ON LYING AWAKE

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EVERYONE can quote the praises of sleep. In English, of course, there is always Shakespeare to be quoted on this and other topics. Scholars, even those whose literature is limited to the histories thereof, will recall the *Crimine quo merui, iuvenis placidissime divom* that is the only thing they remember from Statius, and perhaps as good as anything of its kind. Such panegyric is a convention; and like most conventions that are widespread among many people in different ages, has solid and obvious reasons behind it. There are some, and most of us have met them in our youth, who look on sleep as a necessity but no virtue, and whose encomiums are all reserved for those that rise early in the morning. Contempt is bestowed upon sluggards and sleepyheads. The proverbs that celebrate early rising are legion, and abound on the lips even of those who are careful never to exemplify them in practice. An old German grammar tells us that the morning hour has gold in its mouth. Some captious critic objects that if the early bird catches the worm, then it must be the early worm that gets itself caught, and points out that dexterity in matutinal vermicide is not the most necessary or the highest praise of birds. Vain men there are, too, who boast themselves as generally superior to the weakness of their fellows, and who contrive to work twenty hours *per diem*, turn out the light for a few minutes, and rise for the morning's toil refreshed with the strength of ten giants. Who in the country does not know the enterprising houses in which breakfast is over at six o'clock on week-days? It would be interesting to compile statistics to find whether they show a smaller percentage of mortgages than their neighbours. This investigation might furnish some prospective Doctor of Philosophy with suitable material for a dissertation.

But such discussion would lead too far afield. Here there shall be neither unnecessary praises of Morpheus, nor vain criticism of those who repudiate his sovereignty whenever they may. It is the casual act of lying awake that is here considered,—islands of consciousness rising out of the sea of sleep. Or one might change the figure and regard them, according to one's temper, as oases in the desert of slumber, or barren regions in the fertile plain that Hypnos rules.

There are, of course, various methods and causes of lying awake. Who has not started suddenly from calm oblivion into a blind universe of throbbing pain, the diabolical construction of one so innocent-appearing tooth, itself inspired to misery by an offended nerve so small as almost not to exist? This is not lying awake, but being kicked or stabbed awake. Then there is the long drawn out grumble felt, heard and counted, of the tooth that is, as one man puts it, "too mean to ache out loud". Few there are that have not been reminded by unrelenting melancholy and woe unutterable of the richness of pastry devoured, the insistent strength of the midnight coffee. There are those who cannot sleep for the sighing of the wind, and those who start uneasily at the rattling of the window. Some the distant barking of a dog deprives of rest, or the midnight gnawing of the predatory rat. The song of the nocturnal cat is one of the best antidotes to drowsiness, rousing to wakeful wrath the most somnolent sluggard. People have been known who could not endure the sullen roar of the sea, and others for whom it is a sovereign soporific. The passing automobile has become the regular accompaniment of all urban and most rural slumbers, and the hoot of the locomotive mingles peacefully with the sweetest dreams of innocence or placid age. The too frequent cacophony of the human voice, the operations of an active conscience, the cares of office, the pangs of disappointed ambition, are all on occasion the preventers and disturbers of sleep.

But these are here only incidentally under discussion, to aid in the determination and definition of the subject proper. That subject is not insomnia, which is a disease, and fit only for pathological treatises. It is not wakefulness due to aches and pains and excessive weariness or sheer cruel worry. Nor is it the mere lack of sleep due to the various minor or major external annoyances enumerated above. The lying awake that may, in a limited way, deserve record or even praise is other than these.

It cannot be done in the daytime. However sedulously one may darken the room, compose oneself in a quiet chamber upon a pleasant couch of neutral tint, and count the elusive sheep in the famous hypothetical flock, while the breeze, it may be, plays soothingly about the corner of the house, nothing happens but perhaps a little harmless slumber. In the daytime one may be asleep or awake, or perhaps drowsy, as all who deliver or attend lectures or sermons are aware. One cannot, in the sense here intended, "lie awake" in the daytime. For in the daytime there is no proper detachment from the affairs of this present evil world. The daily

task is rumbling and creaking around one. One's neighbours are real, some of them possibly obnoxious. Dollars have their ordinary unchallenged pre-eminence in the scheme of things. The world is the same big nuisance that it is just after breakfast. The telephone may ring, and will almost infallibly be answered. All sorts of business may interrupt. And in a civilization that has largely retained the vices and renounced the virtues of Puritanism, there is always, for a healthy person of normal habits, a sense of sin in sleeping by day that would in itself prevent the peaceful and secure indifference, the atmosphere of moral holiday (to use a phrase of William James) that is a prerequisite of proper lying awake. One may fall asleep and rest; that is somewhat sinful, but may be excused by simple weariness. But to lie there and not to sleep, that is dawdling, a waste of the time that was given us to improve. The way to improve time is by some useful activity that leads directly or proximately to the making of money. One may therefore quite properly play some mild or strenuous muscle-taxing game that will make him bigger and better, so as more easily to acquire and retain more money. Or one may play an evening game of bridge in order to prevent the possibility of frivolous or other conversation, and the danger of thinking about unpleasant things or anything else. Lying awake cannot be practised by day.

Nor can it be carried on successfully by lamplight. Every form of artificial light, from the simple tallow dip to the incandescent bulb, must be banished. That is perhaps why those sleepers who insist upon a night light are, when not timid, merely dull and prosaic people. They fear, or they do not perceive, the peculiar virtues of the night. There is always, within the sphere of influence of the artificial light, an entanglement with the banal and trivial that obscures the clearness of one's spiritual vision. There is, to be sure, a comfort and even poetry in day-dreaming of an evening in a warm and cheerful room. But one cannot there achieve the purity of intellect necessary for proper lying awake. Such day-dreaming requires the accompaniment of the ticking clock, the purring cat, the basking dog, the crackling hearth, the smoke-uplifting pipe, and is related to the subject of this discourse as pleasant impressionistic music to Bach, or as Trollope to Sophocles. One's mental machinery is clogged with sensations, and mere material things. One might permit the firelight, but even the firelight is an obstacle. It refracts and confuses the *siccum lumen*, the dry light that is here imperatively necessary.

It cannot be done in one's ordinary daily garments. "Wearing clothes", to use a good native colloquialism, are not the garb

here required. Those who, in books and other places, throw themselves down in their clothes and snatch a little brief repose have neither part nor lot in this matter. They are merely working at sleep, toiling to rest. Each particle of clothing is a reminder of the world outside; and clothing, like tools, is merely an extension of one's personality. The world outside still exercises an overpowering influence; but the standards and values of that world have no authority and sometimes no meaning for those that lie awake in the way they should.

It cannot be reached by striving. A free gift of the gods, it comes to those who do not seek, but are humbly thankful for mercies shown. In this respect it resembles the great things of life. One cannot get them by effort; one can only prepare and be ready for them when they come. Even death, to be of value, must come unsought.

The requisites, then, are that the time should be night, at an hour when mortals are naturally and properly asleep; that one should be abed in ordinary night garb; that one should be in no severe bodily discomfort, but easily and peacefully awake, and awake by accident, as it were, a consenting but not an active party, patient but not ambitious of wakefulness. The place should be one's usual place of nightly rest. Great travellers, for all that could here be demonstrated to the contrary, may be able to enjoy such passive vigilance on the summits of the Himalayas, in the midst of the Sahara, in the forests of Brazil, or amid the white wastes of Greenland. Great sailors may conceivably enjoy it during tempests and tornadoes. But in these instances it is only because the abnormal has become the normal, and any ordinary environment unique. If it need not absolutely necessarily be one's usual bed or chamber, there should at least be nothing unusual to the point of distracting the attention. One is well accustomed to a fairly wide range of environment in one's chamber, consequent upon the variations of weather and temperature, sometimes even upon the semi-annual convulsion vulgarly called "house-cleaning", a colourless name for so tragic an occurrence.

The manner of the night, then, does not matter, or at least does not matter much. That blessed frame of mind in which one finds oneself by the favour of Providence and without active volition is not perturbed and not much coloured by the weather outside the room. Any sort of reasonable weather is as good as any other. The outside world is there, but does not touch one. The rain may fall in torrents, the wind may howl, the house may shake. These interruptions are not more than punctuations to one's medi-

tation. One's thoughts work quietly on unperturbed. Snow driving against the window is merely a curtain against outside interference. And the moonlight that lies pale and cold across the floor confirms one in an aloofness from the tangle of phenomena, a tangle of phenomena that will again obtrude upon consciousness when morning comes. Moonlight in a room of any sort differs a little, perhaps a great deal, from moonlight outside. Very cold it is, and very pale, and timeless; timeless at least to human consciousness. So it looked to the caveman, and so to Buddha and Aristotle; so to great conquerors and kings, so to their subjects and victims; so no doubt to our descendants twenty centuries hence it will appear. A great subduer of human passion and ambition the moonlight should be; and in spite of popular illusion to the contrary, it is the nearest to the dry light of reason that nature affords. The sunlight is too hot. Passionless, merciless, the moonlight lies upon the floor like the abstract essence of light that exists for its own good pleasure, and for no service or delight to man. But to be appreciated properly it must be seen in a room. Out of doors it is perverted by all the objects in nature fraudulently to distort their ugliness into the mirage of beauty.

The noises of the external world, too, are subdued to their innate vacuity. Now and then a sound may come, sudden, discordant, and unexpected, to call one back from the contemplation of the vision of truth that one beholds then or never. But all regular noises are easily assimilated into the total concept that means merely the outer shell through which one for a little has penetrated. The street-car, the smoothly running auto, the rumble and whistle of the distant train, the hoarse shout of the steamer in the harbour, all these pass without comment and without annoyance. A human voice, when high-pitched or cackling, as it rises from the street, or the maddening howl from the horn of some savage's auto, will break the spell. The tomahawk may have been a more lethal instrument, but could not have been better adapted for torture. One's vision is distorted by anger. And those who sleep within easy hearing of the ubiquitous garage must have perceived the diabolical concatenation of little annoyances that the late arrival of a car may be; especially if the garage is a small private one, and the owner arrives home with conscious virtue and parks his car carefully for himself. First the dying groan of the wheels, and the crunching of the gravel, the cheerful creaking and slamming open of the garage doors, while the motor throbs outside. Then the car starts again, and comes to a halt in its appointed place. More slamming of the doors follows, the re-

treating crunch of feet upon the gravel walk, perhaps a joyous salutation from the house and a little open air conversation. How the agony drags on for the hearer! Or perhaps a neighbour imagines himself musical, and tries all the latest records upon his gramophone before the window and at any odd hour. These are the things that stir murderous thoughts within the breasts of virtuous men. But after a time the uproar ceases, and civilized life can begin again.

One may not immediately abstract oneself from all one's own business of the day. There is a state of semi-detachment in which it is possible to view all the problems that are at hand without seeming to be unduly perturbed by them, or indeed interested in them in other than an intellectual way. Young and eager students have been heard to say that this is the best time to grapple with such difficulties as their work affords. It is not perhaps on record that any ancient mathematician ever recommended this hour for working out the theorems of his science, but it is true that now the problem can be seen in itself, in its mere elements, clear and free from all encumbrances. The triangle shapes itself in the mind's eye with no adventitious aid from the material world. Step by step, one examines the solution with critical imagination. When the final step has been reached, the result is a possession for ever, or at least for the natural lifetime. It is no longer bound up with a particular page of the geometry, though it is well to retain a pious respect for the old Euclid; and one has got so much more—the acquaintance with the mind itself working. Few people encourage their minds to appropriate and fitting labour; still fewer, perhaps, enjoy the use of the critical imagination. One may, while patiently studying mathematics, recall the theme of great and simple music, and see that music and mathematics are truly one; or rather that real music is merely mathematics clothed in harmony and tone. One might perhaps come to see, too, that some music is bad because it is mathematically at fault; the composer did not comprehend the architectonic necessities of his art; and it would be refreshing to write after it, as Euclid sometimes does, "which is absurd". Some, of course, is bad because it is a horrible noise, and some because it is applied at the wrong time: but that is another matter, and not germane to the present discussion.

If the student continues his investigations, passionless and inevitable as they then become, there is no other such time for taking stock of all that he knows. Let him begin with Adam or with the primeval slime, according to his favourite hypothesis, and examine his knowledge of the history of the world. Note

the large tangled masses, the spots wherein history, mythology, and fable are inextricably intermingled. See the fields of arid dates that a good memory may retain; a beginning by no means useless, because it lies ready to be clothed upon with a knowledge of men and movements, stimulated by an insight into the spirit and temper of the age, that will make the whole body alive and real. See, on the other hand, what a hazy mass it may all be without a few pegs of dates to hang facts upon; a shapeless mass, like a garment that has fallen from its hook. Or let him review his knowledge of some language, sternly refraining from the necessary temptation to rise and search for the missing form or construction; take any English sentence, and turn it into the required tongue. Or take some great word and trace it back as far as may be, noting the shift of meaning, the colour and taste of the word, and realizing that properly to understand a word in all its relations is to understand all time and all eternity: and that, within the limits of attainable possibilities, to understand a few words fully is to comprehend European history. What one knows when lying awake is the knowledge that one lives with, and an integral part of oneself. Your men of practical skill are well enough in their place; but the emphasis on what one can do, what one knows where to look up, what "has passed through the mind on its passage from the work of reference to the notebook", has no room here, and no place in one's personality. Who was it that said that the true test of a scholar was the book that he could write the day after his library had burned to the ground?

Poetry, of course, is a possession for every human being famous and obscure, learned and simple, rich and poor. One cannot avoid it and live; urchins on the street call their rude rhymes after each other as their ancestors have done for unnumbered generations, the merest raw material of gnomic or satiric verse; and the most serious and select minds find in the great poets their most satisfying spiritual food. But it is as one lies awake, unperturbed by the whips and scorns of time, unvexed by the importunities of the daily struggle, that the stores of poetry are most easily accessible to those who possess them. The scholar has no doubt a wider range to call upon, perhaps in several languages; but the quantitative test is here of little avail. One small poem that one has absorbed is now of more value than the knowledge of many books. Some public speakers who drag in the inevitable tag of verse have a large stock of such tags to suit all sorts of occasions; and often poetry is to them of no importance except as a conventional thing with which to round off a period. The poetry that counts

for each of us is the poetry that comes unbidden to sing itself during the quiet of the involuntary vigil. One is, as it were, a passive spectator of one's own mind, or perhaps a watcher at the window of the universe. A verse comes from anywhere, *Rex tremendae maiestatis,* it might be: and the mind runs effortless back to *Dies irae, dies illa,* or forward to *Dona eos requie,* and all that one knows of the great medieval civilization unfolds itself at the impact of the mighty lines. *Inter spem curamque, timores inter et iras,* and the brief epistle runs its course, while the last verses recall the rich and satisfying Epicureanism that, however much it might fall short of the rigid standard of the Stoic or ascetic moralist, made men pleasant neighbours and unexacting friends. Or one hears the magic *Xanadu* and then arise "ancestral voices, prophesying war", and the strains of the damsel with the dulcimer. The great pageant of life that we call Shakespeare, the majesty of Milton, Homer himself and Aeschylus, and all the mighty singers of the past are there for those who are prepared to receive them, and in converse with them is one most truly alive. But these are scholars' memories, it may be; and yet we are all in some sense scholars, though some have carried their studies farther than others. Who could so well appreciate the *Odyssey* as a sailor, did he but know a little Greek? But there are many other verses that recall earlier associations, common to everybody in this land of public schools. *Each on the ground his scabbard threw,* and the fight of the Saxon and the Gael is on, while those who are supposed to be working arithmetic in their seats have laid aside their problems, and are slumbering, or engaged in mischief, or even listening to the reading lesson. The scene calls up few books, and perhaps not many bookish memories; but the little white schoolhouse is there, and the snow-fight, and even at the same moment the road that lay straight and white with dust beneath the sun of early autumn, and the spruce trees stand on the hill, and behind is the orchard where the apples are beginning to redden, while beyond that the corn is rustling demurely in the gentle breeze. Associations rise from all the past, and one views them with no bias for good or evil, so called, but with the sharpest insight and the keenest aesthetic appreciation of which one is ever capable.

For the peculiar virtue of the exercise of lying awake consists in detachment, a disentangling from all the chains that are thrown about us as we go about our ordinary routine. Ephemeral values disappear. One sees one's folly without grieving over it, and notes it as an element in the total concept. And, since the dry light spares others no more than oneself, one sees how entirely unnecessary

some people who have seemed important really are, and how ridiculous are so many conventions that the world highly esteems for a day or two. The solid values appear. For the dreamer his dream, for the seer his vision; and for those who can rise to these heights, nothing else is so important. Bishop Blougram has stated the case well. But for most mortals, health, a reasonably respectable reputation, money enough to prevent worry, a few friends who can be trusted, congenial occupation. Nothing else matters very much in this world, except playing the game. That, indeed, seems to matter more and more as the years go by; that, and the deposit of memories left by the passing of the years. Those who are in the middle course of life may well wonder whether the hopes and ambitions of youth or the joys of memory are to be preferred; the one eager and probably fallacious, the other rich, varied, and unalterably secure until the end. For old people do not really forget more readily than young; they have more things to remember.

It is impossible for a mortal to reach the Aristotelian height of pure thought thinking itself. Whether or not this pleasure is reserved for the gods, it is out of the reach of humanity. The thought may be pure, but the content is necessarily limited by the experience of the individual. But the nearest approach to the theoretical life comes as one lies awake. It is then that the trappings of mortality are most nearly sloughed off. And the result is near to a disembodied intelligence, impartial, ironic, unperturbed, judging all things *sub specie aeternitatis*, a spectator of all time and all existence.

Sometimes only the daylight brings interruption, and sometimes it furnishes a painless approach to this world that does not spoil the vision of the night. There is an eastward window that surveys a Nova Scotia landscape. A little valley lies immediately before, and beyond the land slopes to meet the sky. The slope is clothed with small bushes, and at the summit a few old trees stand as if surveying the landscape. As the pale gray dawn sweeps across the sky, it is easy to remember the ancient myth, Dawn, the beautiful maiden escorted across the horizon by her brothers, the two famous horsemen. There is no human habitation in sight, the old trees stand rigid and watchful, there is for a little no sound of man or beast, and even the neighbouring sea behind the hill sleeps in unbroken peace. Then come the brighter rays, the cattle that draw behind them the all-seeing lord of day, Surya, the sun. The ancient myth may come from the Himalayas, but is apposite at every sunrise. Then one can literally see the world turn to the east, and the edge of the hill move bodily across the

rim of the sun. One seems still a spectator of all time and all existence; one sees time being made by the revolving worlds, and falls asleep until breakfast.

Falling asleep seems a natural and sometimes necessary sequel to lying awake, though sometimes, too, the necessity may be regretted. There are so many things that one wants to know and understand, and there is so little time for unembarrassed reflection. All day business and pleasure occupy the mind or prevent it from occupation; and everyone must be practical and get something done, regardless of the fact that so many of the things that people get excited about doing might very well be omitted. So a great deal of time is spent in strenuously bustling around, and it is no bad thing to have an occasional hour of wakefulness to consider the causes of things and their purpose. And though just before getting the problem settled, morning or sleep is sure to come, one can flatter oneself that, as is the case with Plato and other philosophers, the method and spiritual exercise are more important than the concrete result, and can rise to meet the day with clearer vision, wider tolerance, and keener insight; or, perhaps better, sink into a deeper and more refreshing slumber.