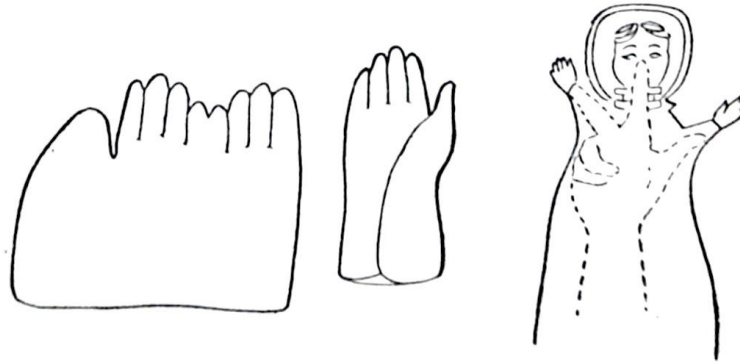


Bessie A. Ficklen – Dream Poetry (1891)

Brief introduction to an oneiricist aunty

by Jason Abdelhadi



Every once in a while another hidden ancestor will pop up in the most unlikely of spots. We think it's important to bring these missing links, to light wherever possible, and to celebrate the often hidden efforts of dreamworld explorers of all times and eras... Oh there you are, great-great-aunty B, floating in the old dream-mirror ...

Bessie Alexander Ficklen (1861-1945) was an American and a southerner who lived in Georgia. She seems to have published only sparingly. Apart from this essay she appears to be most often cited for her *Handbook of Fist Puppets*, contributing significantly to the popularization of that particular art, and even participating in what must be one of the earliest films on the subject. She illustrated a book of nonsense poetry, and was part of at least one art exhibition in Texas. She also published privately circulated books of poetry and illustrations, which we have unfortunately not yet been able to track down.

So as far as dreams go, the 1891 essay "Dream-Poetry" is really all we have to go on for now. We can see that it is tremendously insightful with regards to the early analysis, composition, and appreciation of oneiric poetry in the period immediately preceding the discovery of psychoanalysis. It is Ficklen's willingness to appreciate the gifts of her "Underselves" or "little people"* as serious offerings—and perhaps more importantly, her willingness to accept them as from someone, or something *extraneous to herself*—that puts this work squarely within that realm of open rationalism that surrealism has always found so fruitful. Her humor, courage, and dry objectivity in presenting materials which are so far from the ordinary deserves commendation. While some of the more polished examples fall a bit flat, many compare favourably even with classic 20th century surrealist dream images. Her accompanying analysis prefigures the unapologetic surrealist love for dream imagery; side-stepping any unnecessary baggage from the therapeutic, sociological and marketable aspects for a poetic deployment of surface imagery.

In this she has my sincere admiration. For her, dream exploration has become a duty valuable in itself. I have nothing more to add to her moral exhortation rise and capture all dream images, "no matter how cold the night", as, she says—a point of honour!

Practically speaking her advice and guidance on capturing dream fragments are likely to help those actually looking to *use* dream imagery for surrealist purposes. Not really encumbered by any frameworks (except perhaps the concept of unconscious cerebration, developed by her feminist contemporary Frances Power Cobbe), her account is refreshingly empirical. It recalls the dry observational recordings of Percy Goldthwait Stiles so admired by surrealists. This opens naturally into a kind of practical humour as she goes through the “steps”. She lays out the gradual process of how her circle came to capture dream poems. She gives useful details like time of day and their appearance during “second sleeps” (retroactively confirming, incidentally, an insight from Dr. Josie Malinowski on the potency of late-morning dreams**). And much of the text highlights the sheer difficulty (what we might now call resistance?) of capturing dream-poetry.

She is quite literal in her approach. We are not yet at the point where we consider the dream-account to *be* a kind of poetry in itself; instead she waits for the appearance of something designated as poetry from within the dream-world. She is quite specifically focused on gathering up the “odds and ends of of dream-verse”. While this might sound like a question in a very particular surrealist inquiry (“do you ever write poems in your dreams?”), or assembled after years of research for a special edition of *Dreamdew*, she makes clear that it is not so unlikely for those who spent a lot of their waking lives writing, reading, discussing, and thinking about verse.

But this is also exciting for another disconnect: something which is received as poetry in the dream might not literally “appear” to be so when examined with the waking mind. The Underself-critic is not the waking academic. And this focus gives us a means to access what the dream itself has axiomatically declared to be poetry—perhaps presaging the insight of Luca and Trost in *The Dialectic of the Dialectic*—not all dream content is poetry or anti-oedipal in nature—but this insight here comes from the dream-critic itself. And these facts learned through experience give her the instinct—familiar to all oneiricists—of being able to judge the authenticity of real dream content from the “gentle mediocrity” and “correct tameness” of invented dream content, so often encountered then and now in mass entertainment.

Her insight into the aphasic character of such fragments is a particularly useful one. The enthusiasm often felt when “reading” a brilliant poem in a dream is often at odds with the actual words recalled after awakening, and oftentimes our interpretation within the dream does not mean the same things as the words themselves. She lays the choice before us—will you capture the “meaning” of the dream poem, or the literal words? Oftentimes, she rightly points out, the speed at which dream poems fade is terribly fast, and your choice is one or the other. This accounts also for the difference in flavour between a lot of the 19th century dream-poetry, which aims for recreating the dream’s “meaning” in a secondary elaboration of metrically accurate verse and rhyme, and that that recorded after the surrealist experience which is often very literalist in recording the exact words, hoping to derive poetic or prophetic insight from them.

And is it any wonder that the two other practitioners of “true dream poetry” mentioned in the text are women? These being the feminist Frances Power Cobbe and mystic poet Anna Bonus Kingsford. Of course it makes sense that they would take dreams more seriously, and make more time to seriously explore them, leaving the banal concerns of the phallogocentric literary establishment far behind them.

And what of her hint of that “we”, the “small circle” she mentions in the American south dedicated to the exploration of dream-poetry? Are we to understand that a secret collective of dream explorers existed even then, spanning the gap between between Lautréamont and the first surrealist group—and of all places, in the Reconstruction south? This group of explorers to whom “the Underself often sings” ... Are these the grandparents of Radelunas, Fresh Dirt, and the House of Mysticum?

...And what other secrets are hiding in the “Counter of Katadin”?

-Jason A

*And we can't help being excited that the terms “Underselves” and “Little People” correspond with the inquiries in Peculiar Mormyrid 8 and 7 respectively: dream-poets are both underground and miniature.

** Malinowski, J. E., & Horton, C. L. (2014). The effect of time of night on wake–dream continuity. *Dreaming*, 24(4), 253-269.

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Dream-Poetry

By Bessie A. Ficklen

From Scribner's Magazine, Volume IX, number 67, 1891. P. 636-643

Nowadays the world begins to concede that what I call *Myself*, and write down in the singular number, is not so simple a unit as we were wont to suppose. It is not only in insane, hysteric, or hypnotic patients that “Hidden Selves” are developed; every man in his normal state is known to consist of many beings. The *Myself* that answers to my name, looks after my affairs, and becoming weary in so doing, lies down at night, and is lost in sleep, is only one of the many activities that belong to my organization. The *Centralself* that my weariness puts to sleep, and that I consider my personality, owes a vast amount of his powers to certain *Underselves* who remain alive and active whether he sleeps or wakes, who know their business well, and go about it with a conscientious vigor that needs no supervision. Many of my most important physical and mental processes are carried on by them without a directing thought from the Centralself. In their charge are all my necessary vital functions, and all my accustomed actions. They keep my heart beating, they breathe for me, they generally eat and drink and walk for me; they avoid blows and go around obstacles or inequalities in my path, while my mind, my Centralself, is absorbed in some train of thought that has no connection with those processes. They also may be taught to knit, to perform difficult pieces on the piano, and even to read aloud, to write, to talk, or to add columns of figures in the

way that we call mechanical, and entirely without any help from the Centralself. And still the list of their accomplishments is not ended.

The *Underselves* are capable of higher and more intelligent work, which cannot call mechanical unless in broadest sense of the word. They store up many memories of which the Centralself has no knowledge, and sometimes show a greater ability for reasoning and planning than their self-conscious master. We have all tried in vain to recall some name, date, or fact, and finally given up in despair, and gone to other matters. Then suddenly, after our Centralself has apparently forgotten all about the inquiry, the sought has been quietly laid before consciousness, brought there by brain power that, like a keen hound, has kept straight along the scent, after his master had abandoned it as hopeless. Not only are memories brought to light, but the results of long trains of reasoning, the inferences which should have been drawn from arguments or facts, but which all effort had to reveal to our consciousness—nay important scientific discoveries, been given to us in the same mysterious way. In fact all the phenomena that are generally referred to *unconscious cerebration* we owe to the Underselves.

Now of all the ways in which the Underselves manifest their power, there is probably none more important or more interesting than dreaming. Here the Underselves are the “little people” who take charge of our dreams. It is thus that Robert Louis Stevenson calls them in his charming “Chapter on Dreams” and, he, being a wonderful dreamer, gives many examples of the activity and skill of his “little people”. These dream Underselves are quaint and sportive folk, and though they often act the beneficent fairy and enchant us with glimpses of more than mortal pleasure, they are given to many absurd pranks and cruel practical jokes. They are sometimes physically strong enough to lead the unconscious sleeper from his warm bed out into the cold and darkness of the night, where he may awake shivering to find himself crossing an unsafe bridge, or on the verge of some dizzy height. In this class of their performances, which men call somnambulism, the “little people” have been known to go even farther, leading the dreamer on to death, and thus becoming actual murderers or rather, suicides. Luckily it is rare that they have this physical power. A much happier way in which they manifest their strength is in mental feats. Here the “little people” have shown a rare ability, and here they deserve our greatest respect. There seem to be among these dream Underselves, literary and scientific geniuses; skilful mathematicians, philosophers, artists, musicians, and even poets

The dream-poet has too long been nameless and fameless and it is especially to him and to his poems that we wish to call attention. As it is entirely for his honor and glory that this article is written, he shall hereafter be for us *the* Underself.

We are all more or less familiar with the idea of dream-verses. Everyone has read Coleridge's dream-poem “Kubla Khan”; or has noticed the bits purporting to be dream-poetry, that from time to time appear in the newspapers; or, best of all, has himself dreamed poetry. There are few among those that recognize poetry as one of the pleasures of life, who have not carried that pleasure into their dreams—who have not at some time dreamed of reading or composing poetry. We call this *poetry*, because we wish to look at it from within the stand-point of the Underself, rather than that of the unprejudiced critic, who sees it only in the glare of daylight, and who, therefore, may consider this production of the unconscious muse as worthy of no better name than rhyme or doggerel. We (and this *we* is not editorial, but refers to a small circle who have for a number of years been much interested in

dream-poetry)—we, because the Underself often sings to us, have always been firm believers in his inspiration. He and the other “little people” have brought to us many vivid dreams of all kinds, and he himself has treated us to much poetry—sublime, pathetic, or comic.

For a long time we had never remembered more of these dreams than the pleasure that the poetry had given us. The poem itself had not materialized, for though on first awaking we frequently retained some idea of the words, it never occurred to us to write them down immediately, and an additional nap or another train of thought was always sufficient to dispel them from our minds. One day, however, the admiration which we cherished for dream poems received a rude shock. It was on hearing the experience of a gentleman, who had on two occasions arisen during the night to record, first a short speech, and then a verse, that seemed to him, in his dreams, almost inspired in their eloquence. The speech was, in the dream, made by the host of a small evening entertainment, when inviting the guests to enter the supper-room. The dreamer awoke wondering at the charming and appropriate words of this gentleman, whom he had never thought capable of such an intellectual effort. But as he recovered his full consciousness, the elegant and witty address resolved itself into the following jargon:

“Respectable people, theological students, and others, are more precious than anything else, assisted by seventy-one blacksmiths”.

The verse he recorded was heard in a dream, in which he saw two opposing railway trains on a single track, dash into each other at full speed. As they met with a fearful crash these thrilling words resounded through the air:

Through all my future life a blaze

Eccentric as a cone of rays.

Immediately on hearing these dream-products, we were fired with a desire to emulate this gentleman's example—to look straight into the face of that poetry which charmed us in our dreams. To this end we resolved to jot down immediately any fragment of the Underself's composition that we might remember.

As he has given us very little prose, the result of our efforts during the last ten or twelve years has been chiefly poems or fragments of poems; the odds and ends of dream-verse. These we have been on the alert to catch, though it has not been an easy task. It has generally demanded the exercise of great-will power, frequently of more than was possible for the half awake-dreamer. For the peculiarity of dream-poetry is that it fades rapidly from the memory. No matter how brief the fragment is, no matter how vividly it is recalled on first awaking, or how many times the dreamer recites it over and over, and resolves to remember it, let him go to sleep again, or let his mind wander to other things, and the words are lost forever.

Coleridge had this experience with his “Kubla Khan.” On awaking he remembered, he says, two or three hundred lines that had come to him in his dream. When he had written down the fifty-four lines that are

preserved. “a person with business from Porlock” interrupted him, and detained him for over an hour, and when he tried afterwards to write the rest of his dream-poem, he found it hopelessly gone.

Since we have found any delay to be fatal it has become a point of honor that, whenever we awake with any fragment of dream-poetry in our clutches, we shall rise immediately and write it down no matter how cold and dark the night. Often we have scratched it down with eyes shut and senses so affected by sleep that even the prosaic act of writing could not dispel the glamour, and we would go back to sleep believing that at last we had captured from the Underself a real treasure. But the result was always the same. With daylight the charm vanished. For without meaning we have found it almost invariably. Though it is often fine in sound and perfect in rhyme and metre, there is no escaping from the fact that to the waking mind it seldom conveys more than the ghost of an idea. It has not enough sequence for one verse to suggest the next, and it is probably only by reason of its rhyme and metre that we could grasp the smallest fragment firmly enough to drag it into the light of day. Even “Kubla Khan,” which is more of a poem than anything our less talented Underselves have to offer, has, in common with all the dream-verses that are known to be authentic, a strong flavor of the incongruous. The newspaper dream poems that we occasionally see are probably so remodelled in the remembering, that they represent just about what the dreamer would write with his eyes open. Their gentle mediocrity leads us to doubt their authenticity, for, in our experience of them, the Underself's poems may have all other faults sooner than correct tameness.

There are several ways of remembering dream-poetry. One may recall only its words, without their dream-meaning; or, one may remember the thought expressed in the poem, but not the dream-words, or occasionally one remembers the words and the idea they conveyed to the dreamer. It is very peculiar that in this last case, which is the one where they can be compared, the ideas and the words seldom agree. This makes it clear that, if on waking, we give a correct poetical expression to *thought* of the dream-poem, *the words* are likely to be our own and not those the Underself.

In our specimens we have retained the Underself's exact words; but such may not be the case with the dream-poems published by Miss Frances Power Cobbe, and those dreamed by Mrs. Kingsford. These have, however, in spite of their length and correctness, some of the qualities that we have found to be common in true dream-poetry.

In her article on “Dreams.” published in *Macmillan's* some years ago, Miss Cobbe gives two dream-poems. One of these is in French, though the lady who dreamed it believed herself unable to write poetry in French; and this fact seems to prove it to be in the Underself's words. Like “Kubla Khan” it was dreamed under the influence of a narcotic, and it has the impressiveness so characteristic of the dreams produced by opiates, and so frequently found in dream poetry generally. There are eleven verses of which the two opening ones will give a good idea:

Ce matin du haut de l'ancienne tourelle

J'écoutais la voix de la sentinelle,

*Qui criait à ceux qui passaient là bas
A travers le pont, 'Dis qui va là?'*

*Et toutes les réponses, si pleines d'espoir
Remplirent mon coeur d'un vague effroi,
Car le chagrin est de l'espoir le fruit
Et le suit comme au joursuit la sombre nuit.*

*[This morning from the top of the ancient tower
I heard the voice of the guard
Who cries to those who pass below
Crossing the bridge, "who there goes?"*

*And all the replies so full of hope
Fill my heart with a vague terror
For pain is the fruit of hope
And follows it like night follows day.]*

This and the other poem that Miss Cobbe published appeared to the dreamer, like almost all the dream-poems we know, as a combination of poem and vision.

Mrs. Anna Kingsford has published a volume of her "Dreams and Dream Stories," among which are a number of her dream-poems. One of these is called "Through the Ages," and deals with metempsychosis. It is probably the longest of all dream-poems, consisting of eighty lines. Its beginning is suggestive of that of the *Rubáiyát*:

*Wake, thou that sleepest! Soul, awake!
Thy light is come, arise and shine!*

For darkness melts and dawn divine

Doth from the holy Orient break.

Swift darting down the shadowy ways

And misty deeps of unborn Time,

God's light, God's day, whose perfect prime

Is as the light of seven days.

And here is another fragment from Mrs. Kingsford's collection:

A jarring note, a chord amiss,

The music's sweeter after,

Like wrangling ended with a kiss,

Or tears with silver laughter.

The high Gods have no joys like these

So sweet in human story,

No tempest rends their tranquil seas

Beyond the sunset's glory.

Then there are others, "With the Gods," "Signs of the Times", and fragments, all of which are quite connected and quite unlike the bits we have brought from Dreamland, except in their general elevation of subject.

The Underself prefers lofty subjects, and seems always to aim at some unusually striking effect; in fact, he has a marked tendency toward bombast. In his most disconnected specimens there is generally a suggestion of vast possibilities of humor, beauty, or grandeur, a hint of brilliant but unfocussed ideas. They seem a kind of poetry in solution—something that we feel might astonish the world, if we could only present it in a settled, organized form. It seems to be what some of Browning's verse is to the

uninitiated. In fact, we once, as an experiment, put one of the Underself's verses among some selected extracts from Browning, and defied a literary club who were discussing his poetry to distinguish the dream-poetry from the genuine Browning. This is the dream poetry:

Enriched within the roses' prime,

Blossomed alas from time to time.

Endured from day to day.

This has, in common with most dream-poems, such an air of plausibility that it is easy to see why the club failed to convict it as an imposture.

After the same order as the last is the following enigma, which was pregnant with thought to the Underself, though our waking senses have never yet found its solution:

Believed by all, inspired by none,

By nature nor by art begun.

And here is a verse that the Underself put forth as a very beautiful description of the approach of winter:

Dull Autumn waves her sexless hands,

And saddens all their morning graces,

And throws white veils upon their heads,

And dims the shining of their faces.

The next is from a poem that thought in the dream to paint the of dawn with a magic that made former descriptions pale and lifeless:

Thus the white horse, plumed with the rising morn,

Comes rushing forth to animate the dawn.

The following is the longest of the Underself's poems that we have been able to keep. It is very pathetic, and the dreamer awoke from it almost in tears:

*Out in the sun and the wind together,
Mary and John were growing old;
There when the birds were in full feather,
She gathered eggs while the sad years rolled.
There, in the brightest and darkest weather,
He pruned the trees, till his hands grew cold.
Out in the wind and the rain together,
Mary and John were growing old.
Still as the days passed, hither and thither
Wandered they, nearing Death's silent fold.
Now though trees bloom and all birds in feather,
Sleep they together 'neath wakening mould.*

Besides being longer, this dream-poem is more connected than most of our specimens. But hasn't it a familiar sound—as if we had heard it or something like it before? This dim sense of familiarity is not uncommon with dream-poetry, and this, and the fact that we are much more apt to dream poetry after reading poetry, suggest that the Underself may be something of a plagiarist, and that much of his composition is only a faint and confused echo of something we have heard when awake. This is eminently the case with the following heroic lines:

*Up, up, with a shot into Clavering Hall,
Mount, mount, with the guards and the myrmidons all.*

And these:

He fell, and in an inch exclaimed,

“There’s castles in the air.”

These last, and the following lines, seem to be not only echoes, but actual parodies of something else:

A title is drunk and the clarion is run,

The long wire pulling the short wire’s tongue.

All these seem so absurd in the commonplace light of day, that it is not easy realize how we were affected by them. Yet it is true that we awoke thrilled by eloquence; they touched feelings too deep for expression; to the dreamer their mock-heroics were real, and all their tinsel was pure gold. For the setting of dream-poems is often superb, and they frequently seem to crown some magnificent climax, being pealed out in grand organ tones, or written on the in letters of light. For instance, one of us dreamed of a lordly castle that had in one of its halls a famous old oak beam, whose history seemed to ring the air, à la “Excelsior,” thus:

When freedom from her mountain height

Gave challenge bold and rare,

Fitz-Allen to Clan Estes gave,

This oak to do and dare.

Its flame with crimson, creaming light,

Went climbing mountains high,

And burning banners blazing bright,

Lit echoes in the sky.

Here we have, in this last verse, something very creditable to the Underself, as it was dreamed by a person who had scarcely ever in his life tried to make a rhyme.

The Underself frequently gets into a tragic mood. Here is a bit that he intended for tragedy, though the daylight rather lightens its gloom:

He laughed below stairs,

As I knelt at my prayers,

And I thought more of him than of God.

And again the Underself attempted tragedy in a poetic dream, which told the woful story of a deserted maiden, a kind of “Mariana in the Moated Grange,” who waited sadly for the lover that never came. As this dream-maiden gazed into the mirror from time to time, she sorrowed over her gradual loss of beauty; but, instead of pining away picturesquely like the love-lorn maids of romance, she grew stout with age. Of all this harrowing history only these three could be remembered and written down:

She looked in the mirror and seemed to be

Many years older than she might,

And she drew the clasp of her girdle tight.

Next the Underself has attempted something a little different—“adorning his narrative” with a foreign tongue. The dreamer, who had been a Southern officer in the late war, thought he read this in a newspaper:

From every battle of the war,

Came many wounded, thick and thin;

To this is one exception dread,

Crédit Comptoir de Katadin.

“This last line,” he said, “seemed to be the most terse, elegant, and impressive French, the whole stanza meaning that while, in all other battles, there were many wounded for every one killed outright, the Battle of Fredericksburg was a terrible exception; that there the ‘killed and wounded’ were all killed instantly. In the dream it seemed that this was something that ever since the battle I had known to be true, which it is not. If anything, the proportion of wounded in that battle was larger than usual.

In this last case the sense and the words are even farther separated than is usual. It is one of the few dreams in which the idea was remembered, and may be compared with the words. Here is another of the same sort. The dreamer thought that he read in a Sunday’s paper, a long account in verse of how the insects came to survive the Flood, they having been, as he believed in the dream, either accidentally or purposely, not invited into the ark by Noah. The poem seemed to describe them as floating around on fruit and chips of bark, in a regular fleet. The only lines the dreamer recalled on waking were:

All the night,

Unto light,

Not an orange with a bug,

Not an insect on a rug,

Touched a [something rhyming with light].

We have now a few extracts from his works, which show that the Underself sometimes descends from his grandiose flights, and tries to be funny. In these, more than in the serious poems, we can trace the general trend of each dreamer’s mind. Carroll, the author of “Alice in Wonderland,” who has written so much delightful dream-poetry with his eyes open, dreamed this:

It often runs in families,

Just as the love of pastry does.

One of our dreamers brought from a dream-poem this extract that is just as quaint:

‘Tis a question if our latitude and civil rights agree,

But longitude and other things are surely found to gee.

Another dreamer, who awake, has a very comic vein, dreamed that she saw her sister at a fancy ball arrayed like a bandit king and standing on a table, where with much gesticulation, and amid wild applause, she sang the following song:

I'm a bold buccaneer, with bold glances,

Always in pairs I meet,

I level at those who say "Lancers,"

And waltz with the fair and the sweet.

She also dreamed, at another time, that she was tending her mother by attributing all her own shortcomings to heredity on the maternal side, as follows:

I love to see the college boys,

And copy them from afar,

And wink at them to show my joys—

I gathered it all from ma.

I love to have my purse jammed full,

And stuffed out very far,

But, pa, you can't blame me for this—

I gathered it all from ma.

Here is another that deserves attention, because it seems to show more originality on the part of the Underself; it is harder to account for as an echo of something else. It was dreamed by the Southern officer, before mentioned, in camp in 1863, during a hard winter campaign "on starvation rations." He dreamed that a lady asked him to write in her album; that he tried to decline writing any more than his

name, declaring that he had never been able to write in albums; but she insisted, until in despair, he sat down and by a sudden inspiration dashed off the following:

CONFEDERATE RATIONS.

For a man, corn-bread—so—so.

Any bacon? No! no!

For a horse

O!

In his dream the writing in the album seemed to form a perfectly symmetrical inverted pyramid; the O at the apex to be read “zero.”

This almost completes our assortment of dream-verses, collected with pains and during many years. In spite of their very fragmentary character, they give us quite a good idea of the Underself's poetry in its different phases, though we might be better able do him justice if we could have remembered more of his completed poems. Many persons, perhaps, will take this fruit of all our labors for “the ridiculous mouse” that was born of the mountain. It will seem obvious to them that our mysterious poet, as we have torn from him bit by bit of his veil, has revealed himself to be a petty mountebank, whose poems are nothing more than “sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.” But he who has brilliant dreams must always keep a certain respect for that dream-self who seems a so much higher order of being than his ordinary blundering, stumbling daytime self; who seems to be endowed with such wonderful physical and mental power—moving freely through air and water, overcoming the force of gravitation, and scorning all limits of time and space; who seems to have such a profound skill in controversy and research, such a ready wit and marvellous eloquence. Does not everyone, moreover, remember feats of the Underself that have borne the light of day? Was not Tartini's Devil's Sonata, which he composed in a dream, the finest of all his productions? Did not Burdach and Condorcet solve scientific problems in their dreams?

Why, therefore, when the dream-self, this “Admirable Crichton,” turns his attention to poetry, why should he not here also give some better proof of his ability than these vague and wandering dream-verses? Such was the problem which we placed before ourselves. One of our number, who has dreamed much poetry, was especially enthusiastic in seeking a solution to this problem. At last when he was in despair of finding it, no less an authority than one of the Underselves undertook to explain to him the confusion of dream-poetry.

It is necessary to premise that many years before this dream, an old nurse in the family had been afflicted in the last years of her life with a touch of aphasia, that disease of the brain in which the patient loses to a greater or less extent his memory of words. With this old woman only the substantives were confused; she used all other words correctly. She was convinced of her sanity; and never guessing that a part of her

brain had fallen asleep, she continued to ask for all sorts of impossible things—plantations, cows, churches—and even grew very indignant at the stupidity of her attendants, who could not understand her demands. Now the dream above referred to was one of those dreams within dreams which are not uncommon. In it the dreamer thought that he had just waked from a dream in which he had composed some beautiful lines expressing a very original idea. In this second stage of dreaming he hastened, as he thought, to write down the words. What was his surprise to see in his dream that he had written a senseless jumble of words, though he still retained very clearly in his mind the thought that the verses were intended to convey! He tried to summon up the proper words, but they would not come. Then he recalled the case of the old nurse, and felt that his condition was like hers—that sleep had rendered him temporarily *aphasic*—that he had really originated a brilliant idea, but that, though his sleeping brain was still enough of a poet to understand rhyme and metre, it had lost the power of formulating its thoughts correctly in words.

There is no doubt that this explanation is true in some cases—those of the dreams we have already mentioned, from which we have remembered not only the senseless words, but also the sensible idea that they were meant to convey. There are a number of these, in which the aphasia is more or less marked. The one already given, with the French ending “*Crédit comptoir de Katadin*,” is about the most aphasic, the remembered words bearing little relation to the remembered meaning. The following verse expresses its meaning much more clearly, though it still has a touch of aphasia:

One should be very sure in picking his bone,

That the likeness he finds to another alone.

The dreamer remembered that this was meant to express very epigrammatically, that sharp dealing may injure one’s self much more than the person deceived. A slight change will bring this near to its real meaning—for instance:

One should be very sure in picking his bone,

That the likeness he finds is another’s alone.

.i.e., that he is not picking his own bone—preying on himself.

Now here is a fragment in which the aphasia has disappeared, and the words are evidently quite correct.

The terms I use may mystic seem,

But I'm writing upon a mystic theme.

And there are others like this in the examples already given; so we may suppose that the Underself varies from very serious aphasia to a perfectly correct use of words.

Dreaming, like all other phenomena, cannot be justly estimated without taking into consideration its highest development. Robert Louis Stevenson declares his belief that his sleeping brain is more skilful in the construction of plots and stronger in inventive genius than his waking brain. Mrs. Kingsford declared the same—and more. She said that she had, all through life, gained the greatest assistance in daily perplexities from the nightly counsels of her Underself. And there are many other like cases, where, not only in sleep, but during insanity or the delirium of fever, or in a hypnotic trance, the Underselves have delivered inspired addresses, composed poetry, and shown in many ways wit and brilliancy beyond the waking power of the Centralself.

In spite of all the absurdities that we have quoted from him, we claim that our dream-poet is neither a fool nor an impostor. If he has often surrounded his utterances with mystery, it is only after the manner of the true genius:

“Weave a circle round him thrice,

And close your eyes with holy dread ,

For he on honey dew hath fed,

And drunk the milk of Paradise.”

