

THE SCIENCE NEWS-LETTER

A Weekly Summary of Current Science

EDITED BY WATSON DAVIS

ISSUED BY
SCIENCE SERVICE

B and 21st Streets
WASHINGTON, D. C.

EDWIN E. SLOSSON, Director
WATSON DAVIS, Managing Editor



SUBSCRIPTION: \$5 A YEAR, POSTPAID

The News-Letter, which is intended for personal, school or club use, is based on Science Service's Daily Science News Bulletin to subscribing newspapers. For this reason, publication of any portion of the News-Letter is strictly prohibited without express permission.

Vol. V. No. 172

Saturday July 26, 1924

DREAMS TO ORDER

By Dr. Edwin E. Slosson.

The interpretation of dreams has been an object of eager interest for more than three thousand years. The latest journals of psycho-analysis deal with the same question as the earliest papyri of Egypt or cuneiform bricks of Assyria - and with little more success.

Isn't it time then that we attacked the problem from the other side? Instead of wasting so much time endeavoring to determine what dreams mean, would we not make better progress if we tried to find out what makes dreams? Then we could get whatever dreams we like and whenever we liked and need not bother about their interpretation.

We now have some prospect of progress in this direction for our new knowledge of the hormones gives us a clue. A case in point is reported by Finley. He had a woman patient to whom he gave a grain a day of extract of the pituitary body to build up her blood pressure. Her dreams had hitherto been trivial and colorless, but after ten days of the treatment she began to have pleasurable and highly colored dreams. She travelled extensively in her dreams, as she had always longed to in reality, and wherever she went she found the stations and cars freshly painted in pleasing colors and the trainmen in nice new uniforms with gold braid.

Shortly after the treatment was altered and adrenalin, another of the glandular secretions, was substituted. At once a change came over the spirit of her dreams. They lost their colors and became horrible, filled with violent quarrels

Now if a Freudian practitioner had taken the case, he would have proceeded to probe for complexes in her unconscious without even putting her under an anesthetic. He would diagnose the former dreams as due to "suppressed desires", instead of pituitrin, and the latter as due to "infantile fears", instead of adrenalin. Yet the doctor could produce either brand of dreams at will by an infinitesimal dose of white powder.

Fear and rage promote the secretion of adrenalin from the suprarenal glands. Conversely, the injection of adrenalin, which may be made in the laboratory, will stimulate the symptoms of fear, the goose-pimples, the hair-raising, the cold-sweat, and all that. And James showed years ago that with the symptoms come the corresponding emotion.

It seems from this case that dreams may be made to order like picture post-cards, one cent plain and five cents colored. Common dreams come plain in black and white and grey, chiefly grey. Most of us are colorblind for a third of our

lives. My dreams are usually fragmentary and fugitive, shadowy and colorless. But once when I took laudamum there was unveiled before me a series of the most wonderful pictures, minute and sharp as the landscape seen through the big end of an opera-glass, and as brilliantly colored as a Chinese rice-paper sketch. It was an unprecedented experience for me and I realized for the first time what delight are enjoyed by the favored few who have colored dreams naturally.

De Quincey in his "Confessions" and Baudelaire in his "Hymn to Opium" depict in the most glowing terms that English and French afford the delights of the opium dream. But those who seek an artificial paradise by way of the alkaloids find ultimately that they have jumped out of ennui into anguish. De Quincey soon found himself chased by Chinese, kissed by cancerous crocodiles, and suffering other forms of alliterative torment.

Opium and hashish in the Orient, alcohol and cocaine in the Occident, have been from time immemorial the favorite means of escaping from this dull world into the dreamland of Euphoria. Hashish also intensifies color perception and excites chromatic dreams. I knew a lady who was accustomed to take a pinhead pill of hashish gum before going to the theater because it brightened the scene and converted the painted back-drop into a spacious landscape.

The internally secreted hormones are similar in potency and effect to the externally administered alkaloids. An overdose of insulin, a hormone secreted by the pancreas, causes feelings of "causeless" fear, followed by trembling and finally collapse. The patient can recover his courage by sucking a stick of candy. An excess of activity on the part of the thyroid gland excites anxiety and irritability.

Possibly anxiety and terror dreams in general may be caused by some disturbance in the balance of the hormones or similar organic derangement rather than by anything peculiarly unpleasant in one's past experiences or present predicament.

Certain foods are reputed to produce bad dreams, but this is uncertain. I have often been warned against eating mince pie or Welsh rabbit before bedtime, but when I tried the experiment I saw neither hair nor hoof of a nightmare. Nobody ever told me of any foods that would give pleasant dreams. I wonder why. Aren't there any? But some day the chemist may give us synthetic dreams by his synthetic compounds and then shall our sleep always be happy and the nightmare shall be no more.

READING REFERENCE - Harrow, Benjamin. Glands in Health and Disease. New York, E. P. Dutton Co., 1922.

TO TEST ARTIFICIAL KIDNEY ON HUMAN BEING

An artificial kidney invented by Dr. John J. Abel, professor of pharmacology at the Medical School of Johns Hopkins University, is shortly to be tested on human beings according to word received by him from a German scientist. Before Dr. Abel's discovery could be applied at the Johns Hopkins Hospital the war broke out and disorganized the source of supply of hirudin, an extract from Hungarian leeches necessary to the operation of the artificial kidney.