

PIONEER OF INNER SPACE

which hasheesh unveils: trees were meaningless wood, the clouds a vapory sham. I thirsted for insight, adventure, strange surprises, and mystical discoveries. I took hashish again.¹⁵

It was a pleasant spring afternoon, the kind that were particularly appreciated after the long, mostly overcast Schenectady winter, and which made concentrating on one's studies particularly difficult. Fitz Hugh took a dose just after lunch, and was sitting down to tea at four when "the thrill smote me." Miss McIlvaine, the boarding house matron, was refilling his teacup with the liquid "that cheers but does not inebriate" when her serving arm appeared to travel an extraordinary distance to reach him. The wallpaper became alive with satyrs, Chinese mandarins appeared in the corner of the room, and Fitz Hugh knew it was time to leave. Sam Newbury, one of his new friends at Union, followed him out of the room thinking he was ill. "The look of wild delight with which I greeted him would have revealed my secret even had I not spontaneously imparted it to him."

I besought him to go with me, painting in the most glowing tints the treasures which such a gigantic tour as I had laid out would add to his acquaintance with the grand Kosmos. He consented to become my *compagnon de voyage* for a few hundred miles, at any rate.¹⁶

They set off to walk across a field in the center of the campus, stretching about two hundred yards. This modest meadow grew and transformed before the entranced Fitz Hugh into "a tremendous Asiatic plateau thronged with innumerable Tartars." Fitz Hugh remarked on the tribes of origin of his imagined hordes. It so happened that

Newbury was “a man unexcelled by any of his age that I have ever met for the breadth of his historic, geographical, and political knowledge.” Newbury, though solicitous, was not so sympathetic as Fitz Hugh’s previous guides. He couldn’t let an historical inaccuracy pass unchallenged, even if its source was sheer hallucination. To Sam, Fitz Hugh’s flight of fancy might at least be internally consistent. “It is impossible,” said Sam, “that the tribe of which you speak should occupy this territory through whose boundaries you inform me we are traveling.” Fitz Hugh’s feelings were proportionately sensitive. “Alas! my friend, I see you do not sympathize with me. Let us travel apart.”

Newbury was taken aback but conscientiously followed his wayward friend and soon had appeased Fitz Hugh’s expanded pride. After a long but pleasant journey, the pair reached their dormitory. Newbury was not so intrigued or worried by Fitz Hugh’s state of mind that he did not ask to be excused from further adventure. Fitz Hugh, in a more lucid state that came upon him as often as twice an hour during his hashish sojourns, asked Newbury to convey him to another friend, Sid Norton. Norton was appraised of Fitz Hugh’s condition, and agreed to take over the duty of chaperone. These two set off from dorm out the back way where a “very large domain of woods and fields extends to the east.”

Our way skirted the banks of a little stream, which, tinkling over its rocky bed, makes music through all those shades from boundary to boundary. Coming to a convenient place, we crossed it on broad stepping-stones a pebble’s throw from a low waterfall, which, higher up the bed, was now swollen by recent rains. An instantaneous dart of exultation shot through me. Could it be possible?

“The Nile! The Nile! the eternal Nile!”¹⁷

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Turning to Norton, he continued, “Companion of my journey, see you yonder cataract? (Remember this stream is about ten feet wide, and this cataract may have been as much as two feet high.) Above it lie the sources. Out of that gleaming chasm which you behold toward the east, this mystery-veiled river has poured his floods since God first awakened the years.”



THE HANS GROOT KILL RUNS THROUGH THE UNION COLLEGE CAMPUS. UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF HASHISH, LUDLOW EXPERIENCED HIMSELF CROSSING “THE ETERNAL NILE!”

Leaving the cradle of civilization, the pair passed by two students reciting Shakespeare to each other. As Sid steered him clear of the unwitting students, Fitz Hugh overheard one say “with this farewell, I’m on my way to Padua.” With these simple words, Fitz Hugh was transported from

Africa to Italy. In fact, he would later note that by picturing some exotic locale prior to eating the hashish, he could program himself to visit that place while under the influence. This suggestibility was operative during the experience as well. It might be noted that, years later, Dr. Timothy Leary, Dr. Norman Zinberg and other researchers in psychedelic drugs elucidated the doctrine of “set and setting” as a way to guide drug induced states of consciousness for therapeutic reasons.¹⁸

While strolling through a broad piazza, surrounded by works of Art, Fitz Hugh was once again elevated to the feeling of immense pride in his own superhuman powers. Moreover:

I was invested with a grand mission to humanity, and slowly it dawned upon me that I was the Christ, come in the power and radiance of his millennial descent, and bearing to the world the restoration of perfect peace. I spoke, and it was done: with a single sentence I regenerated the Creation.¹⁹

This mission accomplished, Fitz Hugh fortunately passed out of this identity as the hashish influence began to wane. Returning to the college, a more humble but equally fanciful phenomenon presented itself. As he joined a group of his friends, he saw their faces take on the appearance of objects symbolizing their personality. One friend was a noted whist player, and his face changed to a fan-like display of playing cards. Another, known for his studious habits, became “a book-case bristling with encyclopaedias.” Fitz Hugh was so amused by the latter that he couldn’t help trying to pluck out one volume, and found himself pulling the man’s nose.