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Has Britain Won The War of Nerves?

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★ IT was a large room and unusually light. Three walls were practically all windows—unbroken.

Hardly any London windows are like that now. But London was far away.

There were about thirty narrow iron bedsteads in the room.

"The schoolboys used to have their drawing lessons here, I fancy," said the doctor. "What a time we had, changing a public school into a hospital for neurotics in twenty-four hours! They're having exercise just now. . . . What was that?"

He listened. And then we both heard a sad little sound coming from the other end of the room. A man slowly raised himself to a sitting position. When he caught sight of us, he buried his face in his hands.

"That's S—," the doctor explained. "I ought to have remembered. He's not fit for games yet."

S— took his hands from his face and stared at us. He was quite a good-looking man in the early forties, with a tanned healthy skin that contrasted oddly with the sick bewilderment in his eyes.

It was a lovely day, the doctor told him. Wouldn't it be a good idea to go outside for a bit and watch the others?

This kindly suggestion somehow touched poor S— on the raw. Tears streamed down his face. He muttered a few disjointed words: "Too late. . . . twenty minutes late"; and then, "Head off." This last he

was horrified to find that it was ten minutes past two. He hurried to the spot where, at two, he should have relieved his best friend, George Watson, and taken over the duty of watching a particular house for the rest of the night. But when he got there, twenty minutes late, the house was gone. There was no fire, and the wreckage was shrouded in darkness. Uncertain whether he was awake or in the grip of a nightmare, he stood there gasping. Finally he moved, and his foot touched something soft. He turned his torch on it—and saw a head. Just a head, with wide-open eyes. George Watson's.

George's body must be lying among the ruins. But that was his head, all right—his, not S—'s own. And it should have been S—'s own. Twenty minutes late. That was all S— could think of. *His head blown off. . . . it should have been mine. . . .*

He said very little else when, ten days later, he found himself in this country hospital. In the meantime he had been able to report for duty two nights. Nobody had noticed that he had been late that night, and he need never have mentioned it.

The doctor told me the story as we strolled through the gardens. "It obsessed the man completely," he said. "We'll get him well, though, in a month or so."

He suggested a look at his statistics, and we went on to his office. "How many cases of neurosis do you think we get in the course of a month?" he asked me. "What would be the average

all, what some people in America are saying—that nothing could be harder on your nerves than a prolonged lull after a series of blitzes." But he gave me a very different explanation:

Neurotic patients who had been discharged from hospital during the winter but were not well enough to carry on in their normal occupations received pensions from the state. So did those suffering from war neurosis who, while unable to work and earn their living, were not so ill as to need hospital treatment. "You can readily understand," he said, "that these borderline cases would find it difficult to decide for themselves when they were fit to work again and could do without the pension. On the other hand, once a person has become accustomed to being treated as a patient without even having to submit to the discipline and restrictions of hospital life, it may be very difficult to find the way back to normality."

"So, when the blitzes had died down and there were hardly any new cases of neurosis to be found anywhere in England, we arranged a round-up of all our neurotic pensioners and faced them with an alternative: either they were to stop considering their neurosis, give up their pension, and return to work, or else they must go into hospital and let us get them rid of their nervous troubles by means of scientific individual treatments. Most of the pensioners hurried back to work. Eighty-one of them accepted our invitation and submitted to cures. That's how

Has Britain Won

The War of Nerves?

A brilliant newcomer to Liberty's staff looks at tragedy—and courage

BY ERIKA MANN

whom Liberty has sent to England as its special correspondent. She is the daughter of Thomas Mann, the eminent novelist who left Germany in 1938 and now lives in Princeton, New Jersey, and is herself the author of *The Lights Go Down* and, with her brother Klaus, of *The Other Germany*.

repeated several times. The doctor called a nurse, telling her in a low voice to give him "another injection."

S—, I learned when we left the room, had been a fire fighter. He had been in any number of bad blitzes, fighting the flames and taking no notice of the falling bombs. Then something had happened.

He had had his day off, but was to report for duty at 2 A. M. There was a raid on that night, but not a bad one. Shortly after midnight there was a lull, and he took advantage of it to snatch some sleep. He was awakened by a tremendous explosion, and

for the whole of England?" I risked a guess: 850. "Our average," he said, laying some imposing files on the desk, "has never exceeded thirty-five—including the Forces."

I looked over his shoulder. "September," I read, "15 cases." (And what a September that had been! I knew—I was there.) "November, 1 case; December, 28 (25 in London, 3 in the provinces)." And so on. Then, suddenly, I was startled. It was the figure for June. Though there had been no important raids in June, the curve had risen sharply.

"Ah," I said, "then it is true after

you get your larger figure for June.

"But don't you ever believe that the Hun can drive us out of our senses. He can't do it by raining bombs on us, and he certainly can't make the grade by his would-be nerve-racking lulls."

I asked if there were more women than men among the air-raid-strained civilians. And how about children? The proportion of women was slightly higher, he said. Cases of children suffering from pronounced war neurosis were practically unknown.

We went outdoors again, and came in sight of the playing fields. One group of patients in bathing trunks were lying on the grass in regular formation. Another group were engaged in some ball game.

"See the boy in charge of the game?" The doctor pointed out a

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husky athletic-looking lad. "He was a patient here not long ago. When he had recovered from his shock he didn't want to leave us, so we let him come back here as a trainer. The boys like him better than any one else—he knows how to tackle them, naturally.

"He was a case of concussion from effects of blast. When a bomb exploded, he was thrown to the ground and lost consciousness for a time. There was a slight hemorrhage from the ears for three days and he developed severe headaches. No fracture was detected by X-ray examination. Yet he'd sort of lost his speech—stammered and so on."

The clear voice of the "stammerer" was at that moment giving well enunciated orders.

"These are all army people," the doctor explained. "One might divide them into three main groups. There are those who have been 'shocked' by shells or bombs—young fellows, for the greater part, like our instructor here. Then there are the older men who were in the last war and find it difficult to accustom themselves to this new kind of warfare, so they are apt to lose their self-confidence and become depressed. Thirdly, we get what we call 'peacetime one-job men.' Simple-minded creatures, these. War with all its lovely surprises wouldn't do such a one-job man any good! Incidentally, fifty per cent of all our patients had had some kind of nerve trouble before the war."

We went into one of a number of small houses, and found a regular carpenter's workshop. About fifteen men were busy making new chairs, repairing old tables, and constructing some most ingenious stands. I watched one boy carving small figures out of a piece of rough wood. He did it very well and accurately. "How long have you been learning this?" I asked him. He looked up at me then. His narrow blue eyes, quite different from S——'s eyes, showed the same bewildered emptiness. "For three weeks," he said. The doctor couldn't for the moment recall this particular patient's history. "Where did you come from?" he asked him several times. "From Dunk' !!" the boy finally cried: it sounded rather like: "From hell."

A neighboring house was given up to the "sign painters" among the patients. Four men, each with a drawing board before him, were just completing their work for the day. They had been drawing and painting caricatures of Hitler, Göring, Goebbels, and Mussolini. "Good," said the doctor appreciatively; "very handsome." Then, to me: "Those are to be our targets. The boys will be delighted to have a chance of throwing things at them." One of the artists laughed grimly. "You bet," he said.

THE END