

From "Ten Nights' Dreams" Part II  
—Another Three Dreams of Soseki—

「夢十夜」より

—漱石の更に三つの夢—

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## F o r e w o r d

Sōseki Natsume's "Yumejūya<sup>1</sup> (Ten Nights' Dreams)" (July—August, 1908, in the Asahi) is a piece of work which has recently attracted special public attention in various senses. We have already an excellent English translation of this work<sup>2</sup>, and it seems meaningless to give another and poor translation here. But as I told in the last issue (No.14) of this Bulletin, I began to study this work for the translation nearly twenty years ago without any intention to publish it especially. Last year, however, I was fortunately given an opportunity to put it in the Bulletin, and so published three out of the ten dreams which I was most impressed with. They were the first, the third and the sixth. In this issue, I would like to present another three dreams, and chose the second, the fourth and the ninth. I think I could say that the common keyword in the three dreams is 'wishing' or 'prayer'.

The second dream is based on the experience which Sōseki had when he was staying at a Zen-sect temple, Engakuji Temple<sup>3</sup>, in Kamakura, where he was in ascetic exercises in order to overcome his carnal desire in his younger days. The dream reveals his irritable agony of mind from the difficulty of realizing enlightenment even by Buddhist exercises.

The fourth dream deals with the disappointment of a child who believes a grown-up. At the same time, the serpent might be a symbol related to human original sin as it is in the Bible. The allegory that "wishing to turn something to a serpent could not be fulfilled," seems to be meaningful.

The ninth dream is a sad story of a woman, whose unrewarded sacrifice to a Shintō god almost moves us to tears. A hundred-time worship in the dream reminds us of a poem, "Ohyakudomairi (A Hundred-Time Worship)" (1905, the Taiyo) by a woman novelist and poet, Kusuwo Ōtsuka<sup>4</sup>, who was one of Sōseki's disciples.

Unexpectedly enough, from these three dreams we can learn something of Sōseki's inclination to religion.

## The Second Night

I had a dream like this:

In a Buddhist temple, when I retired from the Priest<sup>1)</sup>'s room and came along the corridor back to my room, I found the paper-covered lamp giving forth a vague light in the room. With one knee on the cushion I raked the fire, when the flower-shaped tip of the wick dropped on to the vermilion-lacquered stool. At once the room got brightened.

The picture on the paper sliding doors was Busōn<sup>2)</sup>'s drawing. Some black willow trees, dark and light, were drawn here and there, and a cold-looking fisherman was passing on the bank with his sedge hat aslant on his head. On the alcove wall there was a hanging scroll of "Monju on the Sea<sup>3)</sup>." Some incense sticks, which were left unburnt, still smelled in the dark corner of the room. The temple was very large, and it was quiet and solitary. On looking up, I saw the round shadow of the round paper lantern moving on the dark ceiling as if it were a living thing.

Still with one knee erect, I turned up one corner of the cushion with my left hand, and slid my right hand under the cushion. It was there in the expected place. I was satisfied with it, so I let the cushion back to its original position and sat down on it with a thud.

—"You are a samurai. A samurai cannot be unable to attain enlightenment<sup>4)</sup>," said the Priest. "You're probably not a samurai, judging from the fact that you're so slow to attain enlightenment. You're quite a good-for-nothing." Then he laughed and said, "Now, now, you're angry, aren't you?" And he turned his face away adding, "Show me evidence of your being enlightened if you resent my words." What a rude Priest!

—I will be enlightened at any cost by the time when the clock in the alcove of the adjacent hall strikes the next hour. After having attained enlightenment I will enter the Priest's room again tonight. And I will exchange my enlightenment with the Priest's head. If I should be unable to attain /

enlightenment, I could not take the Priest's life. I must be enlightened by any means. I am a samurai.

—If I should fail to attain enlightenment by that time, I would stab myself to death. A samurai will disdain to live on in dishonour. I would rather die an honourable death.—

When I thought so, my hand spontaneously reached under the cushion again. It took out a red-sheathed dagger. When I gripped the hilt and drew away the red sheath, the icy blade glittered at once in the dark room. I felt as if something tremendous were running along the blade away from my hand. And it all seemed to gather at the tip of the blade and concentrate all bloodthirstiness at the point. Looking at the sharp edge of the blade, which was resentfully forced to taper to such a fine and tiny needle-point at the end nearly one foot off my hand, I felt like stabbing myself at once. All the blood in my body ran into the right hand, until it got sticky. I felt my lips quiver.

I put the dagger back into the sheath, and placing it close to my right side, I sat in religious meditation. —Jōshū<sup>5)</sup> once said, "Nothingness." What is nothingness? Damned Priest!— I gnashed my teeth.

As I ground my molars firmly, a hot and violent breath came out of my nostrils. My temples ached with cramp. With an effort I opened my eyes twice as large as usual.

I could see the hanging scroll, could see the paper-covered lamp and the matting. I could see the bald head of the Priest vividly. I could even hear his voice when he laughed at me with his jaws wide open. —Rude Priest! I am sure to cut off that bald head of his. I will attain enlightenment by any means. Nothingness, nothingness.— So saying at the root of my tongue, I prayed earnestly. There should be only nothingness, but all the same there was the smell of incense sticks. —Why, damned incense sticks!—

I suddenly gave myself a violent blow on the head with my closed fist. And I ground my molars firmly. Sweat ran down from under my arms. My backbone became as stiff as a stick. Suddenly my knee joints began to ache. I thought

I would not mind if the knees should break. Yet they ached. That afflicted me. Nothingness would not appear in any way. It had hardly begun to appear when I felt a pain. I was indignant. I was resentful. I was very much mortified. Tears fell in drops. I wished I would dash myself against a large rock to crash my flesh and bones to pieces.

Nevertheless, I kept on sitting still patiently. I was enduring something unbearably sad in my bosom. I felt as if, while the sad sensation was struggling to blow out of the pores of my skin pushing up all the muscles in my body, all the pores were cruelly shut and would not give any vent to it.

Meanwhile, I felt queer in my head. The paper-covered light, Buson's drawing, the matting, the side-alcove shelves, and all looked uncertain whether they existed there or not. But nothingness would not be realized. I was sitting merely desultorily. Then the clock in the next room began to strike its first stroke.

It made me awaken to myself. At once I put my right hand on the dagger. The clock struck a second stroke.

#### Notes

- 1) the Priest: The then chief priest of Engakuji Temple was Shaku Sōen, who is also famous for his effort to propagate Zen in America with his disciple, Daisetsu Suzuki.
- 2) Buson: Buson Yosano (1716–83). A famous haiku-poet in the middle of the Edo era. He was also a good painter.
- 3) Monju on the Sea: A Buddhist picture, in which Monju Bosatsu (a very wise Buddhist saint) is coming over the sea on the back of a lion on a cloud.
- 4) enlightenment: "Satori" in the Japanese Buddhist term.
- 5) Jōshū: A Chinese Zen priest (778–897)

## The Fourth Night

In the middle of a large earthen-floored room was placed a low wooden table with some small stools around it. The table was shining black. In one corner, with a small square tray in front of him, an old man was drinking saké by himself. With the saké he seemed to be eating some vegetables boiled hard with soy.

The old man's face was fairly ruddy with drinking. Besides, his face was glossy all over with no wrinkles anywhere. But from a very long white beard he wore, I could tell that he was an old man. Child as I was, I wondered what this old man's age was. Just then the madam of the house came in carrying a pail of water from the water-pipe in the backyard, and wiping her hands with her apron, she asked the old man, "How old are you, old man?"

The old man swallowed the food he had in his mouth, and answered indifferently, "I've forgotten what my age is." The madam was standing with her dried hands inside her narrow sash, staring at the old man's face sideways. The old man gulped saké from a cup as big as a rice-bowl and expired a long breath from within his white beard. Then the madam asked him, "Where do you live?"

The old man broke off his long breath and replied, "In the depth of the navel."<sup>1)</sup>

Still with her hands inside her sash, asked the madam again, "Where are you going?" Again the old man drank hot saké at a draught from a big cup like a rice-bowl, and exhaled a long breath as before.

"I'm going that way," he answered.

"Straight?" asked the madam; then the old man's long breath rushed straight passing through the paper sliding door, by the willow tree, and toward the riverside.

The old man got out of the house. I followed him. A little bottle gourd was hanging at his side. Across his back from the shoulder was slung a square

box under his arm. He had on a light-blue pair of close-fitting trousers and a light-blue sleeveless waist coat. Only his tabi<sup>2)</sup> were yellow. They looked like leather-made ones.

The old man walked straight as far as the willow tree. There were some children under the tree. He took out a light-blue towel from his side. Then he twisted the towel into a rope and put it down right on the ground. And then he drew a large circle around the twisted towel. Finally he took out of the square box a brazen pipe like a one that a wheat-gluten vendor usually blows.

"This towel will soon turn to a serpent. Keep looking at it. Keep looking at it," he said to the children repeatedly.

The children kept their eyes fixed on the towel. So did I.

"Keep watching it. Keep watching it. You see?" the old man said, and blowing the pipe he began to walk along the circle he had drawn around the towel. I was watching on the towel with all my attention. But the towel would not move at all.

The old man piped hard, and walked along the circle over and over again. He walked around on the tips of his straw sandals with stealthy steps as if he were afraid of offending the towel. He looked scared; yet a bit amused, too.

The old man suddenly stopped piping. And lifting the lid of the shouldered box, he picked up the towel serpent by the neck, and threw it into the box.

"Let's keep it in the box in this way, and it'll soon turn to a serpent. I'll soon show it to you. I'll soon show it to you." So saying he began to walk straight. Passing by the willow tree, he walked on straight down a narrow lane. I was so anxious to see the serpent that I followed him. The old man went on, sometimes saying, "It'll soon turn," and at other times saying, "Turn to a serpent." Finally he walked on singing:

"It will soon turn,  
Turn to a serpent,  
It will surely turn,

And the pipe is blowing.”

At last he got down to the bank of the river. As there was neither a bridge nor a ferry-boat, I thought, he would take a rest there and show us the serpent in the box. But the old man began to walk splashing into the water. At first the water was knee-deep, but it became deeper and deeper, until his waist and then his breast were under water. Yet he walked on singing:

”It is growing deeper,  
It is getting darker  
And it is becoming straight.”

He walked on and on straight into the water. At last his beard, his face, his head, his hood, and all got out of sight.

I hoped the old man would show the serpent when he reached the opposite side of the river. So I was waiting for him alone, standing among the rustling reeds on the shore. But after all he did not appear again.

#### Notes

- 1) navel: In Zen the navel is thought to be the center of man's life force.
- 2) tabi: Japanese socks with a split toes.

## The Ninth Night

The world was now getting somewhat in commotion. It seemed that a war was about to break out. It seemed that fire-driven horses were rushing furiously round the house day and night, with crowds of foot-soldiers of the lowest rank of samurai running desperately after them. Nevertheless it was very quiet inside the house.

There lived a young mother and her three-year-old child in the house. The father had gone nobody knew where. It had been in the middle of a moonless night that the father left his house for good. He put on his straw-sandals on the floor, covered his head with a black hood, and got out through the back door of the house. Then the paper lantern which the mother was holding in her hand cast its long light in the dark, shining on an old cypress tree at the inside of the hedge.

The father had never come back since. Every day the mother asked her three-year-old child, "Where has your father gone?" The child gave no answer. After a while he learned to answer, "That way." Even when the mother asked him, "When will he come home?" the child answered with his infant smile, all the same, "That way." The mother also smiled then. And she taught her child over and over again the answer, "Soon he will come home." But the child could not learn by heart except "Soon." Even when he was asked, "Where has your father gone?" he sometimes answered, "Soon."

At night when all was silent, the mother would tidy up herself, put a sharkskin-sheathed dagger inside her sash, bind her child on her back with a girdle, and steal through the wicket. She always had rush-sandals on when she went out. Sometimes the child fell asleep on his mother's back at the sound of the footsteps of the sandals.

Walking westward down a gentle slope between the long walls of some samurai's residences, she would see a big ginkgo tree at the bottom of the slope. When she turned right at the tree, she would see a stone torii<sup>1)</sup> some

hundred yards ahead of her. Walking on over to the torii with rice-fields on one hand and nothing but bushes of low striped bamboos on the other, and passing through the torii, she would find herself in a dark forest of cedars. Another forty yards' walk to the end of the pavement would bring her at the base of the steps to an old altar of a Shinto shrine. Over the offertory box washed gray, a rope was suspended from a big bell high above, and in the daytime one could have seen beside the bell a tablet with the characters of "Hachi-man-gu"<sup>2)</sup> on it. It was fun that the character of "hachi"<sup>3)</sup> (eight)" was written in a pattern of two doves facing each other. Besides it, there were many other tablets. Most of them were framed targets with the respective names of the retainers who had shot them. Some of the tablets had swords on them.

In the forest beyond the torii, owls were always heard whooping in the cedar trees. And there was now the shabby sound of a thin pair of sandals. When the sound stopped before the altar, the mother would be seen to ring the bell, kneel at once and clap her hands in worship. In most cases, the owls suddenly stopped whooping at the time. Then the mother earnestly prayed for her husband's safe return. She believed heartily that if she prayed to the god of arms, Hachiman, with such earnestness, her wish would surely be fulfilled, because her husband was a man of arms.

Sometimes the child was awakened from sleep by the ringing of the bell, and burst out crying on his mother's back as the darkness around frightened him. Then the mother, praying silently, swayed her back to pacify her child. Sometimes that made the child stop crying fortunately. But sometimes he went on crying even louder. At any case, however, the mother would not raise herself soon.

Finishing her ordinary prayer for her husband's safety, she unbound the girdle to let her child down from her back into her arms. Then going up the steps to the altar with him in her arms, the mother would push her cheek to her child's saying, "Wait for a while, good boy." And she tethered the child with the long girdle to the pillar beside the altar. Then she came down the

steps, and began to walk coming and going through the forty-yard pavement for a hundred-time worship.<sup>4)</sup>

The child, who was tethered to the pillar, was usually crawling about on the broad gallery in the dark as far as the length of the girdle permitted him. On such a night the mother felt rather at ease while she was giving her prayer. But on a night when the child on the leash kept crying bitterly, the mother felt impatient. Her pace became very quick. She got quite out of breath. When she could not bear any longer, she would give up her worship halfway to come up to the child on the gallery, and after consoling him, she resumed the worship from the beginning.

The father, whom the mother was so worried about in this way hardly taking any sleep for many nights, had really been killed by masterless samurai long before.

Such a sad story I heard from my mother in a dream.

#### Notes

- 1) torii: A gate to a Shinto shrine.
- 2) Hachimangu: The name of a shrine which was especially believed in by samurai in the old times. There are many Hachimangus in various districts in Japan.
- 3) hachi: The character 八.
- 4) a hundred-time worship: "Ohyakudomairi" in Japanese. A way of worshipping a god in which one prays the god a hundred times by coming and going along the approach to the altar repeatedly as many times. As I mentioned in the foreword, a poem "Ohyakudomairi," had been published by Kusuwō Ōtsuka three years before this work of Sōseki. The poem is an antiwar one in time of the Russo-Japanese War. Kusuo Ōtsuka is said to have been a good-looking woman and the ideal lady to Sōseki, just as Guinevere was to Lancelot. There is a view that without her existence, we could not have almost any of Sōseki's works as they are.<sup>4)</sup>

## A f t e r w o r d

I appreciate being given an opportunity to publish this translation here. I know that I am an immature translator, and I am afraid my English contains a number of awkward expressions. I shall be very happy to be given your frank opinions and instructions. I thank the kind readers in advance.

## R e f e r e n c e s

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