

# THE PSYCHIATRIST'S NIGHTMARE

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On returning from Parliament where I am employed as consulting psychiatrist, I saw a figure so haggard that I at first took it for one of my own patients. Closer inspection, however, revealed that it was the famous agriculturalist, William Potter, who has so long been missing.

Seeing me, he seized my hand. "Madam," he said, "I have some important information for the Prime Minister. Let me give it to you who have readier access to him."

"Well," said I, "you must be quick. For I plan to devote this evening to the indescribably important and arduous duty of inducing psychosis in a rat. Besides, I am compelled by my Trade Union to charge you a guinea a minute."

"In truth," said Dr. Potter, "I care nothing for rats or guineas."

Seeing he was mad, I switched on the tape recorder and recorded the following statement:

Whenever possible I escape from my post as agriculturalist where it is my hopeless task to discover a way of providing sufficient food for the World's millions. I always spend my holidays in a distant country in the East where I search for a rare and delicious blend of tea, made as an offering to a local goddess. She, like most of those deities served by honest priests, has never been known to accept the offerings of the pious. Nevertheless, in spite of fantastic offers from Twinings and Earl Grey the tea cannot be bought.

But I had the good fortune to enter the country when the Emperor's only son, a boy of five, was suffering from chicken-pox. As I never travel without a bottle of eau-de-cologne, I immediately offered it to His Highness' despairing doctors. It alone relieved the intolerable itch from which the young Prince suffered. The Emperor, a scholarly man, whose life had been made hideous by the complaints of his heir, offered me in consequence, with that generosity which is, alas, nowadays too rare among monarchs, anything in his empire.

After a courteous debate I mentioned my desire for a pound of the sacred tea.

On hearing this request the Emperor turned pale, and though he maintained that immobility of feature which is the hall-mark of the aristocrat, I could not but perceive that my request had displeased him.

I must confess that a tremor of fear afflicted me, for these potentates, with that lack of self-control which people like you and me deplore, think nothing of beheading or otherwise seriously injuring anyone who has offended them.

Remembering, however, that these days such things may not be done with impunity to anyone of our species or at least of our race, I remarked that the Commander of one of Her Majesty's warships, who has honoured me with his friendship, would be not unworthy of the divine tea.

The Emperor turned pale and might, I fear, have fainted had I not immediately given him some of the Scotch whisky without which I find it inexpedient to travel.

"Well," said he after the second bottle, "as the Goddess deems the tea unworthy of Her own consumption and since we cannot break our Royal Word, I will give you not one but two pounds. It is devoutly to be hoped, however, that the Commander will not put out to sea since this tea is best consumed at home."

With these words he clapped his hands and the resulting servant brought me a quantity of the tea, from which I weighed out on the bathroom scales with which I always travel, precisely two pounds.

"May I suggest," said I, "that you offer some of this to the Goddess?" And I handed the Emperor a case of Scotch. (I have since learnt that She accepted this offering.)

I will not bore you with my later adventures. Suffice it to say, I survived. On arriving Home I found that the Commander was already at sea, so I could not resist tasting the tea alone. After only one sip, the Goddess appeared to me and said, "I am here to obey your least command."

I had frequently despised those who made this sort of remark when, as a child, I read of them in fairy tales, for I had there learnt that it is almost always fraudulent. But it seemed foolish not to accept so I said, "I would like Helen of Troy to be my wife."

"A lot of men have asked for her," said the Goddess, "but I will arrange it for you."

"Please understand, Divinity," said I, for I knew from my youthful studies that these beings are even quicker than lawyers to take the letter, instead of the spirit, of their orders, "that I wish to have the said Helen all to myself or not at all."

"Oh you will," She said, "do you want anything else?"

"I would like to own Kew Gardens," I said.

"Yes?" said She, in the bored tones of a grocer's assistant taking an order.

Well, I requested all the joys I wanted and everything was given to me. Then the Goddess said, "I am leaving you now, but if you ever want me just take another sip of my tea." With which She vanished.

For two years I have enjoyed utter bliss. Helen has loved me, Kew has become even more beautiful under my proprietorship, and, thanks to my rule the World has been at peace.

Now I know you regard this as a drug addict's delusion. I admit it. The point is that, only through this delusion can one enjoy all one's desires without depriving other people of theirs. Besides, when one lives in a dream, one can do with so little food that the World's supply would be ample for the World's population, were it composed of addicts like me. Particularly as the birth rate would drop. I have written to the Emperor who has replied that the tea can easily be grown and, in return for another case of Scotch, has agreed to supply the West with seeds so that, though we may not all be rich, each of us can enjoy all that money could buy.

With these words Dr. Potter broke off, and gazed expectantly at me.

"Wretched man!" I cried, "not only are you a drug addict, but you wish to reduce the whole of Mankind to a similar state."

"I came to you," he said sadly, "for I thought that you alone would accept my findings with scientific courage since I know you have taken as your motto those splendid lines from Tennyson's poem 'Ulysses'—'To follow knowledge like a sinking star, Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.'"

"That," said I, "was in my youth when I believed that the ultimate truth could only be pleasant. Since then I have taken another poet as my mentor and believe with him that, 'Tis folly to be wise.'"

"Well," said Dr. Potter, plugging in the electric kettle I keep in my drawing room, "drugs go well enough with that outlook too. Let me give you a drop of the tea and you will see now delightful the dreams are which it produces."

"I would never be content with mere dreams," said I.

"How do you know you're not dreaming now?" the absurd man countered. "Anyway the alternative is death, either from War or Famine."

"As for that," I said, "there's enough food for us, and I happen to know that our Air Force is flying over certain hostile countries today, to remind them how unwise it would be to attack us."

And I turned on the television so that Dr. Potter might share this

spectacle. But, on turning back, I saw that he had already taken some of his tea and fallen into a drugged sleep, with an expression of utter bliss on his face. I, preferring to find happiness in the reality of our armed forces, turned back to the television. The aeroplanes (even more advanced in design than I had realized) were already on their way back. In fact, as I write this they must just have passed overh ...