

Vehicle of Imagination

by W. A. Myers Robinson

MOST people do a little day-dreaming but would probably disapprove if their wandering thoughts were described under that label. Whether we describe it as day-dreaming or imagination it is a practice which should not be condemned but disciplined. Obviously, to allow it to function when our minds should be concentrating on matters more relevant [sic] to our duties, would drain our energies required for more needful issues.

What useful purpose is served then to condone a liberal latitude for our imagination? The indulgence in this abstraction when mental conceptions are formed needs defining and harnessing. Imagination is the ability to recall images and elements of our past experiences and weave our wandering thoughts into patterns and pictures for the enrichment of life.

The sensations I have experienced can only be my own and can never belong to anyone else. When I describe the details of an episode in my life, I actively engage the faculty of my own imagination. Others may try to relate and copiously copy its description but my actual experience can never be theirs.

If I wished to create from my abstract ideas an image that would symbolise, sincerity or honour, it would be conveyed on the vehicle of my imagination. The reproduction of past events is a power well developed in some people and revealed to us by their visual aids. For instance, the artists, musicians, and dramatists who are endowed with a creative temperament use the faculty of imagination to communicate what they have felt but their sensibility can never be mine. I can enjoy a reproduction of their experiences and feelings but the originals are theirs. To develop the faculty of imagination can provide indescribable happiness, untold pleasures, unlimited opportunities.

When I was a boy at school I could not appreciate poetry. The lesson was boredom. Yet, although the humdrum methods applied to the teaching of the subject then may have been responsible for weakness, I still felt there was something about poetry which was there to be understood. I felt it had a purpose but at that time it was hidden from me. As the lines and rhythm of the nursery rhymes in my childhood years had given me a sense of music and imagination, it seemed to disappear in the poetry which I was compelled to learn at the age of twelve or so.

My child mind seemed to question 'What is this going to do for me as I get older?' It was not until after years of maturity that I discovered that there was not only rhyme, rhythm and music in poetry, but by reading it aloud I could form a mental picture of what the poet had tried to convey. Gradually I realised that poetry was something far more deep than the rhyming of words. I discovered poems were expressions and experiences of life conveyed to me on the vehicle of my imagination. Only after several years of training in the technique of meter, stress, phrasing, pauses, pace and pitch could I estimate its value.

[p 262]

Undoubtedly it is the highest form of expression, it reminds us of reality. If poetry does nothing more for us than to awaken and develop a sense of imagination, who knows what the outcome of that may mean to an individual or a nation? If the mental pictures we have formed by harnessing our wandering thoughts become the constructive faculty of the mind, surely then, time spent on imagination is not wasted nor does it deserve denunciation. Indeed our thanks

are due to the inventors, scientists, theologians, playwrights and others who have exercised their gift of imagination. Was it not, for instance, Elias Howe who invented the sewing machine? and we know the thrills, pleasure and economy that ladies have enjoyed by the image of his imagination. Have not the inventors of wireless played a magnificent role in bringing so much happiness into millions of homes? Benjamin Franklin, the American statesman and scientist who after allowing his imagination full sway, turned his attention to electricity and invented the lightning conductor in 1749. Another American inventor, named Samuel Finley Breese Morse produced a telegraph at New York University in 1835 which was half a mile long. The first telegraph message transmitted in 1844 was 'What hath God wrought?' Yet another American inventor, named Thomas Alva Edison, allowed his thoughts to roam to the extent of revolutionising telegraphy. People of our own generation are also aware of the name of Marconi, the Italian inventor, who by his interest in wave transmission, in 1901, communication was established between Cornwall and Newfoundland.

God in his wisdom has used these men and directed their day dreaming, their imagination, for the benefit of mankind. Their thought roaming has not been wasted.

In one of her books, Helen Keller, who was blind from the age of two, once wrote, 'I am moved to pleasure by ineffable beauty which I have never beheld in the physical world. Once in a dream I held in my hand a pearl. I have no memory vision of a real pearl. The one I saw in my dreams must, therefore have been a creation of my imagination.'

Have you ever considered what an important factor imagination is today in the field of advertising? Men not so very old can remember when advertising was in its infancy but now has its place as an engine in the conduct and expansion of many a thriving business. But a moment of imagination was the starting point.

Day dreaming in a child is not so dreadful as some suppose. It may be a pointer to a potential politician, an aspiring artist or benevolent benefactor. It may need discipline in the early years but in maturity deserves appraisal of the development of dormant powers that have become awakened.

It is good exercise to bring our imagination to reproduce past elements of sense experience; whether it be passive, active or creative.