when eight very elderly gentlemen meet together at the time of the sending out of the Superannuation forms, there is always present the knowledge that they may not all ever meet again. But that, after all, is invariably the case. Anyhow, so I determined, I was going to enjoy the

evening as usual. If this was to be the last time that this particular party, old and stupid and bald as we might be, were going to enjoy, as we had done for the last fifty years, each other's society, so much the more reason for making the most of it. If, on the other hand, we were going to enjoy it again, there was no reason at all for disturbance. So—I was a sprightly old man, I am afraid—I laughed.

"Come, let's play some old-fashioned game," I said to our host—"bridge, for instance; let's play bridge and pretend we are all thirty and thirty again. But we must play it seriously, just as we used to, in the spirit of forty years ago, when we all used to get so excited about it. By Gad! I nearly quarrelled with you over it and cut short a friendship that has lasted forty years longer."

Now the knowledge that the Superannuation forms had been sent out had penetrated over the room, and out of the eight present there were certainly three rather grave faces. But the notion of playing bridge, a game that had been obsolete some twenty years, and of thus artificially putting the clock back, met with marked success, and in a very few minutes two tables had been put out. There was a certain amount of recollective disagreement as to the methods of scoring, but our host happily found, on a shelf of rare old books, a soiled and somewhat battered copy of the Rules of 1905 (first edition), in which year, apparently, certain small alterations came into force. With the shabby volume as referee, from which there was to be no appeal, we started on this queer old game, which always seemed to me to have certain



good points about it, though now it was hard to get a rubber together, unless, as in the present instance, a party of elderly old friends were dining together. For myself, I cut the lowest card but one, and so—the copy of the Rules of 1905 upheld this—I was dummy.

Being dummy, and the first hand being a somewhat uninteresting declaration of clubs, it was not strange that I went back in my mind to the news I had just heard. And to make this dream vivid to the reader in at all the same degree as it was to me, I must enter into a short exposition as to my own feelings and habit of mind, as they were mine in the dream, in order that what follows may be intelligible. It is as vivid to me now—that outlook on life, and knowledge of the modes under which life was passed—as is my present outlook and the present modes of life to me now, as I sit here in the dim noon of a London day and write about the other from mere recollection of a dream. The year then was 1945, because I knew I was seventy-seven years old, and being that age I looked on life in a way that I can remember now with clear-cut vividness, though it was quite foreign to me. I looked, in fact, backwards, and my thoughts were as much and as pleasantly occupied with the past as they are now with the future. But this mention of the Superannuation forms distracted my mind both from the bridge that was being played, and from its habitual grazing-ground in the past, and made it wonder what risk any of those present (and, in particular, myself) ran of receiving one. The whole system of the Superannuation scheme was, of course, perfectly familiar to me, and though in this year 1905 it seems to me rather brutal, it did not seem so in the least in my dream. Familiarity with it may partly account for that, but what more accounts for it, to my mind, is that in the year 1945 one looked on the mere fact of life (the tenses are difficult) in a manner altogether different from that in which one looks on it in 1905. In 1945 the life of the individual mattered far less than it does now, or—which, perhaps, is the same thing—the life and well-being of the nation mattered far more. This, I think, is one of the probable points about the dream, and to my waking mind it was Japan and her heroic, unquestioning sacrifices in 1904 and 1905 during the Russian war, which began to wake the Western nations up to the undoubted fact that to progress as a nation the individual must sacrifice himself

by his thousands (or be sacrificed) without question or demur.

Briefly, then, the Superannuation scheme was this. Anyone over the age of sixty-five was liable to receive each year from the Home Office a printed paper, which, like the income-tax return, he had to fill up to the best of his power and belief. Everybody over that age did not receive them, but a very large number were sent out each year. In this paper were some eight or ten questions, as far as I remember (I shall not forget them or the number of them again), and, to certain of these, witnesses—who were liable to have to swear to the truth of their testimony, and were subject to cross-examination—had to append their names. And if, in the opinion of the Board for Superannuation (attached to the Home Office), the answer to these questions was unsatisfactory, the returner of the form “died” within a fortnight. This Board for Superannuation consisted of the most humane, wise, and kindly men, and any of those who were related to the filler-in of any particular paper, or who could, in the most remote manner possible, profit by his death, were debarred from adjudicating or voting in any such instance. I had several friends on the Board; indeed, I had once been asked whether, if a seat there were offered me, I would take it. This I had declined. The manner of death was infinitely various, and reflected great credit on the ingenuity of the contrivers. It was also perfectly painless, and, I believe, even pleasant. Such was the sum of my musings about the matter while the hand of clubs was being played.

Now all this seems somewhat cold-blooded and unwarrantable to us in 1905; but in 1945, owing chiefly, I think, to the utterly different value put then on mere life, it seemed perfectly reasonable. The population of the world had, of course, vastly increased, and there was no ground left for useless people to cumber. The law had been in force some twenty years, and the form drawn up with the most scrupulous care. Any valid cause why a man should continue to live was cause enough. What exactly the questions were I did not at the moment remember. Afterwards—

However, for the present the bridge went on, and it was late when this pleasant though elderly party broke up. The night was warm and fine, and I walked home with a 1945 edition of the friend mentioned above, with whom I had walked home in 1905. Old times, as usual, occupied our thoughts,

and we recalled our fifty years of friendship with no little complacency.

"And half-a-dozen times, at least, every year," said I, "we must have walked home



"There was only one"

from that door together. Three hundred times, at least. Well, well!"

"And three hundred times, at least," said he, "I have asked you to walk a shade slower, just a shade slower. All these fifty years you have never mastered the fact that I am two years your senior. Well, I turn off here," he added, as usual, at the corner of Albemarle Street. "Good night, good night. See you at lunch at the club to-morrow?"

"Rain or fine," said I (also as usual).

Now, to younger people this all sounds very dull; just two old men of near eighty who had often and often bored and irritated each other, toddling home, and settling to lunch at the club next day. But there

seemed to me then in the dream (and, indeed, there seems to me now, when I am awake) a certain humanity, a certain achievement in the mere fact that these two old things had preserved their tolerance and liking for each other during so many years. I am glad to think that I was one of them, for they must have had rather kind hearts and a pleasant indulgence for each other's irritating qualities. In fact, I sincerely hope that this part of the dream may come true.

I let myself into my flat and went into my sitting-room to see if there were any letters. There was only one, in a long, pale-yellow envelope, unstamped, but with O.H.M.S. printed at the top. It looked like income-tax. It also looked like something else.

I opened it; a small white printed paper fell out and fluttered to the ground. There was also a long, yellow printed paper with many blank spaces in it. I read the small white paper first:—

"Home Office, Whitehall.

"May 9, 1945.

"Sir,—

"The Board of Superannuation beg to enclose the usual form, with the request that it may be filled in according to the instructions, and returned to them within the space of seven complete days. For every additional day beyond these you are liable to one year's imprisonment as a criminal of the second class.

"Should your return be satisfactory, you will be informed of the fact within fourteen days of the receipt of your return.

"I beg to remain,

"Your obt. servant,

"A. M. AGUESON (Secretary)."

Then I read the other paper:—

O. H. M. S.

Superannuation Department.

The recipient is required to fill in answers to the following questions to the best of his ability and belief.

Witnesses are liable to be called upon to repeat their testimony on oath and subject to cross-examination. Suspected perjury on this point will subject them to criminal prosecution.



"Not less than three in number."

I.—Are you useful?

(Useful is taken to mean *productive* in the widest sense of the word. The answer should therefore include (a) any works or objects of art which the returner is in the habit of producing, (b) all scientific or other research work on which he may be engaged, (c) any other pursuit in which he is now personally engaged which, in his opinion, adds to the pleasure, wealth, or happiness of the nation or of individuals.)

Sub-section (d).—Mere employment of labour or mere contribution to charities does not fall under the preceding heads, unless such is accompanied by active work, investigation, or inquiry on the part of the owner or donor. Witnesses to the answer must be: (a) art-critics of the specific art in question of recognised standing, (b) scientific men, (c) responsible manufacturers, and [sub-section (d)] commissioners of charity organisation or similar and recognised schemes.)

Answer.

Witnesses.

II.—Are you beautiful?

(Beautiful must be taken to imply an object of positive beauty, the contemplation

of which is calculated to afford artistic pleasure to the beholder, and stir the artistic into production.)

Witnesses to this section must be professional artists, two at least in number, of the standing of A.R.A.)

Answer.

Witnesses.

III.—Are you morally better (though still, perhaps, bad) than you were a year ago?

(Honesty, temper, tact, good nature, patience, truthfulness, content, are all reckoned moral qualities.)

Witnesses (not less than three in number) must be (a) clergymen of the Church of England in priests' orders, or two bishops are considered the equivalent of three priests, (b) domestic servants.)

Answer.

Witnesses.

IV.—Are you contributing in other ways than by moral worth, personal beauty, etc., to the reasonable happiness of others? If so, how?

(The word "happiness" to be taken in its broadest sense.)

Witnesses to the answer should be not less than three in number, and consist of those who most habitually see the signatory—i.e., friends and domestic servants. The signatory is also recommended to note with the greatest possible accuracy (since this will be tested) the effect that the news that he has received the Superannuation form makes on such.)

Answer.

Witnesses.

V.—Are you likely to become an object of beauty?

(Enclose two photographs, if an affirmative answer is returned, (a) of this year, (b) of any previous year. These photographs will be returned by the Home Office in any event. No witnesses required.)

Answer.

VI.—Are you happy? If so, give a brief sketch of your average day, stating from

what your happiness is derived. No witnesses required.

Answer.

VII.—State broadly any additional reasons you may have for wishing to continue to live. No witnesses required.

Answer.

(This form must be folded and sent entire within seven days. No stamp need be affixed).



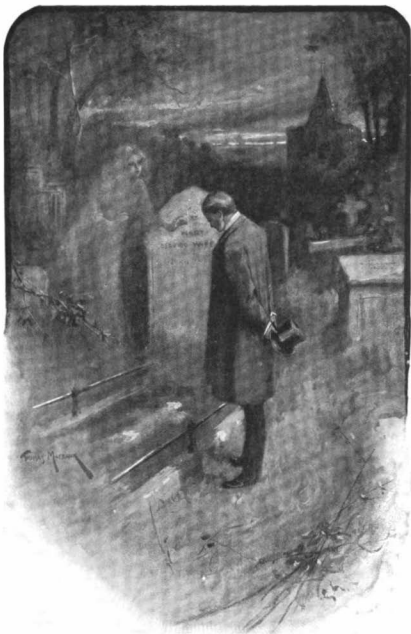
I could not say I was beautiful

It was as I read through this that, for the first time, any sense of nightmare or horror awoke in me, and as question after question conveyed itself to my mind, this horror gained on me. I could not say I was beautiful; at least, I could not get an A.R.A. (still less two) to agree with me, except at very grave risk of their incurring the penalty of perjury. Or what three clergymen would say I was better than I was last year? But on purely personal grounds I wanted to live. No doubt that was unworthy; my room, no doubt, was more useful to the nation than my company.

But I still wanted to live, and as I came—so I suppose—nearer to waking, I more and more wanted to live. Whatever the past had been, whatever was the present which was constructed on that, I wanted the future and its opportunities. My own live self, in fact, as my sleep became less deep, began to grow more dominant, while the aged “me” of the dream began to fade, till, with a strangled cry, protesting against the wild injustice of being put out of the world, I awoke, with flying heart and perspiring head, to find my room bright with the newly risen dawn and all the promise of another day.

Now, never in all the archives of this leather box have I had a dream so distinct with the sense of sober reality as this; and as the days passed on, that reality grew no less, till now, when a dozen days have passed, I can recall, as vividly as I can recall anything that ever happened to me in waking hours, the sense of being old, the sense, too—which is utterly alien to me—of looking backwards instead of forwards. For up to a certain time of life one is like a traveller who is seated facing the engine, and ever looks just ahead of what is immediately opposite him. But that time past, for fear of draughts or what not, we gather up a railway rug, seat ourselves with our backs to the direction of progress, and see only that which has passed us.

Again, though the perturbation of waking woke a sense of rebellion in the dreamer's mind as to the justice and expediency of the Superannuation scheme, my belief in it now is fast and firmly rooted. For—such is the wisdom of the questions—no one, except the most useless drone, stands within the danger of the State-inflicted death. Usefulness, beauty, cause of happiness in others, improvement in oneself, even mere personal happiness, are all taken to be signs—or so I read the paper—that the signatory of the form is still paying his way, so to speak, in the world; that his presence there, being a source of encouragement and pleasure to others, is still desirable; that he is still in some sense a growing being, not a mere blind block on the highway of life over which others may trip and hurt themselves, and which is far better removed. In every line of this dream-document there is statecraft, and in none more



† "He will not be sorry to go."

clearly than in the clause that distinguishes between mere employment of labour, mere charitable munificence, and real usefulness. For such employment of labour and such munificence is but a mechanical function, and could be as well, and probably better, done by others than by one who in no other way contributes to the national welfare. That clause, in fact, seems to me really Japanese in point of insight.

Further, how wise is the question: "Are you happy? If so, why?" For here the State recognises that innocent and instinctive happiness is in itself a gain, a dividend-earning proposition. For happiness is as infectious as misery (which is saving a great deal), and a happy man cannot help contributing to the welfare of the world. It is a fact not yet properly recognised, and I rejoice to know that in 1945 it will be.

Again, in those Utopian days, it will be recognised that beauty is a contributor to the welfare of nations. It must be allowed that now, while London is London and, more especially, New York is New York, a great gulf is fixed between now and then, as regards our Western civilisation, where county councils and other bodies of high intelligence are steadily employed in substituting the ugly for the beautiful, wherever such substitution can be made without undue expense or sacrifice of efficiency. But in 1945, so I have reason now to hope, even though beauty be of so senile a quality as may be exhibited in gentlemen of sixty-five and over, it will be recognised as an asset in a nation's solvency and a reason why the possessor of it should be permitted to live. And from where but from the East may this dawn be expected to enlighten the skies? Here, again, Japan springs to the fore—Japan, who in the midst of the most sanguinary and expensive war that the world has ever seen, celebrates with her accustomed courtesy and merriment the festivals of Chrysanthemum and the Flowering of the Cherry.

Again, how wise and "insighted" to make mere domestics competent witnesses as to a man's habit of diffusing happiness, a thing so vastly important; while for the mere support of his claim to beauty, A.R.A.'s are required to give their signature! For this seems to be at last a practical recognition of the truism that charity begins at home. Deeds of trivial domestic kindness, and the habit of them, are recognised at their real value in this dream-document. Mark, too, the severity of the punishment for perjury.

On first consideration the penalty for delay

in sending in returns seemed to me disproportionate to the offence, but on subsequent reflection I think it is right. For any man who dallies with death for the mere sake of living another day is no longer fit to live, being an essential coward. And if we want to get rid of the superfluous population, let us by all means begin by segregating and putting in confinement all essential cowards. For really there is no use for them. Cowardice stains the whole character: it eats like corrosive acid into whatever apology for other virtues there may happen to be, and renders them futile.

Finally, how sound a principle underlies the whole scheme! Such a paper might indeed be set with advantage, not merely to poor old folk of over sixty-five, but to all adults, since its challenge is "Justify your existence." If any man cannot justify his own existence, it is almost certain that nobody else can do it for him. He came into the world through no volition of his own: surely he may be enabled to leave it in the same manner, if his presence there is unjustified on so broad a field of inquiry as is covered by this Superannuation form. Above all, if he is not happy, he will not be sorry to go, while if he is, any reasonable grounds will be accepted by the Board—or so I read it—as a sufficient reason for his being allowed to live. But—this, too, is wise—the grounds of his happiness must be reasonable. I cannot imagine the Board accepting a burglar because he took pleasure in stealing.

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So there in the leather box this dream reposes. It would give me great pleasure—if it were in my power to do so—to dream on the same subject again, in order to clear up, for my own satisfaction, several points which are still vague to me. I want to know, for instance, whether one affirmative answer, if completely satisfactory, entitles the signatory to a fresh lease of life.

Ah, yes, it must be so. However hopeless in other respects, a man of over sixty-five who can thrill with joy (and satisfy the Board on the point) when, on an early day of spring, he sees the pale crocuses peer above the grass, and feels the spring in his bones, is surely worthy to live, on the mere consciousness of his own happiness, whether he be twenty years old, or seventy, or ninety—in fact, the older he is, the less he can be permitted to die, if he can possibly be kept alive. For on such a day, though it is easy for the blackbirds to have their will, it takes a poet to have his.