

THE CAMBRIDGE MEDICAL SERIES

GENERAL EDITORS

SIR CLIFFORD ALLBUTT, K.C.B., M.D., F.R.S.

REGIUS PROFESSOR OF PHYSIC

SIR WALTER FLETCHER, K.B.E., M.D., F.R.S.

FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE

WAR NEUROSES

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-62652-2 - War Neuroses
John T. MacCurdy
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-62652-2 - War Neuroses
John T. MacCurdy
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

WAR NEUROSES

BY

JOHN T. MACCURDY, M.D.

PSYCHIATRIC INSTITUTE, WARD'S ISLAND, NEW YORK
LECTURER ON MEDICAL PSYCHOLOGY
CORNELL UNIVERSITY MEDICAL SCHOOL
NEW YORK

WITH A PREFACE BY

W. H. R. RIVERS, M.D. (LOND.)
FELLOW OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1918

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-62652-2 - War Neuroses
John T. MacCurdy
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107626522

© Cambridge University Press 1918

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1918

First paperback edition 2013

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-62652-2 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

PREFACE

THE account of the neuroses of war set forth in this book was written primarily for the instruction of the medical profession in America. Dr MacCurdy came to this country in 1917 to inquire into the nature of the problems which were about to confront the neurologists and psychiatrists of America through the participation of that country in the war. The experience he gained was originally recorded in the "Psychiatric Bulletin" of the New York State Hospitals in July, 1917, and the Cambridge University Press are greatly indebted to the editors of this journal for their permission to make Dr MacCurdy's work accessible to the public in another form.

The book describes the experience of one with a long record of skilful investigation of the psycho-neuroses of civil life when brought into contact in British hospitals with the special forms of neurosis which are produced by the shocks and strains of warfare. The cases on which the book is based are not startling rarities especially selected to show features of scientific interest, but are characteristic straightforward cases such as may be met with by the score in any hospital especially devoted to functional nervous disorders. The merit of the book lies, not in the nature of its material, but in the skill with which this material has been treated and the clearness with which the essential facts have been set down and utilized to illustrate the special problems presented by the neuroses of war.

The great frequency of functional nervous disorders in the present war has made a subject which was formerly a somewhat narrow speciality one with which every practitioner of medicine has been forced to become familiar. Dr MacCurdy's

book should go far to enable him to make good use of this familiarity. The book, however, should not appeal to the medical profession alone. There are now many who are trusting greatly to the assistance of the laity when, after the war, the task is undertaken of putting the treatment of the neuroses and psychoses of civil life upon a new basis. Dr MacCurdy's book is so written that any intelligent layman will be able to follow its essential lessons. It should thus be most useful in following up the movement for the instruction of the laity already set on foot by the admirable work of Professor Elliot Smith and Mr T. H. Pear¹.

One of the lines upon which the book will exert a strong educative influence lies in the clearness and definiteness with which it brings out the essentially psychological character of the war neuroses. In the early days of the war the medical profession, in accordance with the materialistic outlook it had inherited from the latter part of the nineteenth century, was inclined to emphasise the physical aspect of the antecedents of a war neurosis. As the war has progressed the physical conception has given way before one which regards the shell explosion or other catastrophe of warfare as, in the vast majority of cases, merely the spark which has released long pent up forces of a psychical kind. Dr MacCurdy's book should contribute greatly to progress upon these lines. His cases not only bring out clearly the great part taken by purely mental factors in the production of the war neuroses, but they also show to how great an extent the symptoms of neurosis are determined by mental factors, even when the main agent in the production of the neurosis is concussion or fatigue.

In coming into touch with the neuroses of war Dr MacCurdy was especially struck by their simplicity as compared with those of civil practice. He rightly ascribes this to the fact that the war neuroses depend essentially on the coming into

¹ *Shell Shock*, by G. Elliot Smith and T. H. Pear, Manchester University Press.

PREFACE

vii

play of the relatively simple instinct of self-preservation, while the neuroses of civil life largely hinge upon factors connected with the far more complicated set of instincts associated with sex. Dr MacCurdy agrees with other observers that sexual factors take a comparatively small place in the production of the war neuroses, but he believes that those who have shown a lack of adaptability to the stresses dependent on sex are also liable to fail in their adaptability to the stresses of warfare.

The classification of the war neuroses adopted in the book is one which is now coming into vogue in this country, in which two main varieties are recognised. In one the various mental factors tending towards neurosis produce states of anxiety, with symptoms similar to those which accompany anxiety in its milder and non-pathological forms. Dr MacCurdy speaks of this group in general as "Anxiety states," and does not use the "Anxiety neurosis" and "Anxiety hysteria" of other writers. He does so in order to include cases, of not infrequent occurrence, which, in spite of the presence of pronounced anxiety, can hardly be regarded as examples of true neurosis. The second group in the classification of the book is formed by those cases in which the mental factors find expression in manifestations resembling in some measure those produced by a wound or other physical disability. This group is entitled "Conversion Hysterias" on the ground that the morbid psychical energy to which the neurosis is primarily due has been converted into the physical symptom or symptoms.

Dr MacCurdy shows that the direction taken by the morbid psychical energy underlying the neurosis depends largely upon the nature of the desires entertained by the soldier before his breakdown. Perhaps the most original feature of his work is the view, duly supported by evidence, that those who suffer from anxiety states have wished for death during the period of strain and fatigue preceding the final collapse, while sufferers from conversion hysteria have entertained the

desire for disablement, for a “Blighty” wound, or for some disabling illness. It is a striking fact that officers are especially prone to the occurrence of anxiety states, while privates are the chief victims of hysterical manifestations. Dr MacCurdy explains this fact by differences of education and responsibility which produce a different mental outlook towards the two chief means of escape from the rigours and horrors of warfare.

One of the most pleasing features of the book from the practical and humanitarian points of view is to be found in its attitude towards prognosis and treatment. Coming direct from practice with the neuroses of civil life, Dr MacCurdy was especially struck by the amenability of the war neuroses to treatment, provided this treatment is of the right kind.

In the early stages of the war the treatment used in this country was largely dictated by the physical conception of the neuroses and consisted chiefly in the prescription of massage, electricity and drugs. Where these remedies acted as means of suggestion, they did a certain amount of good in many cases, but too often they merely accentuated the disease, and even produced new manifestations, by encouraging the patient to believe in the physical character of his condition. The noxious influence of the uncritical administration of drugs is well brought out by Dr MacCurdy’s observation that “in those hospitals where reliance is placed chiefly on drugs there is a constant difficulty in combating insomnia, whereas the difficulties are much less in those institutions where drugs are largely taboo.”

While Dr MacCurdy holds that hypnotism and suggestion may be useful in demonstrating to the patient that lost or disturbed functions are not vitally affected, he sums up strongly against the general employment of these measures as therapeutic agents. He attaches great importance to the line of treatment, which following Captain W. Brown may well be called “autognosis,” in which the patient is given insight into the processes by which his state has been pro-

PREFACE

ix

duced. The patient is led to see that he has not been altogether the creature of circumstance, but that his own tendencies have not been without influence in the production of his state. Dr MacCurdy's main method is in fact that of re-education which in this country will always be associated with the names of Maghull under Colonel R. G. Rows and of Craiglockhart under Major W. H. Bryce.

W. H. R. RIVERS.

July 1918

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-62652-2 - War Neuroses
John T. MacCurdy
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
PREFACE	v
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. TYPICAL CASES	4
III. ANXIETY STATES	17
IV. MENTAL MAKE-UP	33
V. FATIGUE	49
VI. CONCUSSION	63
VII. TREATMENT OF ANXIETY STATES	80
VIII. CONVERSION HYSTERIAS	87
IX. HEART NEUROSES	113
X. GENERAL PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS	122
XI. PROPHYLAXIS	129