

THE FAR CONTINENTS OF THE MIND

ALDOUS HUXLEY (U. S. A.)

It is difficult to speak of mental events except in similes drawn from the familiar universe of material things. A man may be said to consist of an Old World of personal consciousness, and, on the other side of a dividing ocean, of a series of New Worlds. These New Worlds of a subconscious can never be colonized, are seldom thoroughly explored, and in many cases await even discovery. As in this earth, if you go to the antipodes of the self-conscious personality, you will encounter all sorts of creatures at least as odd as kangaroos. We do not, in either case, invent these creatures. They live independently, and beyond our control. But we may go where they are, and observe them. They exist "out there" in the mental equivalent of distant space. From "in here" we can sometimes watch them as they go about their mysterious business.

Some never consciously discover their antipodes. Others make an occasional landing. A few others come and go easily at will. For the naturalist of the mind—who must gather his data before we become true zoologists of the mind—the primary need is for some safe, easy, reliable method of transportation between the two Worlds. Two such methods exist. Neither is perfect; both are sufficiently reliable, easy and safe to justify their use by those who know what they do. The first is by use of mescaline, an alkaloid chemical. The second is by means of hypnotism. The two vessels carry consciousness to the same region; the drug has longer range and carries one farther into the *terra incognita*.

As to hypnosis, we do not know how it produces its observed effects. Nor need we know. About the physiological effects of mescaline we know a little. It interferes with the enzyme system regulating cerebral functioning, impairs the brain's efficiency and permits entry into consciousness of certain kinds of mental activity normally excluded as possessing no survival value. We have visions. But they are not random visions. What takes place in them follows patterns as logical internally as are the things seen in the antipodes of the external world. They are strange, but with a certain regularity.

Certain common features are imposed by this pattern upon our visionary experience. First, and most important, is the experience of light. Everything is brilliantly illuminated, shining from within, and a riot of colors is intensified to a pitch unknown in the normal state. (Most normal dreams are either in black and white or only faintly colored.) Color in dream or vision probably represents sight of "something given" as distinguished from the dramatic symbols of our own struggles or wishes, which are usually uncolored. The visions seen in these antipodes of the mind have nothing to do with the dreams of normal sleep, which we ourselves generate. We see them because they are there, but they are not our creations. Such preternatural light is characteristic of all visionary experience.

Along with light, there comes recognition of heightened significance. The self-luminous objects possess a meaning as intense as their color. Here, significance is identical with being: objects do not stand for anything but themselves. Their meaning is precisely this: that they are intensely themselves, and, being so, are manifestations of the essential givenness and otherness of the universe.

Light, color and significance do not exist in isolation. They modify, or are manifested by, objects. Certain classes of perceptual images appear again and again; colored, moving, living geometrical forms which undulate into more concrete perceptions of patterned things, such as

carpets, carvings, mosaics, transmuting continually into other forms in heightened color and grandeur. The observer is cut off from his past; he views a new creation. Much in them is similar to the heavens and fairylands of folklore and religion, the prototype of many Paradises.

But there may be infernal experience as well, as terrible as the other is glorious. In paradisal visions there is a sense of dissociation from self and its body; in infernal visions the consciousness of the body is heightened and continually degraded. This comes when one lacks that faith and loving confidence which alone guarantees that visionary experience shall be blissful. And what takes place in visions may be but a foretaste of what shall come after the moment of death.