

Mr. Jones's Dream.

BY EDWARD ROBINS.



EVEN o'clock, and first call to breakfast," cried the lazy colored porter of the Overland Express, which was speeding, with occasional jerks and thumps, on its way to San Francisco, twenty-four hours out from Chicago. Mr. Felarty Jones, aroused from a deep but apparently unrefreshing slumber, stretched his thin limbs on the hard mattress of his upper Pullman berth and started in for the serious affairs of the day. He was a gentle-looking little man, with a face that a novelist would have described as mobile. There were deep wrinkles about his mouth (although he could not have been a day over forty) and a preoccupied, puzzling air about him which might have stamped him as anything seriously inclined, from a country postmaster to a horse jockey. Having slept in half his clothing, his toilet did not consume much time. He pulled on a faded pepper-and-salt suit, relieved by a blue waistcoat variegated with yellow polka dots, and attached to his rumpled white shirt a collar that bore the dust and cinders of a previous day's journey. Then he donned a soft greenish cravat and a battered felt hat, and descending from his berth with the agility and grace of a cat, made his way to the end of the car set apart, according to the euphemistic proclamation of the Pullman Palace Car Company, for the ablutions of "gentlemen." Mr. Jones had dressed with the quickness of a soldier, but he was by no means the first to seek the comfort vouchsafed by the cheap soap, muddy water, and suspicious towels of this resort. There were three travelers in the place when he entered. One was a fat, luxuriously appointed fellow, with a Jewish cast of countenance, whose appearance suggested diamonds and a well-filled pocketbook; the second was a clergyman, to judge from external signs, while the third bore all the marks of an ultra-Bostonian

out for an intellectual holiday. All three had spent part of the previous afternoon with the mild-mannered Jones in the smoking car, and so, when the latter appeared on the scene, unkempt and haggard, there was a general inquiry as to how he had passed the night.

"Poorly, very poorly," he sighed, with a woe-begone expression. "I had a wretched dream that woke me up with a start about three o'clock, and after that the horror of the thing kept me from sleeping for several hours."

"A bad dream! Dear me! dear me!" softly murmured the clergyman, as he vainly tried to brush his thin golden hair, while the train went around a curve at the rate of sixty miles an hour. "I can imagine nothing worse. I dreamed the other night that my choir turned Anarchists and refused to sing unless my salary was reduced one half — with the result that I woke up in a frightful perspiration."

"What is it Shakespeare says about dreams?" asked the young Bostonian, who was eking out the somewhat inadequate poetry of his honeymoon by copious drafts upon the accumulated stock of literature — "the children of an idle brain, begot — begot —"

"Dey aind't no need of schvearing aboutt it," interrupted the Israelite, misapprehending the participle and rushing into the breach in the speaker's memory with anxious solicitude for the feelings of the clergyman. "Vot vas your dream, Mr. Chones? Vot vas it aboutt?" he gently inquired, as he took off his diamond ring preparatory to washing his dimpled hands.

Thus questioned, Mr. Jones gave a shudder; the pupils of his faded yellow eyes dilated, and there came into his face a look of terrible resolve, as though he were about to discharge a frightful but none the less imperative duty. "Gentlemen," he exclaimed excitedly, "you probably have no faith in dreams! No more have I. Yet when you or I, or any of us, have a vision of evil — a premonition of the future — what do we do? Do we sit down and forget it? Do we find comfort in some dinkey quotation?" Here he glowered triumphantly at his Shakespearean critic. "No, sir! We feel upon our souls the dark shadow of an impending misfortune."

The favored recipient of divine warning emitted a blood-curdling groan at this point, glanced nervously around him, and continued:—

“Has not our great Longfellow spoken of ‘Death and his brother, Sleep’?” (He meant Shelley, but in his zeal to demonstrate his intellectual parity with the Bostonian he made this pardonable miscue.) “Well, gentlemen, my sleep last night had to do with death. I dreamed that we were approaching the high trestle-work at El Paso Del Forte—we are due there this evening at eight o’clock, I think—when suddenly a grinning skeleton blocked the passage of the engine, and with specter-like arms beckoned the engineer to stop. Thrice did he wave us back, and thrice did he swing a ghastly red light across the track; but no one seemed to see him but myself. I, for some reason, was the only one conscious of the awful warning. The engineer slept at his post; the fireman looked into the pitch darkness ahead of him and saw nothing. I tried to cry out,—in my dream I thought I had a place in the locomotive cab,—but my parched throat refused me utterance, and with a feeling of horror which I cannot describe, I felt the train touch the fatal trestle. There was a crash, a sound of breaking timbers, piercing shrieks from a hundred voices, and then—I awoke. This, sirs, is all I have to tell, yet until we have passed over that wretched trestle to-night I shall not feel comfortable.”

Mr. Jones’s narrative had by no means an enlivening effect on his three listeners, yet when he finished a general desire to make light of it was noticeable. Mr. Oberstein, he of the diamonds and dimpled paws, remarked, with a grunt of displeasure: “For goodness’ sake! Vot did you eat for tinner last evening, aind’t it?” The Rev. Mr. Alban agreed that such a dream was merely a result of indigestion—something that might easily be forgotten by any one having faith in Providence; and Mr. Worcester Beebe, the Boston Benedict, observed contemptuously that these childish superstitions were melancholy survivals from the dark ages of the human mind.

“Of course, gentlemen, of course,” replied Mr. Jones, with the air of a martyr going to the stake; “it’s very foolish to grow anxious over the thing, but then, nature’s nature.” With which

parting bit of philosophy he completed his unambitious toilet, glided softly from the place, and spent the remainder of the day, barring intervals for refreshments, in the Bohemian precincts of the smoking car, wrapped in a cloud of Napoleonic gloom and tobacco smoke.

When the Rev. Mr. Alban and his delicate-looking little wife sat down to breakfast they found themselves opposite Mr. and Mrs. Worcester Beebee. Now Mrs. Beebee, albeit a blushing bride of twenty-five, was a lady of decided views, with a present ascendancy over her husband which promised his entire subjugation before the passing of many moons of wedded bliss. "I always want to know what Worcester has been about when he's not near me," she had said to one of her fellow-passengers, and in pursuance of this vigilant policy she had easily wormed from him all that Mr. Jones had revealed. Thus, when Mrs. Alban, tired and hungry, came to table, and the two husbands had introduced their respective wives, Mrs. Beebee at once burst out with, "I hope you're not a nervous woman, Mrs. Alban, for if you are, that dream of Mr. Somebody or Other Jones is enough to take away your appetite for the day."

The clergyman, who had purposely kept the story from his spouse, instantly frowned violently at Beebee, hoping that the latter would head off the loquacious bride. Alas! it was to no purpose. Mr. Beebee was already too well trained to stop his better half in the midst of a piece of gossip, and so the unfortunate Mrs. Alban was treated to the full horrors of Mr. Jones's dream, embellished with a few highly colored additions, the whole ending with a dramatic reminder that "dreams often come true."

Mrs. Alban had ordered a good breakfast, but this recital was too much for her. After toying with a piece of cantaloupe, gulping down some coffee, and trying to assure her new-found friends that she wasn't at all nervous, she left the dining car with a fast-developing case of hysterical sick headache. Mr. Alban, with an injured glare at the Beebees, ran after her, and was soon busily engaged in an adjoining sleeper, hunting through a shabby cabas for smelling-salts, ammonia, and a tiny vial of whiskey labeled "For use only in great emergencies." Kind-hearted Mrs. Oberstein, whose five children stood placidly watching Mrs. Alban's progress

toward hysterics, now came to the rescue in motherly fashion, and putting one plump arm around the slim waist of the minister's wife, said tenderly, "Cheer up, mine tear, cheer up, und tell me vot is your trouble all about it." Then she trumpeted a sort of elephantine snort in the direction of the distracted Alban, as much as to say, "It's all your fault, you brute, I know it is." But the patient soon absolved him from any guilt in the matter for, bursting into tears, she sank her head on the expansive but plebeian shoulder of Mrs. Oberstein, and, with occasional intervals of weeping, recounted how that horrid Mr. Jones had dreamed a still more horrid dream.

As this recital proceeded, a vast fear slowly filled the capacious bosom of Mrs. Oberstein, and at its conclusion, catching sight of her lord and master as he returned from breakfast with the air of a conqueror, she promptly abandoned Mrs. Alban and threw herself into his arms.

"Oscar, Oscar," she screamed, "take us off de train; some't'ing fearful is going to habben, und ve shall all be killed."

This was enough for the little Obersteins, three of whom, with wailings of deep despair, immediately clung to the sturdy legs of their male parent, while the two youngest threw themselves on the floor and bellowed like young bulls. As may be imagined, this scene was watched with painful attention by the several other occupants of the sleeper, who soon knew the whole story.

Matters became more and more interesting. A clean-shaven and highly dignified gentleman from Philadelphia reminded Mr. Alban that it happened to be the thirteenth of the month, and that in his own family the thirteenth had always been a most unlucky day. "Only last month," he added solemnly, "my wife's mother and my cook both died on the thirteenth, and the month before that, on the same day, my most expensive horse ran away through Rittenhouse Square and broke his neck."

A Mr. Van Snorter, of New York, recalled that several years ago he was traveling with a conductor who had a strange pre-sentiment that something was about to happen, and something did happen, sure enough. The train struck a cow, the engine was derailed, and the fireman was killed outright. Mrs. Van Snorter suggested, at this point, that trestles were usually made of wood,

and had an uncomfortable way of getting on fire. Ergo, the El Paso del Forte trestle might now be in ashes.

Altogether, it promised to be an unenviable day for the unfortunate people on the Overland Express. The story of the dream gradually spread throughout the length of the train, so that even the colored porters began to take on an ashen-gray hue. When the innocent cause of all the commotion, the limp and modest Jones, ventured to return to his compartment for a moment, he was greeted by such a terrible array of angry glances (as though the poor man could control his dreams) that he slunk back into the seclusion of the smoker. But he had a conscience and a heart, and as soon as the conductor passed his way he pleaded with him earnestly to have the train stopped half a mile from the trestle. "Not that I myself have the least fear," he hastened to explain, "but merely as an act of mercy to the ladies. They have heard of my dream, and are so wrought up about it that something should be done to allay their alarm. Now if the engine is stopped this side of the El Paso del Forte Chasm, and a brakeman is sent on to examine the trestle, sees that it is still standing, and comes back at once to report the good news, then we can all continue the journey with hearts light as larks."

Evidently the conductor had no sympathy for hearts light as larks, for he sternly refused to do anything of the kind. Not only was the suggestion absurd, but there was, furthermore, the certainty that he would "lose his job" if he allowed "such a piece of nonsense." Mr. Jones sighed at this ultimatum. He had done his duty, and more than that he could not accomplish. So he lighted another bad cigar, and relapsed into a melancholy revery.

Lunch that day suggested a discussion of funeral baked meats. Mrs. Worcester Beebee had a wan, strained look on her usually strong-minded face; Mrs. Alban, with red eyelids and a powerful smell of salts and ammonia, refused everything brought to her by the waiter; while the expansive Mrs. Oberstein conversed in excited tones about the cowardice of men who wouldn't take it upon themselves to stop a train, and save the lives of innocent women and children. The aforesaid men had a sheepish air about them, but few dared to venture any opinions. To be sure, an unman-

nerly Westerner was heard to say something like "Rot," but an Amazonian glance of frozen displeasure from a lady from Baltimore put a stop to further remarks from so boorish a quarter.

The gentlemen stole off one by one to the smoking car, where they discovered the subdued Jones eating an orange given him by the tender-hearted barber. "Friends," said Mr. Jones, as he rose slowly from the sofa as the last man entered, "I have been, through no intention of my own, the cause of much suffering. Let me do all I can to atone. The conductor refuses my request to stop the train a short distance from El Paso del Forte, on the ground that he would be discharged for so doing. To quiet his fears let us make up a purse large enough to protect him from any such contingency. I shall head the list myself, gentlemen, with a hundred dollars."

From that moment Mr. Jones became the most popular passenger on board the train. Seven hundred dollars was quickly subscribed, the refractory conductor was as quickly brought to the proper frame of mind, and a mighty load was lifted from every one's mind. The time passed rapidly, six o'clock dinner was consumed with zest and rapidity, and by half past seven, when the lamps were all lighted, every one was on the alert.

About five minutes of eight, when within half a mile of the dreaded trestle-work, the engineer was signaled, and the cars were brought to a standstill. At the same moment armed, masked men appeared, one at every door on the train; the engineer found himself gagged almost as soon as he got down from the locomotive, the fireman shared the same fate, and the conductor and brakeman were promptly covered by pistols as they reached the ground. The front door of the first sleeper was heard to open, there was a deprecating little cough by way of introduction, and Mr. Jones, the modest and mystical Jones, was revealed to the astounded travelers. He had a "bulldog" revolver in one hand, a large carpet-bag was grasped by the other.

"Gentlemen," he said politely but firmly, "you must pardon this unlooked-for *dénouement*" (he pronounced it deenoomong), "but the fact is that I am a trifle short of funds, and so must adopt this way of turning an honest penny. You need only keep perfectly still, and no harm will happen to you. Otherwise my

friends at the door will be reluctantly obliged to make things lively."

And with this elegant preliminary, Mr. Jones walked mournfully through the whole train, relieving stupefied men and half-fainting women of money, jewelry, and a variety of valuable articles. As he searched the last passenger in the end car he cried out cheerfully: "Don't fear the trestle; I can assure you that, despite my dream, it is perfectly safe. Only in future remember"—and here his eyes rested humorously upon the haggard countenance of Mr. Worcester Beebe, which glared at him from between the curtains of his berth — "that in this age of reason it never pays to be superstitious."

With this he vanished; there was a shrill whistle, and the masked watchers in the several cars ran to the platforms and disappeared in the darkness.

"At least," chirped the Rev. Mr. Alban with Christian cheerfulness, as the paralyzed victims began to recover speech, "the conductor can give us back that seven hundred dollars."

"I wish to heaven I could," ruefully replied the latter, "but your friend, Mr. Jones, never turned it over to me."

