

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer George
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Storm Casanova Lessing Langbein Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Tersteegen Gilm Grillparzer Georgy
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Strachwitz Bellamy Schilling Raabe Gibbon Tschchow
Katharina II. von Rußland Gerstäcker Raabe Gibbon Tschchow
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Wilde Gleim Vulpius
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Morgenstern Goedicke
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Kleist Mörike Musil
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
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Marx Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz
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The Substance of a Dream

F. W. (Francis William) Bain

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Author: F. W. (Francis William) Bain
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**THE
SUBSTANCE OF A DREAM**

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT

by

F. W. BAIN

*Mix, with sunset's fleeting glow, Kiss of friend, and stab of
foe, Ooze of moon, and foam of brine, Noose of Thug, and creeper's
twine, Hottest flame, and coldest ash, Priceless gems, and poorest
trash; Throw away the solid part, And behold – a woman's heart.*

Nidrādarpana

DEDICATED

to

THE INEXPRESSIBLY GENTLE GENIUS

of

MY OWN MOTHER

INTRODUCTION

I could almost persuade myself, that others will like this little fable as much as I do: so curiously simple, and yet so strangely profound is its delicate epitome of the old old story, the course of true love, which never did run smooth.

And since so many people have asked me questions as to the origin of these stories, I will say a word on the point here. Where do they come from? I do not know. I discovered only the other day that some believe them to have been written by a woman. That appears to me to be improbable. But who writes them? I cannot tell. They come to me, one by one, suddenly, like a flash of lightning, all together: I see them in the air before me, like a little Bayeux tapestry, complete, from end to end, and write them down, hardly lifting the pen from the paper, straight off "from the MS." I never know, the day before, when one is coming; it[viii] arrives, as if shot out of a pistol. Who can tell? They may be all but so many reminiscences of a former birth.

The *Substance of a Dream* is half a love-story, and half a fairy tale: as indeed every love-story is a fairy tale. Because, although that unaccountable mystery, the mutual attraction of the sexes, is the very essence of life, and everything else merely accidental or accessory, yet only too often in the jostle of the world, in the trough and tossing of the waves of time, the accidental smothers the essential, and life turns into a commonplace instead of a romance. And so, like every other story, this little story will perhaps be very differently judged, according to the reader's sex. The bearded critic will see it with eyes very different from those with which it may be viewed by the fair voter with no beard upon her chin; for women, as the great god says at the end, have scant mercy on their own sex, and the heroine of the story is a strange heroine, an enigmatical Mona Lisa, so to say, who will not appeal to everybody so strongly as she does to the Moony-crested Deity, when he sums her up at the close. I venture, with humility, to concur in the opinion of the Deity, for she holds me under the same spell as her innumerable other lovers. The reader, a more formidable authority even[ix] than the god, must decide: only I must warn him that to understand, he must go to the very end. He will not think his time wasted, if he take half the de-

light in reading, as I did, in transcribing, the evidence in the case. Only, moreover, when he closes the book will he appreciate the mingled exactitude and beauty of its name: for no story ever had a name which fitted it with such curious precision as this one. For the essence of a dream is always that along with its weird beauty, it counters expectation, often in such queer, ludicrous, kaleidoscopic ways. So it is, here.

Many bitter things, since the beginning, have men said of women, though neither so many nor so bitter, as the witty Frenchman cynically remarks, as the things women have said of one another. Poor Eve has paid very dear for that apple: the only wonder is, that she was not made responsible also for the Flood: but we have not got the whole of that story: Noah's wife may have dropped some incriminating documents into the water, for the Higher Criticism to unearth by and by: the Eternal Feminine may have had a hand in it after all, as she is generally to be found somewhere behind the scenes, wherever mischief brews for mortal man. She comes down the ages, loaded with accusations; and yet,[x] somehow or other, they do not seem to have done her much harm. And the reason is, that she possesses, in supreme perfection, the art of disarming her antagonist, having been very cunningly constructed by the Creator for that very purpose: she is like a cork; she will not drown, under any flood of charges: she floats, *quand même*: (two words that she might very well take, like the inimitable Sarah, for her motto:) so that, be as angry as you please with her, you generally find yourself not only unable to condemn her, but even ready to beg her pardon, and rather glad, on the whole, to get it. It is a hopeless case. And all the more, because no woman ever lived, bad or good, who could be got to understand what is meant by "playing cricket": you cannot make her keep the rules in any game: she plays to win, like a German, and invariably cheats, if she can: international law counts, only as long as it is for and not against her: if you find her out, and scold her, she pouts, and will not play. And then, if, as is commonly the situation, you want her to play, very badly, what are you to do? Yes, it is a hopeless case.

And yet, if we look into the matter with that stern impartiality which its public importance demands, we may perceive, that though there is, it must be candidly[xi] owned, an element of truth

in the charges brought against her, they are founded, for all that, largely on misunderstanding. It is man himself, her accuser, who is very nearly always to blame. His intelligence as compared with her own, is clumsy: (it is the difference between the dog and the cat:) he does not realise the unfathomable gulf that divides her nature from his own, and for lack of imaginative tact, judging her by himself, he enormously overestimates the part played by reason in her behaviour. Hence when, as she is always doing, she lets him down, he breaks out, (obtusely) into denunciation and reproach, taking it for granted, that what she did, she did, deliberately. But that is his mistake. Women never act by deliberation, least of all in their relations with men. Reason has hardly anything to do with it. A woman is a weapon, designed by the Creator, who generally knows what he is doing, to fascinate the other sex: that is her essence and her *raison d'être*: the woman who does not do it is a failure, and she is Nature's triumph and entelechy, who does it best. And this every woman knows, by instinct, and feels, long before she knows it, almost as soon as she can stand upon her feet: consequently, no artificially elaborated compliment, no calculated flattery, ever touches her so near, as it does, when she perceives that[xii] her personality *tells*, acts like a charm, on any given man: a point about which no woman ever blunders, as a man often so ridiculously does about himself: she invariably detects, by unerring instinct, when her arrow hits its mark. And this involuntary homage she finds so irresistibly delectable, going as it does down to the very depths of her being, and endorsing it, that she literally *cannot* deny herself the pleasure of basking in it, making hay, so to say, while her sun shines, revelling in the consciousness of her power all the more delicious because she knows only too well that she must lose it later on, as youth flies: old age, *i.e.* the loss of her charm, being every woman's ogre, the skeleton in her cupboard, which she dreads far more than death, just as the only disease which she shudders to face is the smallpox, for a similar reason. And so, when she finds her spell working, she lets herself go: never dreaming what interpretation her victim puts on her behaviour: and then, all at once, she awakes to discover with what fire she was ignorantly playing. And then it is, that she recoils, on the verge: and then it is, that thwarted in the very moment that he deemed triumph secured, the baffled lover falls into fury and abuse, because he imagines her to have been all along clearly aware

of what she was about, which is exactly what hardly one[xiii] woman in a million does. Not being a man, she does not understand: her end is only his beginning: his object is possession, still to come: hers is already gained in the form of the tribute to her charm: she was only playing (every woman is a child), he was in deadly earnest, and took her purely instinctive self-congratulation for a promise deliberately made. Suddenly illuminated, she lets him down abruptly with a bump, all the harder that she never meant to do it (the *coquette* does: but she is a horrible professional, methodising feminine instinct, for prey: a psychological ghoul, feeding on souls instead of bodies, and deserving extermination without benefit of clergy). The real crime of woman is not so much a crime as a defect: she is weak, as all the sages know, and all languages prove, though "democracy" ignores it; it is her strength, and half her charm, that she cannot stand alone, like a creeper. But that is why you cannot depend on her, good or bad. Irresolution is her essence: she will "determine" one way, and act in another, according to the pressure. Instinct, inclination or aversion, vanity, emotion, pity or fear, or even mere chance: these are her motives, the forces that move her: reason counts with her for absolutely nothing, a thing like arithmetic, useful, even indispensable, but only for adding up a grocer's bill, or catching a train.[xiv] It has literally nothing to do with her heart. There is no folly like the folly of supposing that it has: yet on this folly rest most of the accusations against her. Reduce her to a rational being, and you degrade her to the level of an inferior man. But she is not his inferior: she is his dream, his magnet, his force, his inspiration, and his fate. Take her away, and you annihilate him: Othello's occupation's gone. Nine-tenths of the great things done in the world have been done for a woman. Why? Exactly because she would burn down a street to boil her baby's milk. No rational being would do that: but we all owe our lives to it.

And hence, misogyny is only a pique. To fall foul of the sea, like Xerxes, when it wrecks your ambitions, is to behave as he did, like a spoiled child, without the child's excuse. "If you burn your fingers, is the flame to blame?" You should have known better. When Aristotle was reproved, by some early political economist, for giving alms to a beggar, he replied: I gave not to the man, but humanity. Admirable retort! which is exactly in point here. When she required

your homage with such encouraging smiles, it was not *you* but the man in you, that appealed to her. And because you are *a* man, are you necessarily *the* man? Not at all. And argument is mere waste of time: reason is not the court of appeal.[xv] *If of herself she will not love, nothing can make her.* Yet why draw the poet's ungallant conclusion? Why should *the devil take her*? Because she was weak (were *you* not weak?) is she therefore to be damned beyond redemption? Because flattery was sweet, must she give herself away to every male animal that confesses the spell? Surely that is not only harsh, but preposterous, even outrageous. Are you sure that your merit is worthy of such generosity?

And yet, here is the human catastrophe. Why did the Creator scatter his sexual attraction so anomalously that it is so rarely reciprocated, each lover pursuing so often another who flies him for a third, as in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, an imbroglio oddly enough found in a little poem identical in the Greek Moschus and the Hindoo Bhartrihari? Was it blunder or design? Why could he not have made action and reaction equal and opposite, as they are in mechanics? For if affection could not operate at all, unless it was mutual, there would be no unhappy, because ill-assorted, marriages. What a difference it would have made! Had mutual gravitation been the law of the sexes, as it is of the spheres, this Earth would never have stood in need of a Heaven, since it would have existed already: for the only earthly heaven is a happy marriage. As it is, even[xvi] when it is not a Hell, a marriage is only too often but an everlasting sigh.

And not marriage only, but life. For here lies the solution of a mystery that has baffled the sages, who have failed to discover it chiefly because they have blinded themselves by their own theological and philosophical delusions, idealism and monotheism. Why is it, that gazing at Nature's inexhaustible beauty, thrown at us with such lavish profusion in her dawns and her sunsets, her shadows and her moods, in the roar of her breakers and the silence of her snows, the gloom of her thunder and the spirit of her hills, the blue of her distance and the tints of her autumns, the glory of her blossom and the dignity of her decay, her heights and her abysses, her fury and her peace—why is it, that as we gaze insatiably at these never ending miracles, we are haunted by so unaccountable a sad-

ness, which is not in the things themselves, for Nature never mourns, but in some element that we ourselves import? For if the Soul be only Nature's mirror, her looking-glass, whence the melancholy? It is because beneath our surface consciousness, far away down below, in the dark organic depths that underlie it, we feel without clearly understanding that, as the Hindoos put it, we have missed the fruit of our exist[xvii]ence, owing to our never having found our other half. For every one of us, so far from being a self-sufficient whole, an independent unity, is incomplete, requiring for its metaphysical satisfaction, its complement, apart from which it never can attain that peace which passeth all understanding, for which it longs obscurely, and must ever be uneasy, till it finds it. For just as no misfortunes whatever can avail to mar the bliss of the man who has beside him the absolute sympathy of his feminine ideal, so on the other hand no worldly success of any kind can compensate for its absence. All particular causes of happiness or misery are swallowed up and sink into insignificance and nullity compared with this: this present, they disappear: this absent, each alone is sufficient to wreck the soul, fluttering about without rudder or ballast on the waves of the world. Duality is the root, out of which alone, for mortals, happiness can spring. And the old Hindoo mythology, which is far deeper in its simplicity than the later idealistic pessimism, expresses this beautifully by giving to every god his other half; the supreme instance of which dualism is the divine Pair, the Moony-crested god and his inseparable other half, the Daughter of the Snow: so organically symbolised that they coalesce indistinguishably into one: the *Arddanári*, the Being half Male half Female, He whose left half[xviii] is his wife. That is the true ideal: cut in two, and destroyed, by the dismal inhuman monotheism of later sophistical speculation.

It was long before I understood this: the solution came to me suddenly, of its own accord, as all profound solutions always come, apparently by accident: like a "fluke" in a game of skill, where often unskilfulness unintentionally does something that could not be achieved by any degree of skill whatever, short of the divine.[1] And the two things that combined to produce my spark of illumination were, as it so fell out, the two things that mean most to me, a sunset and a child. The child was looking at the sunset, and I was

looking at the child. Some readers of these stories have been introduced to her before, and will be obliged to me for renewing the acquaintance, as they would be to the postman who brought them news of an old friend.

The sunset was like every other sunset, the garment of a dying deity, and a gift of god: but it had a special peculiarity of its own, and it was this strange peculiarity that arrested the attention of the child. For children are little animals, *terram spectantia*, taking sunsets and [xix]other commonplaces such as mother, father, home, furniture and carpets, generally for granted, being as a rule absorbed in the great things of life, that is, play. This child was very diligently blowing bubbles, occasionally turning aside up a by-path to make a bubble-pudding in the soap-dish: the ruckling noise of this operation possessing some magical fascination for all childhood. And in the meanwhile, yellow dusk was gradually deepening in the quiet air. Presently the tired sun sank like a weight, red-hot, burning his way down through filmy layers of Indian ink. The day had been rainy, but the clouds had all dissolved imperceptibly away into a broken chain of veils of mist, which looked with the sun behind them like dropping showers of liquid gold, or copper-coloured waterfalls: while underneath or through them the lines of low blue hills showed now half obscured, now clear and sharp in outline as if cut with scissors out of paper and stuck upon the amber background of the sky. And then came the miracle. Right across the horizon, a little higher than the sun, a long thin bar of cloud suddenly changed colour, becoming rich dark purple, and all along its jagged upper edge the light shot out in one continuous sheet of bright glory to the zenith, while below there poured from the bar a long cascade, a very Niagara of golden mist and rain, as[xx] if the flood-gates of some celestial dam had suddenly given way, and all the precious stuff were escaping in a cataract through the rift, in one gigantic plunge, to be lost for ever in some bottomless abyss.

Suddenly, the dead silence struck me: my ear missed the "ruckle," and the occasional exclamations of delight. I turned abruptly, and glanced at the child. She was standing still as a stone, with one hand just in front of her holding the forgotten pipe, arrested on the way to her mouth, as the heavenly vision struck her: rapt, lost in her eyes, which were filled with wonder to the brim, open-mouthed,

entranced, with a smile on her lips of which she was totally unconscious, faint, involuntary, seraphic, indescribable. The ecstasy of union had swallowed her: she was gone. I called her by her name: she never heard: her soul was away at the golden gates.

And I said to myself, as I gazed at her with intense curiosity, mixed with regret that I was not Raffael, so marvellous was the picture: This, this is the wisdom of the sages, the secret of Plotinus and the Buddhists: this is Nirwána, Moksha, Yoga, the unattainable ecstasy of bliss, the absolute fruition, which men call by many names: the end towards which the adult strives, in vain, to recover what he lost by ceasing to be a child: a child, which is sexless, knowing as yet nothing of the esoteric[xxi] dissatisfaction of the soul that wants and has not found. Aye! to reach the mystic union, the absolute extinction of the Knower in the All; to lose one's Self in Infinity, without a remnant of regret; to attain to the unattainable, the point of self-annihilation where all distinction between subject and object, something and nothing, disappears, it is necessary to be a child: to be born again. *Rebirth!* the key to the enigma of unhappiness lies there!

And after a while, as I watched her, she came back to herself. Our eyes met: and she looked at me long, with a far-off expression that I could not define. And at last, she gave a little sigh. Daddy, she said, why does the golden rain never fall here? Our rain is always only common rain.

And I said solemnly: Little girls are the reason why. But she didn't understand. She looked at me reproachfully with puzzled eyes – such great, grey, beautiful, sea-green eyes! – and then drew a long breath. And she went back to her bubbles, and together we watched them go as they floated away into the valley, wild with excitement as to whether my bubble or her bubble would go farthest before it burst – till the Rhadamanthine summons came, and the Bubble-Blower went to bed.

Poona, 1919.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] *O quantum est subitis casibus ingenium!* an exquisite line of Martial which ought to be posted on a board on every putting-green.

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The Vignette I owe to the artistic genius of my friend, Arthur Hight.

I

On the Banks of Ganges

BENEDICTION

What! the Digit of the Moon on his brow, Gangá in his hair, and Gaurí on his knee, and yet proof against all Love's arrows! O wonder of wonders! who but the greatest of all the gods would not have melted long ago, like butter between three fires?[2]

Now, long ago, it happened, that Párvatí was left alone on Kailàs for a little while, as she waited for the Lord of the Moony Tire. And having nothing else to do, she amused herself by building an elephant of snow, with large ears and a little tail, made of a yak's hair. And when it was finished, she was so delighted with her toy, [4]that she began to clap her hands: and then, not being able to endure waiting, she went off with impatience to fetch the Moony-crested god, to show him what she had done, and revel in his applause. And the moment that her back was turned, Nandi[3] happened to come along: and just as he reached the elephant, which owing to his abstraction he never noticed, taking it for a mere hump, formed at random by the snowdrifts, he was suddenly seized with an irresistible desire to roll. And so, over he rolled, and went from side to side, throwing up his legs into the air. And as luck would have it, exactly at that very moment the Daughter of the Snow returned, pulling Maheshwara along eagerly by the hand. And she looked and saw Nandi, rolling about on the flat snow just where she had left her elephant, which was gone. And she uttered a loud cry, and stood, aghast with rage and disappointment. And she opened her mouth to curse the author of the mischief, and was on the very verge of saying: Sink into a lower birth, thou insolent destroyer! when Maheshwara stopped her in the very act, guessing her intention, by putting his hand upon her mouth.[4] And he exclaimed: Say nothing rash, O angry one, for Nandi did not do it on purpose, after all. And a good servant does not deserve cursing, for an accidental blunder.

[5]

And then, Párvatí burst into tears. And she exclaimed: Out of my sight, thou clumsy one! for I cannot bear to see thee. And she turned away, sobbing. And Maheshwara looked at her out of the corner of his eye, and he said to himself: Now, then, I must do something to console her for the elephant, and bring back her good humour. For ill humour in a woman spoils all. And presently he said: Come now, enough! for Nandi has gone off in disgrace, sufficiently punished by banishment for a time, and very sad to have been the unwitting cause of thy distress. And let us roam about awhile, in search of something new, that may help to obliterate recollection, and change thy gloom into a smile.

And he took the goddess in his arms, and set her as she sobbed upon his knee, and rose from the peak of Kailàs, and shot like a falling star down into the plain below. And coming to Haradwára, where Gangá issues from the hills, he began to follow the holy stream down its course, gliding along just above it like a cloud that was unable to refrain from watching its own beautiful reflection in the blue mirror of her wave. And so they went, until at last they reached an island that was nothing but a sandbank in the very middle of the river, covered with crocodiles lying basking in the sun. And then he said: See! we will go down, and rest awhile among the crocodiles on this sand, whose banks resemble nothing so much as the outline of thy own graceful limbs. And Umá said tearfully: Pish! what do I care for crocodiles, that sit for hours never even moving, like a *yogí* in a trance?[6]

Then said the cunning god: None the less, we will go down: for it may be that the island contains something besides its crocodiles. And as they settled on it, he said again: Did I not say we should find something? for yonder it lies, and it is a very great curiosity indeed. And now, canst thou tell me what it is?

And she looked at it with scrutiny, and presently she said: I can tell this only, that it must have been in the water for a very long time, before it was washed up at last upon this bank by the river's flood: since it is but a shapeless lump, covered with sand and rust and dirt. Who but thyself could even guess what it might be? And Maheshwara said: It has had a very long journey, and been not only in the river, but in a crocodile too. For crocodiles swallow every-