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Memories, Dreams, Reflections

C.G. JUNG

MEMORIES, DREAMS, REFLECTIONS

by C. G. Jung

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TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY

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Introduction

He looked at his own Soul
with a Telescope. What seemed
all irregular, he saw and
shewed to be beautiful
Constellations; and he added
to the Consciousness hidden
worlds within worlds.
COLERIDGE, *Notebooks*

THIS BOOK had its inception during the Eranos Conference held in Ascona in the summer of 1956. There the publisher Kurt Wolff, in conversation with friends from Zürich, spoke of his wish to have Pantheon Books of New York publish a biography of Carl Gustav Jung. Dr. Jolande Jacobi, one of C. G. Jung's associates, proposed that the office of biographer be entrusted to me.

All of us were well aware that the task would by no means be an easy one. Jung's distaste for exposing his personal life to the public eye was well known. Indeed, he gave his consent only after a long period of doubt and hesitation. But once he had done so, he allotted to me an entire afternoon once a week for our work together. Considering the press of his regular program of work, and how easily he tired—for even then he was past eighty—that was a great deal of time.

We began in the spring of 1957. It had been proposed that the book be written not as a "biography," but in the form of an "autobiography," with Jung himself as the narrator. This plan determined the form of the book, and my first task consisted solely in asking questions and noting down Jung's replies. Although he was rather reticent at the beginning, he soon warmed

to the work. He began telling about himself, his development, his dreams, and his thoughts with growing interest.

By the end of the year Jung's affirmative attitude toward our joint efforts led to a decisive step. After a period of inner turbulence, long-submerged images out of his childhood rose to the surface of his mind. He sensed their connection with ideas in the works he had written in his old age, but could not grasp it clearly. One morning he informed me that he wanted to set down his recollections of his childhood directly. By this time he had already told me a good many of his earliest memories, but there were still great gaps in the story.

This decision was as gratifying as it was unexpected, for I knew how great a strain writing was for Jung. At his advanced age he would not undertake anything of the sort unless he felt it was a "task" imposed on him from within. Here was evidence that the "autobiography" was justified in terms of Jung's own inner life.

Some time after this new development, I noted down a remark of his: "A book of mine is always a matter of fate. There is something unpredictable about the process of writing, and I cannot prescribe for myself any predetermined course. Thus this 'autobiography' is now taking a direction quite different from what I had imagined at the beginning. It has become a necessity for me to write down my early memories. If I neglect to do so for a single day, unpleasant physical symptoms immediately follow. As soon as I set to work they vanish and my head feels perfectly clear."

In April 1958 Jung finished the three chapters on his childhood, school days, and years at the university. At first he called them, "On the Early Events of My Life." These chapters ended with the completion of his medical studies in 1900.

This, however, was not the sole direct contribution that Jung made to the book. In January 1959 he was at his country house in Bollingen. He devoted every morning to reading chosen chapters of our book, which had meanwhile been hammered into shape. When he returned the chapter, "On Life after Death," he said to me, "Something within me has been touched. A gradient has formed, and I must write." Such was the origin of "Late Thoughts," in which he voiced his deepest and perhaps his most far-reaching convictions.

In the summer of that same year of 1959, likewise in Bollingen, Jung wrote the chapter on Kenya and Uganda. The section on the Pueblo Indians is taken from an unpublished and unfinished manuscript that deals with general questions of the psychology of primitives.

In order to complete the chapters “Sigmund Freud” and “Confrontation with the Unconscious,” I incorporated a number of passages from a seminar delivered in 1925, in which Jung spoke for the first time of his inner development.

The chapter “Psychiatric Activities” is based on conversations between Jung and the young assistant doctors of the Zürich mental hospital of Burghölzli in 1956. At that time one of his grandsons was working as a psychiatrist there. The conversations took place in Jung’s house in Küsnacht.

Jung read through the manuscript of this book and approved it. Occasionally he corrected passages or added new material. In turn, I have used the records of our conversations to supplement the chapters he wrote himself, have expanded his sometimes terse allusions, and have eliminated repetitions. The further the book progressed, the closer became the fusion between his work and mine.

The genesis of the book to some extent determined its contents. Conversation or spontaneous narration is inevitably casual, and that tone has carried over to the entire “autobiography.” The chapters are rapidly moving beams of light that only fleetingly illuminate the outward events of Jung’s life and work. In recompense, they transmit the atmosphere of his intellectual world and the experience of a man to whom the psyche was a profound reality. I often asked Jung for specific data on outward happenings, but I asked in vain. Only the spiritual essence of his life’s experience remained in his memory, and this alone seemed to him worth the effort of telling.

Far more significant than the difficulties of formal organization of the text were those prior obstacles, of a more personal kind, to which Jung refers in a letter to a friend of his student days. Replying to a request, in the latter part of 1957, to set down the memories of his youth, he wrote:

“… You are quite right. When we are old, we are drawn back, both from within and from without, to memories of youth. Once before, some thirty years ago, my pupils asked me for an account of how I arrived at my

conceptions of the unconscious. I fulfilled this request by giving a seminar.[1] During the last years the suggestion has come to me from various quarters that I should do something akin to an autobiography. I have been unable to conceive of my doing anything of the sort. I know too many autobiographies, with their self-deceptions and downright lies, and I know too much about the impossibility of self-portrayal, to want to venture on any such attempt.

"Recently I was asked for autobiographical information, and in the course of answering some questions I discovered hidden in my memories certain objective problems which seem to call for closer examination. I have therefore weighed the matter and come to the conclusion that I shall fend off other obligations long enough to take up the very first beginnings of my life and consider them in an objective fashion. This task has proved so difficult and singular that in order to go ahead with it, I have had to promise myself that the results would not be published in my lifetime. Such a promise seemed to me essential in order to assure for myself the necessary detachment and calm. It became clear that all the memories which have remained vivid to me had to do with emotional experiences that arouse uneasiness and passion in the mind—scarcely the best condition for an objective account! Your letter 'naturally' came at the very moment when I had virtually resolved to take the plunge.

"Fate will have it—and this has always been the case with me—that all the 'outer' aspects of my life should be accidental. Only what is interior has proved to have substance and a determining value. As a result, all memory of outer events has faded, and perhaps these 'outer' experiences were never so very essential anyhow, or were so only in that they coincided with phases of my inner development. An enormous part of these 'outer' manifestations of my life has vanished from my memory—for the very reason, so it has seemed to me, that I participated in them with all my energies. Yet these are the very things that make up a sensible biography: persons one has met, travels, adventures, entanglements, blows of destiny, and so on. But with few exceptions all these things have become for me phantasms which I barely recollect and which my mind has no desire to reconstruct, for they no longer stir my imagination.

"On the other hand, my recollection of 'inner' experiences has grown all the more vivid and colorful. This poses a problem of description which I

scarcely feel able to cope with, at least for the present. Unfortunately, I cannot, for these reasons, fulfill your request, greatly as I regret my inability to do so.…"

This letter characterizes Jung's attitude. Although he had already "resolved to take the plunge," the letter ends with a refusal. To the day of his death the conflict between affirmation and rejection was never entirely settled. There always remained a residue of skepticism, a shying away from his future readers. He did not regard these memoirs as a scientific work, nor even as a book by himself. Rather, he always spoke and wrote of it as "Aniela Jaffé's project," to which he had made contributions. At his specific request it is not to be included in his *Collected Works*.

Jung has been particularly reticent in speaking of his encounters with people, both public figures and close friends and relatives. "I have spoken with many famous men of my time, the great ones in science and politics, with explorers, artists and writers, princes and financial magnates; but if I am to be honest I must say that only a few such encounters have been significant experiences for me. Our meetings were like those of ships on the high seas, when they dip their flags to one another. Usually, too, these persons had something to ask of me which I am not at liberty to divulge. Thus I have retained no memories of them, however important these persons may be in the eyes of the world. Our meetings were without portent; they soon faded away and bore no deeper consequences. But of those relationships which were vital to me, and which came to me like memories of far-off times, I cannot speak, for they pertain not only to my innermost life but also to that of others. It is not for me to fling open to the public eye doors that are closed forever."

The paucity of outward events is, however, amply compensated by the account of Jung's inner experiences, and by a rich harvest of thoughts which, as he himself says, are an integral part of his biography. This is true first and foremost of his religious ideas, for this book contains Jung's religious testament.

Jung was led to a confrontation with religious questions by a number of different routes. There were his childhood visions, which brought him face to face with the reality of religious experience and remained with him to the end of his life. There was his insuppressible curiosity concerning everything that had to do with the contents of the psyche and its manifestations—the

urge to know which characterized his scientific work, And, last but not least, there was his conscience as a physician. Jung regarded himself primarily as a doctor, a psychiatrist. He was well aware that the patient's religious attitude plays a crucial part in the therapy of psychic illnesses. This observation coincided with his discovery that the psyche spontaneously produces images with a religious content, that it is "by nature religious." It also became apparent to him that numerous neuroses spring from a disregard for this fundamental characteristic of the psyche, especially during the second half of life.

Jung's concept of religion differed in many respects from traditional Christianity—above all in his answer to the problem of evil and his conception of a God who is not entirely good or kind. From the viewpoint of dogmatic Christianity, Jung was distinctly an "outsider." For all his world-wide fame, this verdict was forcibly borne in upon him by the reactions to his writings. This grieved him, and here and there in this book he expresses the disappointment of an investigator who felt that his religious ideas were not properly understood. More than once he said grimly, "They would have burned me as a heretic in the Middle Ages!" Only since his death have theologians in increasing numbers begun to say that Jung was indubitably an outstanding figure in the religious history of our century.

Jung explicitly declared his allegiance to Christianity, and the most important of his works deal with the religious problems of the Christian. He looked at these questions from the standpoint of psychology, deliberately setting a bound between it and the theological approach. In so doing he stressed the necessity of understanding and reflecting, as against the Christian demand for faith. He took this necessity for granted, as one of the essential features of life. "I find that all my thoughts circle around God like the planets around the sun, and are as irresistibly attracted by Him. I would feel it to be the grossest sin if I were to oppose any resistance to this force," he wrote in 1952 to a young clergyman.

This book is the only place in his extensive writings in which Jung speaks of God and his personal experience of God. While he was writing of his youthful rebellion against the church, he once said, "At that time I realized that God—for me, at least—was one of the most immediate experiences." In his scientific works Jung seldom speaks of God; there he is

at pains to use the term “the God-image in the human psyche.” This is no contradiction. In the one case his language is subjective, based upon inner experience; in the other it is the objective language of scientific inquiry. In the first case he is speaking as an individual, whose thoughts are influenced by passionate, powerful feelings, intuitions, and experiences of a long and unusually rich life; in the second, he is speaking as the scientist who consciously restricts himself to what may be demonstrated and supported by evidence. As a scientist, Jung is an empiricist. When Jung speaks of his religious experiences in this book, he is assuming that his readers are willing to enter into his point of view. His subjective statements will be acceptable only to those who have had similar experiences—or, to put it another way, to those in whose psyche the God-image bears the same or similar features.

Although Jung was active and affirmative in the making of the “autobiography,” for a long time his attitude toward the prospect of its publication remained—quite understandably—highly critical and negative. He rather dreaded the reaction of the public, for one thing because of the candor with which he had revealed his religious experiences and ideas, and for another because the hostility aroused by his book, *Answer to Job*, was still too close, and the incomprehension or misunderstanding of the world in general too painful. “I have guarded this material all my life, and have never wanted it exposed to the world; for if it is assailed, I shall be affected even more than in the case of my other books. I do not know whether I shall be so far removed from this world that the arrows of criticism will no longer reach me and that I shall be able to bear the adverse reactions. I have suffered enough from incomprehension and from the isolation one falls into when one says things that people do not understand. If the Job book met with so much misunderstanding, my ‘memoirs’ will have an even more unfortunate fate. The ‘autobiography’ is my life, viewed in the light of the knowledge I have gained from my scientific endeavors. Both are one, and therefore this book makes great demands on people who do not know or cannot understand my scientific ideas. My life has been in a sense the quintessence of what I have written, not the other way around. The way I