

NIGHTMARES OF EMINENT PERSONS
AND OTHER STORIES

BY BERTRAND RUSSELL

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NIGHTMARES

OF EMINENT PERSONS

AND OTHER STORIES

by

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illustrated by
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PREFACE

It is only fair to warn the reader that not all the stories in this volume are intended to cause amusement. Of the "Night-mares," some are purely fantastic, while others represent possible, though not probable, horrors. "Zahatopolk" is designed to be completely serious. The last story, "Faith and Mountains," may strike some readers as fantastic, but, if so, they must have led sheltered lives, as appears from the following :

"Taking its cue from the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II of England this year, the National Pickle Association started a search for an American girl with the name of Elizabeth Pickle to be the ruler of Pickledom during 1953. The Peanut Journal and Nut World." (Quoted from the Observer, June 28, 1953.)

I wish Elizabeth Pickle all success !

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Nightmares of Eminent Persons

INTRODUCTION

The following "Nightmares" might be called "Signposts to Sanity." Every isolated passion is, in isolation, insane; sanity may be defined as a synthesis of insanities. Every dominant passion generates a dominant fear, the fear of its non-fulfilment. Every dominant fear generates a nightmare,

sometimes in the form of an explicit and conscious fanaticism,
sometimes in a paralysing timidity, sometimes in an unconscious or subconscious terror which finds expression only in dreams. The man who wishes to preserve sanity in a dangerous world should summon in his own mind a Parliament of fears, in which each in turn is voted absurd by all the others. The dreamers of the following nightmares did not adopt this technique; it is hoped that the reader will have more wisdom.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA'S NIGHTMARE

Put Not Thy Trust in Princes

The Queen of Sheba, returning from her visit to King Solomon, was riding through the desert on a white ass with her Grand Vizier beside her on an ass of more ordinary colour. As they rode, she discoursed reminiscently about the wealth and wisdom of Solomon. "I had always thought," she said, "that I do pretty well in the way of royal splendour, and I had hoped beforehand that I should be able to hold my own, but when I had seen his possessions I had no spirit left in me. But the treasures of his palace are as nothing to the treasures of his mind. Ah, my dear Vizier, what wisdom, what knowledge of life, what sagacity his conversation displays ! If you had as much political sagacity in your whole body as that King has in his little finger, we should have none of these troubles in my kingdom. But it is not only in wealth and wisdom that he is matchless. He is also (though perhaps I am the only

one privileged
to know this) a supreme poet. He gave me as we parted a
jewelled

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volume in his own inimitable handwriting, telling in
language of
exquisite beauty the joy that he had experienced in my
company.
There are passages celebrating some of my more intimate
charms
which I should blush to show you; but there are
portions of this
book which I may perhaps read to you to beguile the
evenings of
our journey through the desert. In this exquisite
volume not only
are his own words such as any lady would love to hear
from
amorous lips, but by a quintessence of imaginative
sympathy he has
attributed to me poetic words which I should be glad to
have
uttered. Never again, I am convinced, shall I find such
perfect union,
such entire harmony, and such penetration into the
recesses of the
soul. My public duties, alas, compel me to return to my
kingdom,
but I shall carry with me to my dying day the knowledge
that there
is on earth one man worthy of my love."

"Your Majesty," replied the Vizier, "it is not for me
to instil
doubts into the royal breast, but to all those who
serve you, it is
incredible that among men your equal should exist."

At this moment, emerging out of the sunset, a weary
figure
appeared on foot.

"Who may this be?" said the Queen.

"Some beggar, your Majesty," said the Grand Vizier. "I

strongly
advise you to steer clear of him."

But a certain dignity in the aspect of the approaching
stranger
seemed to her indicative of something more than a
beggar. And in
spite of the Grand Vizier's protests she turned her ass
towards him.
"And who may you be?" she said.

His answer dispelled at once the Grand Vizier's
suspicions, for
he spoke in the most polished idiom of the court of
Sheba: "Your
Majesty," he said, "my name is Beelzebub, but it is
probably un-
known to you, as I seldom travel far from the land of
Canaan. Who
you are, I know. And not only who you are, but whence
you come,
and what fancies inspire your sunset meditations. You
have come,
I know, from visiting that wise king who, though my
humble guise
might seem to belie my words, has been for many years
my firm
friend. I am convinced that he has told you concerning
himself all
that he wishes you to know. But if though the
hypothesis seems

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA S NIGHTMARE //

rash there is anything that you wish to know concerning
him
beyond what he has seen fit to tell, you have but to
ask me, for he
has* no secrets from me."

"You surprise me/' said the Queen, "but I see that our
con-
versation will be too long to be conducted conveniently
while you
walk and I ride. My Grand Vizier shall dismount and
give his ass
to you."

With an ill grace the Grand Vizier complied.

"I suppose," the Queen said, "that your conversations with Solomon were mainly concerned with statecraft and matters of deep wisdom. I, as a Queen not unrenowned for wisdom, also conversed with him on these topics; but some of our conversation so at least I flatter myself revealed a side of him less intimately known, I should imagine, to you than to me. And some of the best of this he put into a book which he gave to me as we parted. This book contains many beauties, for example, a lovely description of the spring."

"Ah," said Beelzebub, "and does he in this description speak of the voice of the turtle?"

"Why, yes," said the Queen. "But how did you guess?"

"Oh, well," Beelzebub replied, "he was proud of having noticed the turtle talking in the spring and liked to bring it in when he could."

"Some of his compliments," the Queen resumed, "particularly pleased me. I had practised Hebrew during the journey to Jerusalem, but was not sure whether I had mastered it adequately. I was therefore delighted when he said, Thy speech is comely.' "

"Very nice of him," said Beelzebub. "And did he at the same time remark that your Majesty's temples are like a piece of pomegranate?"

"Well, really," said the Queen, "this is getting uncanny! He did

say so, and I thought it rather an odd remark. But how
on earth
did you guess ?"

"Well," Beelzebub replied, "you know all great men have
kinks,
and one of his is a peculiar interest in pomegranates."

"It is true," said the Queen, "that so me of his
comparisons are

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a little odd. He said, for instance, that my eyes were
like the fish-
pools of Heshbon."

"I have known him," said Beelzebub, "to make even
stranger
comparisons. Did he ever compare your Majesty's nose to
the
Tower of Lebanon ?"

"Good gracious," said the Queen, "this is too much! He
did
make that comparison. But you are persuading me that
you must
have some more intimate source of knowledge than I had
suspected."

"Your Majesty," Beelzebub replied, "I fear that what I
have to
say may cause you some pain. The fact is that some of
his wives
were friends of mine, and through them I got to know
him well/*

"Yes, but how about this love poem?"

"Well, you see, when he was young, while his father was
still
alive, he had to take more trouble. In those days he
loved a farmer's
virtuous daughter, and only overcame her scruples by
his poetic
gifts. Afterwards, he thought it a pity the gifts
should be wasted,

and he gave a copy to each of his ladies in turn. You see, he was essentially a collector, as you must have noticed when you went over his house. By long practice, he made each in turn think herself supreme in his affections; and you, dear lady, are his last and most signal triumph."

"Oh, the wretch!" she said. "Never again will I be deceived by the perfidy of man. Never again will I let flattery blind me. To think that I, who throughout my dominions am accounted the wisest of women, should have permitted myself to be so misled!"

"Nay, dear lady," said Beelzebub, "be not so cast down, for Solomon is not only the wisest man in his dominions, but the wisest of all men, and will be known as such through countless ages. To have been deceived by him is scarcely matter for shame."

"Perhaps you are right," she said, "but it will take time to heal the wound to my pride."

"Ah, sweet Queen," Beelzebub replied, "how happy could I be if I could hasten the healing work of Time ! Far be it from me to imitate the wiles of that perfidious monarch. From me shall flow only simple words dictated by the spontaneous sentiments of the heart. To you, the Peerless, the Incomparable, the Matchless Jewel

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA'S NIGHTMARE ZJ

of the South, I would give if you permit it whatever balm a true

appreciation of your worth can offer."

"Your words are soothing/' she replied, "but can you match his splendours? Have you a palace that can compare with his? Have you such store of precious stones ? Such robes, purveying the aroma of myrrh and frankincense ? And, more important than any of these, have you a wisdom equal to his ?"

"Lovely Sheba," he replied, "I can satisfy you on every point.

I have a palace far grander than Solomon's. I have a far greater store of precious stones. My robes of State are as numerous as the stars in the sky. And as for wisdom, his is not a match for mine.

Solomon is surprised that, although the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is not full. I know why this is, and will explain it to your Majesty on some long winter evening. To come to a more serious lapse, it was after he had seen you that he said 'there is no new thing under the sun.' Can you doubt that in his thoughts he was comparing you unfavourably with the farmer's daughter of his youth? And can any man be accounted wise who, having beheld you, does not at once perceive that here is a new wonder of beauty and majesty? No! In a competition of wisdom I have nothing to fear from him."

With a smile, half of resignation concerning the past, and half of dawning hope for a happier future, she turned her eyes upon Beelzebub and said: "Your words are beguiling. I made a long journey from my kingdom to Solomon's, and I thought I had seen what is most noteworthy on this earth. But, if you

speak truth,
 your kingdom, your palace, and your wisdom, all surpass
 Solo-
 mon's. May I extend my journey by a visit to your
 dominion?"

 He returned her smile with one in which the appearance
 of love
 barely concealed the reality of triumph. "I can imagine
 no greater
 delight," he said, "than that you should allow me this
 opportunity
 to place my poor riches at your feet. Let us go while
 yet the night
 is young. But the way is dark and difficult, and
 infested by fierce
 robbers. If you are to be safe, you must trust yourself
 completely
 to my guidance."

"I will," she said. "You have given me new hope."

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 At this moment they arrived at a measureless cavern in
 the
 mountain-side. Holding aloft a flaming torch, Beelzebub
 led the
 way through long tunnels and tortuous passages. At last
 they
 emerged into a vast hall lit by innumerable lamps. The
 walls and
 roof glittered with precious stones whose scintillating
 facets flashed
 back the light of the lamps. In solemn state, three
 hundred silver
 thrones were ranged round the walls.

"This is indeed magnificent," said the Queen.

"Oh," said Beelzebub, "this is only my second-rate hall
of
audience. You shall now see the Presence Chamber."

 Opening a hitherto invisible door, he led her into
 another hall,
 more than twice as large as the first, more than twice

as brilliantly
lit, and more than twice as richly jewelled. Round
three walls of
this hall were seven hundred golden thrones. On the
fourth wall
were two thrones, composed entirely of precious stones,
diamonds,
sapphires, rubies, huge pearls, bound together by some
strange art
which the Queen could not fathom.

"This," he said, "is my great hall, and of the two
jewelled
thrones, one is mine and the other shall be yours."

"But who," she said, "is to occupy the seven hundred
golden
thrones?"

"Ah well," he said, "you will know that in due course."

As he spoke, a queenly figure, only slightly less
splendid than
the Queen of Sheba, glided in and occupied the first of
the golden
thrones. With something of a shock, the Queen of Sheba
recognized
Solomon's Chief Consort.

"I had not expected to meet her here," she said with a
slight
tremor.

"Ah well," said Beelzebub, "you see I have magic
powers. And
while I have been wooing you, I have been telling this
good lady
also that Solomon is .not all he seems. She listened to
my words
as you have listened, and she has come."

Scarcely had he finished speaking, when another lady,
whom
also the Queen of Sheba recognized from her visit to
Solomon's
harem, entered and occupied the second golden throne.
Then
came a third, a fourth, a fifth, until it seemed as if
the procession

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA'S NIGHTMARE 1 5

would never end. At last all the seven hundred golden thrones were occupied.

"You may be wondering," Beelzebub remarked in silken tones,
"about the three hundred silver thrones. All these are by now occupied by Solomon's three hundred concubines. All the thousand in this hall and the other have heard from me words not unlike those that you have heard, all have been convinced by me, and all are here."

"Perfidious monster!" exclaimed the Queen. "How could I have had the simplicity to let myself be deceived a second time ! Henceforth I will reign alone, and no male shall ever again be given a chance to deceive me. Good-bye, foul fiend ! If you ever venture into my dominions, you shall suffer the fate that your villainy has deserved."

"No, good lady," Beelzebub replied, "I am afraid you do not quite realize the position. I showed you the way in, but only I can find the way out. This is the abode of the dead, and you are here for all eternity but not for all eternity on the diamond throne beside mine. That you will occupy only until you are superseded by an even more divine queen, the last Queen of Egypt."

These words produced in her such a tumult of rage and despair that she awoke.

"I fear," said the Grand Vizier, "that your Majesty has

had
troubled dreams."

MR. BOWDLER'S NIGHTMARE

Family Bliss

Mr. Bowdler, the highly meritorious author of The Family Shakespeare, which the most innocent young lady could read without a blush, never showed in waking life any doubt of the usefulness of his labours. It would seem, however, that somewhere within the depths of that good man's unconscious there must have lurked a still small voice, malign and mocking. It was his practice on Sundays to dispense liberal helpings of pork to his family and not least to himself. It was accompanied by boiled potatoes and cabbage, and followed by roly-poly pudding. For himself, though not for the rest of the household, there was a moderate portion of ale. After this repast, it was his custom to take a brisk walk. But once, when snow and sleet were falling heavily, he permitted himself to break through his usual routine and rest in a chair with a good book. The good book, however, was not very interesting, and he fell asleep. In his sleep he was afflicted by the following nightmare:

MR. BOWDLER'S NIGHTMARE II

Mr. Bowdler was believed by all the world, and is still believed by many, to have been a pattern of all the virtues. He had, however,

at one time dreadful reason to doubt whether, in fact, he was all that his neighbours believed him.

In his youth he wrote a scathing attack upon Wilkes (of Wilkes & Liberty), whom he considered, not wholly without reason, to be a libertine. Wilkes was, by this time, past his prime, and no longer capable of taking such vengeance as in earlier years would have been natural to him. He left in his will a considerable sum of money to young Mr. Spiffkins, with the sole condition that Mr. Spiffkins, to the best of his ability, should bring disaster upon the head of Mr. Bowdler. Mr. Spiffkins, I regret to say, unhesitatingly accepted the unscrupulous legacy.

With a view to carrying out the provisions of Wilkes's will, he visited Mr. Bowdler under the guise of seeming friendship. He found Mr. Bowdler in the fullest enjoyment of perfect family bliss. He had a child on each knee, and was saying: "Ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross." Presently two oth[^]t- Children began to clamour: "Our turn now, Papa!" and they T turn, were provided with oscillatory ecstasy. Mrs. Bowd* .om, good-natured, and

smiling, surveyed the happy scene whi ; bustled about preparing the tea.

Mr. Spiffkins, with that exquisite tact which had caused Mr. Wilkes to select him, led the conversation to those literary topics which he knew to be dear to the heart of Mr. Bowdler, and to the principles which had guided that gentleman in making the works

of great men not unfit to be put into the hands of little women.
The utmost harmony prevailed until at last, after tea was over, and Mrs. Bowdler could be seen through the open door of the pantry washing up the tea-cups, Mr. Spiffkins rose to go. As he was saying good-bye, he remarked:

"I am impressed, dear Mr. Bowdler, by your quiverful of domestic blessings, but having carefully studied all the omissions that you have made in the works of the Bard of Avon, I am compelled to conclude that these smiling infants owe their existence to parthenogenesis "

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Mr. Bowdler, red with fury, shouted: "Get out!" and slammed the door in the face of Mr. Spiffkins. But alas, Mrs. Bowdler, in spite of the clatter of the tea-cups, had overheard the dreadful word. What it meant she could not imagine, but since she did not know it, and her husband disapproved of it, she had no doubt that it must be a bad word.

It was not the sort of matter about which she could ask her husband. He would only have replied: "My dear, it means something about which good women do not think." She was therefore left to her own devices. She knew, of course, all about Genesis, but the first half of the word remained obscure to her. One day, greatly daring, she stole into her husband's library while he was out, and fetching down the Classical Dictionary, read

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