

## **AN EVIDENTIAL DREAM - (1913)**

A lady suffering from doubting mania and obsessive ceremonials insisted that her nurses should never let her out of their sight for a single moment: otherwise she would begin to brood about forbidden actions that she might have committed while she was not being watched. One evening, while she was resting on the sofa, she thought she saw that the nurse on duty had fallen asleep. She called out: 'Did you see me?' The nurse started up and replied: 'Of course I did.' This gave the patient grounds for a fresh doubt, and after a time she repeated her question, which the nurse met with renewed protestations; just at that moment another attendant came in bringing the patient's supper.

This incident occurred one Friday evening. Next morning the nurse recounted a dream which had the effect of dispelling the patient's doubts.

DREAM. - Someone had entrusted a child to her. Its mother had left home, and she had lost it. As she went along, she enquired from the people in the street whether they had seen the child. Then she came to a large expanse of water and crossed a narrow footbridge. (There was an addendum: Suddenly there appeared before her on the footbridge, like a 'fata Morgana', the figure of another nurse.) Then she found herself in a familiar place, where she met a woman whom she had known as a girl and who had in those days been a saleswoman in a provision shop and later had got married. She asked the woman, who was standing in front of her door: 'Did you see the child?' The woman paid no attention to the question but informed her that she was now divorced from her husband, adding that marriage is not always happy either. She woke up feeling reassured and thought that the child would turn up all right in a neighbour's house.

ANALYSIS. - The patient assumed that this dream referred to the falling asleep which the nurse had denied. From additional information volunteered by the latter, she was able to interpret the dream in a fashion which, although incomplete in some respects, was sufficient for all practical purposes. I myself heard only the lady's report and did not interview the nurse. I shall first quote the patient's interpretation, and then supplement it with whatever our general understanding of the laws governing dream-formation allows us to add.

'The nurse told me that the child in the dream reminded her of a case the nursing of which had given her the most lively satisfaction. It was that of a child who was unable to see on account of inflammation of the eyes (blennorrhoea). The mother, however, did not leave home: she helped to nurse the child. On the other hand I remember too that when my husband, who thinks highly of this nurse, went away, he left me in her care and she promised to look after me as she would after a child.'

Furthermore, we know from the patient's analysis that by insisting on never being let out of sight she had put herself back in the position of being a child once more.

'Her having lost the child', continued the patient, 'signified that she had not seen me; she had lost sight of me. This was her admission that she had actually gone to sleep for a time and had not told me the truth afterwards.'

She was in the dark about the meaning of the small piece of the dream in which the nurse enquired from the people in the street whether they had seen the child; on the other hand, she was able to elucidate the later details of the manifest dream.

'The large expanse of water made the nurse think of the Rhine; she added, however, that it was much larger than the Rhine. Then she remembered that on the previous evening I had read her the story of Jonah and the whale, and had told her that I myself once saw a whale in the English Channel. I fancy that the large expanse of water was the sea and was an allusion to the story of Jonah.

'I think, too, the narrow footbridge came from the same story, which was amusingly written in dialect. The anecdote related how a religious instructor described to his pupils the wonderful adventures of Jonah; whereupon a boy objected that it could not be true, since the teacher himself had told them before that whales could swallow only the smallest creatures owing to the narrowness of their gullets. The teacher got out of the difficulty by saying that Jonah was a Jew, and that Jews would squeeze in anywhere. My nurse is very pious but inclined to religious doubts, and I reproached myself in case what I had read to her might have stirred them up.

'On this narrow footbridge she now saw the apparition of another nurse, whom she knew. She told me the story of this nurse: she had drowned herself in the Rhine because she had been discharged from a case owing to something she had been guilty of.<sup>1</sup> She herself had feared, therefore, that she would be discharged for having fallen asleep. Moreover, on the day following the incident and after relating the dream, the nurse cried bitterly, and when I asked her why, replied quite rudely: "You know why as well as I do; and now you won't trust me any more!"'

Since the apparition of the drowned nurse was an addendum and an especially distinct one, we would have advised the lady to begin her dream-interpretation at that point. According to the dreamer's report, too, this first half of her dream was accompanied by acute anxiety; the second part paved the way for the feeling of reassurance with which she awoke.

'I regard the next part of the dream', said the lady, continuing her analysis, 'as certain corroboration of my view that the dream had to do with what happened on Friday evening, for the person who had formerly been a saleswoman in a provision shop can only have referred to the attendant who brought in the supper on that occasion. I noticed, too, that the nurse had complained of nausea all day long. The question she put to this woman: "Did you see the child?" is obviously traceable to my question: "Did you see me!" which I had put to her for the second time just as the attendant came in with the dishes.'

<sup>1</sup> At this point I have been guilty of making a condensation of the material, which I have been able to put right after going through my draft with the lady who told me the story. The nurse who met the dreamer as an apparition on the footbridge had not been guilty of anything in her nursing. She was discharged because the child's mother, who had to leave home at the time, wanted to leave her child in charge of an older attendant - thus in point of fact a more trustworthy one. This was followed by a second story about another nurse who had actually been discharged on account of neglect, but who did not on that account drown herself. The material necessary for the interpretation of the dream-element came, as is so often the way, from two sources. My memory carried out the synthesis that led to the interpretation. For the rest, this story of the drowned nurse contains the factor of the mother leaving home, which the lady connected with the departure of her husband. We thus have here an overdetermination which detracts somewhat from the elegance of the interpretation.

In the dream, too, enquiry after the child was made on two occasions. The fact that the woman did not reply - paid no attention - we may regard as a depreciation of this other attendant made in the dreamer's favour: she represented herself in the dream as being superior to the other woman, precisely because she herself had to face reproaches on account of her own lack of attention.

'The woman who appeared in the dream was not in actual fact divorced from her husband. The situation was taken from an incident in the life of the other attendant, who had been separated - "divorced" - from a man by her parents' command. The remark that "marriage does not always run smoothly either" was probably a consolation used in the course of conversation between the two women. This consolation prefigured another, with which the dream ended: "The child will turn up all right."

'I concluded from this dream that on the evening in question the nurse really did fall asleep and that she was afraid of being dismissed on that account. Because of this I no longer felt any doubt about the correctness of my observation. Incidentally, after relating the dream, she added that she was very sorry she had not got a dream-book with her. To my comment that such books were full of the most ignorant superstitions, she replied that, although she was not at all superstitious, still all the unpleasant happenings of her life had taken place on a Friday. I must add that at the present time her treatment of me is not at all satisfactory, and she is touchy and irritable and makes scenes about nothing.'

I think we must credit the lady with having correctly interpreted and evaluated her nurse's dream. As so often happens with dream-interpretation during analysis, the translation of the dream does not depend solely on the products of association, but we have also to take into account the circumstances of its narration, the behaviour of the dreamer before and after the analysis of the dream, as well as every remark or disclosure made by the dreamer at about the same time - during the same analytic session. If we take into consideration the nurse's touchiness, her attitude to unlucky Fridays, etc., we shall confirm the conclusion that the dream contained

an admission that, in spite of her denial, she had actually dozed off, and was afraid she would be sent away from the 'child' in her care.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A few days later, indeed, the nurse confessed to a third person that she had fallen asleep that evening, and thus confirmed the lady's interpretation. While, however, for the lady who reported it to me this dream had practical significance, for us it stimulates theoretical interest in two directions. It is true that it ended in a consolation, but in the main it represented an important admission in regard to the nurse's relation to her patient. How does it come about that a dream, which is supposed, after all, to serve as the fulfilment of a wish, could take the place of an admission which was not even of any advantage to the dreamer? Must we really concede that in addition to wishful (and anxiety) dreams, there are also dreams of admission, as well as of warning, reflection, adaptation, and so on?

I must confess that I still do not quite understand why the stand I took against any such temptation in my Interpretation of Dreams has given rise to misgivings in the minds of so many psycho-analysts, among them some well-known ones. It seems to me that the differentiation between dreams of wishing, admission, warning, adaptation, and so on, has not much more sense than the differentiation, which is accepted perforce, of medical specialists into gynaecologists, paediatricians, and dentists. Let me recapitulate here as briefly as possible what I have said on this question in my Interpretation of Dreams.<sup>1</sup>

The so-called 'day's residues' can act as disturbers of sleep and constructors of dreams; they are affectively cathected thought-processes from the dream-day, which have resisted the general lowering through sleep. These day's residues are uncovered by tracing back the manifest dream to the latent dream-thoughts; they constitute portions of the latter and are thus among the activities of waking life - whether conscious or unconscious - which have been able to persist into the period of sleep. In accordance with the multiplicity of thought-processes in the conscious and preconscious, these day's residues have the most numerous and varied meanings: they may be wishes or fears that have not been disposed of, or intentions, reflections, warnings, attempts at adaptation to current tasks, and so on. To this extent the classification of dreams that is under consideration seems to be justified by the content which is uncovered by interpretation. These day's residues, however, are not the dream itself: they lack the main essential of a dream. Of themselves they are not able to construct a dream. They are, strictly speaking, only the psychical material for the dream-work, just as sensory and somatic stimuli, whether accidental or produced under experimental conditions, constitute the somatic material for the dream-work. To attribute to them the main part in the construction of dreams is simply to repeat at a new point the pre-analytic error which explained dreams by referring them to bad digestion or to pressure on the skin. Scientific errors, indeed, are tenacious of life, and even when they have been refuted are ready to creep in again under new disguises.

<sup>1</sup> p. 992 ff..1

The present state of our knowledge leads us to conclude that the essential factor in the construction of dreams is an unconscious wish - as a rule an infantile wish, now repressed - which can come to expression in this somatic or psychical material (in the day's residues too, therefore) and can thus supply these with a force which enables them to press their way through to consciousness even during the suspension of thought at night. The dream is in every case a fulfilment of this unconscious wish, whatever else it may contain - warning, reflection, admission, or any other part of the rich content of preconscious waking life that has persisted undealt-with into the night. It is this unconscious wish that gives the dream-work its peculiar character as an unconscious revision of preconscious material. A psychoanalyst can characterize as dreams only the products of the dream-work: in spite of the fact that the latent dream-thoughts are only arrived at from the interpretation of the dream, he cannot reckon them as part of the dream, but only as part of preconscious reflection. (Secondary revision by the conscious agency is here reckoned as part of the dream-work. Even if one were to separate it, this would not involve any alteration in our conception. We should then have to say: dreams in the analytic sense comprise the dream-work proper together with the secondary revision of its products.) The conclusion to be drawn from these considerations is that one cannot put the wish-fulfilling character of dreams on a par with their character as warnings, admissions, attempts at solution, etc., without denying the concept of a psychical dimension of depth - that is to say, without denying the standpoint of psycho-analysis.

Let us now go back to the nurse's dream, in order to demonstrate the quality of depth in the wish-fulfilment contained in it. We already know that the lady's interpretation of the dream was by no means complete; there were portions of it to which she was unable to do justice. Moreover she suffered from an obsessional neurosis, a condition which, from what I have observed, makes it considerably harder to understand dream-symbols, just as dementia praecox makes it easier.

Nevertheless, our knowledge of dream-symbolism enables us to understand uninterpreted portions of this dream and to discover a deeper significance behind the interpretations already given. We cannot but notice that some of the material employed by the nurse came from the complex of giving birth, of having children. The expanse of water (the Rhine, the Channel where the whale was seen) was certainly the water out of which children come. And then, too, she came to the water in search of a child. The Jonah legend, which was a factor lying behind the determination of this water, the question how Jonah (the child) could get through such a narrow passage, belongs to the same complex. And the nurse who threw herself into the Rhine out of mortification found a sexual-symbolic consolation for her despair of life in the mode of her death - by going into water. The narrow footbridge on which the apparition met her was in all probability also a genital symbol, although I must admit that here we lack as yet more precise knowledge.

The wish 'I want to have a child' seems therefore to have been the dream-creator from the unconscious; no other would have been better calculated to console the nurse for the distressing state of affairs in real life. 'I shall be discharged: I shall lose the child in my care. What does it matter? I shall get a real

child of my own instead.' The uninterpreted portion of the dream in which she questioned everyone in the street about the child may perhaps belong here; the interpretation would then run: 'And even if I have to offer myself on the streets I know how to get a child for myself.' A strain of defiance in the dreamer, hitherto disguised, suddenly declares itself at this point. Her admission fits in here for the first time: 'I have shut my eyes and compromised my professional reputation for conscientiousness; now I shall lose my place. Shall I be such a fool as to drown myself like Nurse X? Not I: I'll give up nursing altogether and get married; I'll be a woman and have a real child; nothing shall prevent me.' This interpretation is justified by the consideration that 'having children' is really the infantile expression of a wish for sexual intercourse: indeed it can be chosen in consciousness as a euphemistic expression of this objectionable wish.

Thus the dreamer's disadvantageous admission, to which she showed some inclination even in waking life, was made possible in the dream by being employed by a latent character-trait of hers for the purpose of bringing about the fulfilment of an infantile wish. We may surmise that this trait had a close connection - in regard both to time and to content - with the wish for a child and for sexual enjoyment.

Subsequent enquiry from the lady to whom I owe the first part of this interpretation afforded some unexpected information about the nurse's previous life. Before she took up nursing she had wanted to marry a man who had been keenly interested in her; but she had abandoned the projected marriage on account of the opposition of an aunt, towards whom her relations were a curious mixture of dependence and defiance. This aunt who prevented the marriage was the Superior of a nursing Order. The dreamer always regarded her as her pattern. She had expectations of an inheritance from her and was tied to her for that reason. Nevertheless, she opposed her aunt by not entering the Order as that lady had planned. The defiance shown in the dream was therefore directed against the aunt. We have ascribed an anal-erotic origin to this character-trait, and may take into consideration that the interests which made her dependent on her aunt were of a financial nature; we are also reminded that children favour the anal theory of birth.

This factor of infantile defiance may perhaps allow us to assume a closer relation between the first and last scenes in the dream. The former saleswoman in a provision shop represents in the dream the attendant who brought the lady's supper into the room just when she was asking the question 'Did you see me?' It appears, however, that she was cast for the role of hostile rival in general. The dreamer disparaged her capacities as a nurse by making her take not the slightest interest in the lost child, but deal only with her own private affairs in her answer. She had thus displaced on to this figure the indifference about the child in her care which she was beginning to feel. The unhappy marriage and divorce which she herself must have dreaded in her most secret wishes were attributed to the other woman. We know, however, that it was the aunt who had separated the dreamer from her fiancé. Hence the 'provision saleswoman' (a figure not necessarily without an infantile symbolic significance) may represent the aunt-Superior, who was in fact not much older than the dreamer and who had played the traditional part of mother-rival in her life. A satisfactory confirmation of this interpretation is to be

found in the fact that the 'familiar' place where she came upon this person standing in front of her door was precisely the place where her aunt resided as a Superior.

Owing to the lack of contact between the analyst and the person under analysis, it is scarcely advisable to penetrate deeper into the structure of the dream. But we may perhaps say that so far as it was accessible to interpretation it has provided us with plenty of confirmations as well as with plenty of new problems.<sup>4</sup>