

CHAPTER VI

There is more than the germ of truth in things erroneous in the child's definition of memory as the thing one forgets with. To be able to forget means sanity. Incessantly to remember, means obsession, lunacy. So the problem I faced in solitary, where incessant remembering strove for possession of me, was the problem of forgetting. When I gamed with flies, or played chess with myself, or talked with my knuckles, I partially forgot. What I desired was entirely to forget.

There were the boyhood memories of other times and places--the "trailing clouds of glory" of Wordsworth. If a boy had had these memories, were they irretrievably lost when he had grown to manhood? Could this particular content of his boy brain be utterly eliminated? Or were these memories of other times and places still residual, asleep, immured in solitary in brain cells similarly to the way I was immured in a cell in San Quentin?

Solitary life-prisoners have been known to resurrect and look upon the sun again. Then why could not these other-world memories of the boy resurrect?

But how? In my judgment, by attainment of complete forgetfulness of present and of manhood past.

And again, how? Hypnotism should do it. If by hypnotism the conscious mind were put to sleep, and the subconscious mind awakened, then was the thing accomplished, then would all the dungeon doors of the brain be thrown wide, then would the prisoners emerge into the sunshine.

So I reasoned--with what result you shall learn. But first I must tell how, as a boy, I had had these other-world memories. I had glowed in the clouds of glory I trailed from lives aforetime. Like any boy, I had been haunted by the other beings I had been at other times. This had been during my process of becoming, ere the flux of all that I had ever been had hardened in the mould of the one personality that was to be known by men for a few years as Darrell Standing.

Let me narrate just one incident. It was up in Minnesota on the old farm. I was nearly six years old. A missionary to China, returned to the United States and sent out by the Board of Missions to raise funds from the farmers, spent the night in our house. It was in the kitchen just after supper, as my mother was helping me undress for bed, and the missionary was showing photographs of the Holy Land.

And what I am about to tell you I should long since have forgotten had I not heard my father recite it to wondering listeners so many times during my childhood.

I cried out at sight of one of the photographs and looked at it, first with eagerness, and then with disappointment. It had seemed of a sudden

most familiar, in much the same way that my father's barn would have been in a photograph. Then it had seemed altogether strange. But as I continued to look the haunting sense of familiarity came back.

"The Tower of David," the missionary said to my mother.

"No!" I cried with great positiveness.

"You mean that isn't its name?" the missionary asked.

I nodded.

"Then what is its name, my boy?"

"It's name is . . ." I began, then concluded lamely, "I, forget."

"It don't look the same now," I went on after a pause. "They've ben fixin' it up awful."

Here the missionary handed to my mother another photograph he had sought out.

"I was there myself six months ago, Mrs. Standing." He pointed with his finger. "That is the Jaffa Gate where I walked in and right up to the Tower of David in the back of the picture where my finger is now. The authorities are pretty well agreed on such matters. El Kul'ah, as it was

known by--"

But here I broke in again, pointing to rubbish piles of ruined masonry on the left edge of the photograph.

"Over there somewhere," I said. "That name you just spoke was what the Jews called it. But we called it something else. We called it . . . I forget."

"Listen to the youngster," my father chuckled. "You'd think he'd ben there."

I nodded my head, for in that moment I knew I had been there, though all seemed strangely different. My father laughed the harder, but the missionary thought I was making game of him. He handed me another photograph. It was just a bleak waste of a landscape, barren of trees and vegetation, a shallow canyon with easy-sloping walls of rubble. In the middle distance was a cluster of wretched, flat-roofed hovels.

"Now, my boy, where is that?" the missionary quizzed.

And the name came to me!

"Samaria," I said instantly.

My father clapped his hands with glee, my mother was perplexed at my

antic conduct, while the missionary evinced irritation.

"The boy is right," he said. "It is a village in Samaria. I passed through it. That is why I bought it. And it goes to show that the boy has seen similar photographs before."

This my father and mother denied.

"But it's different in the picture," I volunteered, while all the time my memory was busy reconstructing the photograph. The general trend of the landscape and the line of the distant hills were the same. The differences I noted aloud and pointed out with my finger.

"The houses was about right here, and there was more trees, lots of trees, and lots of grass, and lots of goats. I can see 'em now, an' two boys drivin' 'em. An' right here is a lot of men walkin' behind one man. An' over there"--I pointed to where I had placed my village--"is a lot of tramps. They ain't got nothin' on exceptin' rags. An' they're sick. Their faces, an' hands, an' legs is all sores."

"He's heard the story in church or somewhere--you remember, the healing of the lepers in Luke," the missionary said with a smile of satisfaction.

"How many sick tramps are there, my boy?"

I had learned to count to a hundred when I was five years old, so I went over the group carefully and announced:

"Ten of 'em. They're all wavin' their arms an' yellin' at the other men."

"But they don't come near them?" was the query.

I shook my head. "They just stand right there an' keep a-yellin' like they was in trouble."

"Go on," urged the missionary. "What next? What's the man doing in the front of the other crowd you said was walking along?"

"They've all stopped, an' he's sayin' something to the sick men. An' the boys with the goats 's stopped to look. Everybody's lookin'."

"And then?"

"That's all. The sick men are headin' for the houses. They ain't yellin' any more, an' they don't look sick any more. An' I just keep settin' on my horse a-lookin' on."

At this all three of my listeners broke into laughter.

"An' I'm a big man!" I cried out angrily. "An' I got a big sword!"

"The ten lepers Christ healed before he passed through Jericho on his way

to Jerusalem," the missionary explained to my parents. "The boy has seen slides of famous paintings in some magic lantern exhibition."

But neither father nor mother could remember that I had ever seen a magic lantern.

"Try him with another picture," father suggested.

"It's all different," I complained as I studied the photograph the missionary handed me. "Ain't nothin' here except that hill and them other hills. This ought to be a country road along here. An' over there ought to be gardens, an' trees, an' houses behind big stone walls. An' over there, on the other side, in holes in the rocks ought to be where they buried dead folks. You see this place?--they used to throw stones at people there until they killed 'm. I never seen 'm do it. They just told me about it."

"And the hill?" the missionary asked, pointing to the central part of the print, for which the photograph seemed to have been taken. "Can you tell us the name of the hill?"

I shook my head.

"Never had no name. They killed folks there. I've seem 'm more 'n once."

"This time he agrees with the majority of the authorities," announced the missionary with huge satisfaction. "The hill is Golgotha, the Place of Skulls, or, as you please, so named because it resembles a skull. Notice the resemblance. That is where they crucified--" He broke off and turned to me. "Whom did they crucify there, young scholar? Tell us what else you see."

Oh, I saw--my father reported that my eyes were bulging; but I shook my head stubbornly and said:

"I ain't a-goin' to tell you because you're laughin' at me. I seen lots an' lots of men killed there. They nailed 'em up, an' it took a long time. I seen--but I ain't a-goin' to tell. I don't tell lies. You ask dad an' ma if I tell lies. He'd whale the stuffin' out of me if I did. Ask 'm."

And thereat not another word could the missionary get from me, even though he baited me with more photographs that sent my head whirling with a rush of memory-pictures and that urged and tickled my tongue with spates of speech which I sullenly resisted and overcame.

"He will certainly make a good Bible scholar," the missionary told father and mother after I had kissed them good-night and departed for bed. "Or else, with that imagination, he'll become a successful fiction-writer."

Which shows how prophecy can go agley. I sit here in Murderers' Row,

writing these lines in my last days, or, rather, in Darrell Standing's last days ere they take him out and try to thrust him into the dark at the end of a rope, and I smile to myself. I became neither Bible scholar nor novelist. On the contrary, until they buried me in the cells of silence for half a decade, I was everything that the missionary forecasted not--an agricultural expert, a professor of agronomy, a specialist in the science of the elimination of waste motion, a master of farm efficiency, a precise laboratory scientist where precision and adherence to microscopic fact are absolute requirements.

And I sit here in the warm afternoon, in Murderers' Row, and cease from the writing of my memoirs to listen to the soothing buzz of flies in the drowsy air, and catch phrases of a low-voiced conversation between Josephus Jackson, the negro murderer on my right, and Bambeccio, the Italian murderer on my left, who are discussing, through grated door to grated door, back and forth past my grated door, the antiseptic virtues and excellences of chewing tobacco for flesh wounds.

And in my suspended hand I hold my fountain pen, and as I remember that other hands of me, in long gone ages, wielded ink-brush, and quill, and stylus, I also find thought-space in time to wonder if that missionary, when he was a little lad, ever trailed clouds of glory and glimpsed the brightness of old star-roving days.

Well, back to solitary, after I had learned the code of knuckle-talk and still found the hours of consciousness too long to endure. By

self-hypnosis, which I began successfully to practise, I became able to put my conscious mind to sleep and to awaken and loose my subconscious mind. But the latter was an undisciplined and lawless thing. It wandered through all nightmarish madness, without coherence, without continuity of scene, event, or person.

My method of mechanical hypnosis was the soul of simplicity. Sitting with folded legs on my straw-mattress, I gazed fixedly at a fragment of bright straw which I had attached to the wall of my cell near the door where the most light was. I gazed at the bright point, with my eyes close to it, and tilted upward till they strained to see. At the same time I relaxed all the will of me and gave myself to the swaying dizziness that always eventually came to me. And when I felt myself sway out of balance backward, I closed my eyes and permitted myself to fall supine and unconscious on the mattress.

And then, for half-an-hour, ten minutes, or as long as an hour or so, I would wander erratically and foolishly through the stored memories of my eternal recurrence on earth. But times and places shifted too swiftly. I knew afterward, when I awoke, that I, Darrell Standing, was the linking personality that connected all bizarreness and grotesqueness. But that was all. I could never live out completely one full experience, one point of consciousness in time and space. My dreams, if dreams they may be called, were rhymeless and reasonless.

Thus, as a sample of my roving: in a single interval of fifteen minutes

of subconsciousness I have crawled and bellowed in the slime of the primeval world and sat beside Haas--further and cleaved the twentieth century air in a gas-driven monoplane. Awake, I remembered that I, Darrell Standing, in the flesh, during the year preceding my incarceration in San Quentin, had flown with Haas further over the Pacific at Santa Monica. Awake, I did not remember the crawling and the bellowing in the ancient slime. Nevertheless, awake, I reasoned that somehow I had remembered that early adventure in the slime, and that it was a verity of long-previous experience, when I was not yet Darrell Standing but somebody else, or something else that crawled and bellowed. One experience was merely more remote than the other. Both experiences were equally real--or else how did I remember them?

Oh, what a fluttering of luminous images and actions! In a few short minutes of loosed subconsciousness I have sat in the halls of kings, above the salt and below the salt, been fool and jester, man-at-arms, clerk and monk; and I have been ruler above all at the head of the table--temporal power in my own sword arm, in the thickness of my castle walls, and the numbers of my fighting men; spiritual power likewise mine by token of the fact that cowed priests and fat abbots sat beneath me and swigged my wine and swined my meat.

I have worn the iron collar of the serf about my neck in cold climes; and I have loved princesses of royal houses in the tropic-warmed and sun-scented night, where black slaves fanned the sultry air with fans of peacock plumes, while from afar, across the palm and fountains, drifted

the roaring of lions and the cries of jackals. I have crouched in chill desert places warming my hands at fires builded of camel's dung; and I have lain in the meagre shade of sun-parched sage-brush by dry water-holes and yearned dry-tongued for water, while about me, dismembered and scattered in the alkali, were the bones of men and beasts who had yearned and died.

I have been sea-cuny and bravo, scholar and recluse. I have pored over hand-written pages of huge and musty tomes in the scholastic quietude and twilight of cliff-perched monasteries, while beneath on the lesser slopes, peasants still toiled beyond the end of day among the vines and olives and drove in from pastures the blatting goats and lowing kine; yes, and I have led shouting rabbles down the wheel-worn, chariot-rutted paves of ancient and forgotten cities; and, solemn-voiced and grave as death, I have enunciated the law, stated the gravity of the infraction, and imposed the due death on men, who, like Darrell Standing in Folsom Prison, had broken the law.

Aloft, at giddy mastheads oscillating above the decks of ships, I have gazed on sun-flashed water where coral-growths iridesced from profounds of turquoise deeps, and conned the ships into the safety of mirrored lagoons where the anchors rumbled down close to palm-fronded beaches of sea-pounded coral rock; and I have striven on forgotten battlefields of the elder days, when the sun went down on slaughter that did not cease and that continued through the night-hours with the stars shining down and with a cool night wind blowing from distant peaks of snow that failed

to chill the sweat of battle; and again, I have been little Darrell Standing, bare-footed in the dew-lush grass of spring on the Minnesota farm, chilblained when of frosty mornings I fed the cattle in their breath-steaming stalls, sobered to fear and awe of the splendour and terror of God when I sat on Sundays under the rant and preachment of the New Jerusalem and the agonies of hell-fire.

Now, the foregoing were the glimpses and glimmerings that came to me, when, in Cell One of Solitary in San Quentin, I stared myself unconscious by means of a particle of bright, light-radiating straw. How did these things come to me? Surely I could not have manufactured them out of nothing inside my pent walls any more than could I have manufactured out of nothing the thirty-five pounds of dynamite so ruthlessly demanded of me by Captain Jamie, Warden Atherton, and the Prison Board of Directors.

I am Darrell Standing, born and raised on a quarter section of land in Minnesota, erstwhile professor of agronomy, a prisoner incorrigible in San Quentin, and at present a death-sentenced man in Folsom. I do not know, of Darrell Standing's experience, these things of which I write and which I have dug from out my store-houses of subconsciousness. I, Darrell Standing, born in Minnesota and soon to die by the rope in California, surely never loved daughters of kings in the courts of kings; nor fought cutlass to cutlass on the swaying decks of ships; nor drowned in the spirit-rooms of ships, guzzling raw liquor to the wassail-shouting and death-singing of seamen, while the ship lifted and crashed on the black-toothed rocks and the water bubbled overhead, beneath, and all

about.

Such things are not of Darrell Standing's experience in the world. Yet I, Darrell Standing, found these things within myself in solitary in San Quentin by means of mechanical self-hypnosis. No more were these experiences Darrell Standing's than was the word "Samaria" Darrell Standing's when it leapt to his child lips at sight of a photograph.

One cannot make anything out of nothing. In solitary I could not so make thirty-five pounds of dynamite. Nor in solitary, out of nothing in Darrell Standing's experience, could I make these wide, far visions of time and space. These things were in the content of my mind, and in my mind I was just beginning to learn my way about.