

CLINICAL PROBLEMS OF REPATRIATES.*

By T. F. MAIN, M.D., D.P.M.,

The Cassel Hospital.

IN recent months most of us have seen patients who have been in the Services and who now present features of psychiatric illness. Many of them are in the ordinary run of our experience, and we have no difficulties—other than the usual ones—of understanding the origins and pattern of their present distress. By and large, the ordinary clinical breakdowns occurring in the Services were of a kind familiar to us before the war, while during the war we became familiar with most of the disturbances of behaviour and feeling produced by specific stresses of service life. Many patients with difficulties of these two kinds were discharged the Services in the past, and others have since been demobilized. The large and compelling problem of their treatment and effective rehabilitation should not blind us to another newer problem—that of ex-servicemen who made satisfactory adjustments to civilian life before the war, and to service life during the war, but who are now in severe difficulties under the stresses presented to them by their return to civilian life. In a manner unexpected by the majority, they have become ill-at-ease in familiar surroundings, phobic, depressed or irritable, asocial, confused, retarded, aggressive, antisocial or restless. There is a mass of evidence to show that in addition to the clinical symptoms which lead some of them to seek help from medical men, their damaged attitudes disrupt other aspects of their lives—social, domestic or industrial—in serious and subtle ways.

It would be easy to exaggerate the extent and the depth of these disturbances, and it would be tempting to shut our eyes and to argue the problem in terms of intrapsychic conflict, but it would be folly to assume that it is a problem too small for consideration, easy to understand, one to be dismissed as a natural consequence of demobilization which time will heal. Tens of thousands of men are or have been involved in psychological difficulties of this kind, and investigations have shown that far from there being a "natural" cure after a few months of civilian life, the passage of time may only harden the trouble and compel the individual to live with his social potential severely blunted; to pursue life as it were with one cylinder missing.

Description of the psychological difficulties of ex-servicemen is made difficult by the very wide range in kind and severity of their reactions; they vary from acute schizophrenia to a more common inability to enjoy the taste of life. Some ex-servicemen have felt no difficulty at all in becoming civilians again; some of the men in great but secret distress would be furious if their problems were openly broached; and it is certain that a considerable number

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will never consult a doctor because of fear of impending insanity. So both the size of the problem and the exact shape of the curve of its intensity are difficult to assess. Some relevant facts are known, of course. Surveys of ex-prisoners of war suggest that 60–70 per cent. have experienced greater or lesser distress and difficulty in industrial, domestic or social fields. Many hundreds of these men have been treated in psychiatric hospitals, not for illness which appeared during imprisonment, but for psychiatric disturbances consequent upon and arising only after repatriation. Many thousands of prisoner repatriates accepted the offer of help at the Civil Resettlement Units, which were designed after a study of the problem by psychiatrists and psychologists working in the Army. Scores of men are known who cancelled their acceptance of the offer because in their distress they could not face the prospect of discussing their problems with anybody at all.

Prisoner repatriates have been studied intensively and there is agreement by those who made this study that the basic problems they present are different *in no essential* from the problems presented by servicemen in general who have returned to home life after years in the Services. Civil Resettlement Units could not be created, however, for other than prisoners of war. Their numbers were too large, and in any case they do not arouse the same mixture of curiosity and compassion as was aroused by prisoner-repatriates. There is little public feeling now for the man leaving the Services. He may once have been treated by the public with propitiatory fêtes and rites, like a sacred sacrificial animal, but naturally, now that the war is over, he is an anachronism, and any difficulties he may have in becoming a civilian he must handle as best he can, with few social agencies to help him. An estimate of the numbers who have not made a good adjustment must be a guess—a sample survey of non-prisoner repatriates suggests that a quarter are as unsettled as the most unsettled prisoners of war—certainly the majority will never come for medical diagnosis, and they must be regarded as a sociological as well as a medical problem, an incubus on the mental health of the nation. Without pressing for too close an identification of the prisoners of war with other repatriates, it would be wise to take seriously the figures reached from the study of the former problem. We may be sure at least that the numbers we see in our consulting-rooms represent a few men self-selected from the mass which either hides its troubles or endeavours to cope with them in other ways.

Before we can discuss the feelings these men have and the different syndromes into which these may fashion themselves, we must recognize that repatriation itself is a stress at once peculiar, subtle and unexpected. A glance at myth and history will show us, however, that it is not a new phenomenon. Let me quote one case-history from literature :

When Ulysses was away on overseas service he resisted the wiles of foreign women and thought often of his homeland, the beautiful Ithaca, and of his wife who lived there. Penelope was fighting a different, nearly a losing, battle against the temptations of her aspirant suitors, and when her service husband demobilized himself he was just in time to prevent the complete break-up of his home. When he returned from his combined operations he found that things were far from well. Much had changed. His own son did not recognize

him, and his own servants regarded him as a stranger in his own land ; and it is interesting to note the hesitancy and caution with which he handled the situation facing him. He sought no effusive welcome, but disguised himself as a shepherd, and going to a trusted farm hand who knew him as a child, re-established a relationship there. Only when he was sure that the old man retained his affection for his master did he say who he was, and begin the painful process of rehabilitation. He approached his house in a mixture of anger, curiosity and doubt, and was laughed at by his wife's suitors and mocked by his own maids. He was eager to be loved by his wife, not as a hero, but for his own sake, and he entered his home beset by rage, suspicion and uncertainty.

The case-history goes on to say how his irritation at the immoral women in his home community grew and expressed itself, and how he took his revenge on those civilians who had been eating up his birthright, how he was reunited with his war-weary wife and his worried old father, and how he re-orientated himself in honour and affection. This psychiatric social history ends there, and Homer does not go on to tell us of any subsequent difficulties of industrial or domestic adjustment needing after-care. We must imagine these for ourselves. We know that Penelope and Ulysses were fairly stable individuals, but I cannot imagine that their home was without domestic scenes until their mutual emotional readjustment was complete. At all events, on the evening of V.J.-Day I seemed to hear a continuation of the story. I heard a woman behind me in the crowd gossiping about a more recently demobilized commando — "Two and a half years ! Back only a fortnight and she doesn't know what to do with him. He sits in the back room by himself. Won't speak to anybody, won't go out, won't read. Won't do nothing. She doesn't know what to do. There'll be trouble there."

A second case-history is that of a man seen earlier this year. In 1939 at the age of 18½ he joined the Army, and in 1940 went to the Middle East with an armoured unit. Three times in the next three years his unit got to the salt flats of El Ageila, and twice it was driven back. During this time his home and his father and mother were destroyed by bombs. He lived, mainly in the sand and sun, a life full of thrills but little day-to-day interest, with the compensations of tight comradeship and freedom from responsibility for the major decisions of the day. During these three years he had two leaves in Cairo and spent £200 in two weeks in hotels, cabarets and brothels. He returned to his own land last year and immediately fell into difficulties. Though a young man of 25 he had never been in an English pub, and panicked on the two occasions he had tried to ask for a drink. He felt awkward because he did not know what behaviour was normal in any social situation and felt that he was a foreigner, liable to be looked at and laughed at. Any public places—a café, a railway station, a dance hall, a bus — brought up problems of behaviour and common convention which made him feel inferior and ignorant. How to behave as a visitor in somebody else's home puzzled and worried him, and he was afraid of young women, diffident and uncertain how to address them, unsure of the proper approach, and unable to decide whether women were Madonnas or harlots. It was difficult for him to think that they might just be human beings like himself. So, unsure of himself, somewhat

lost and bewildered, and unable to feel settled and at home in his own city, his sleep was disturbed and he became morose, angry with civilization, bitter about the lack of comradeship in civilian life, quiet, asocial and depressed. He wanted to rejoin the Army or join the Palestine Police Force or to emigrate, but felt too ill because of recurrent nightmares even to take up simple work. When he was seen he had spent all his gratuity in a vain search for enjoyment, and had come to the end of his tether.

The third case-history concerns a prisoner of war, a regular soldier, now 26 years old. He had been brought up in a slum home, from which he escaped into the Army in an endeavour to lead a decent, clean, orderly life. He enjoyed the discipline, the regularity of pay and food, and began to respect himself. He seriously hoped to reform his widowed mother, who disgraced him even before his slum neighbours by drinking too much. The war broke out when he was abroad. His great pride in his unit for its subsequent fighting record suffered a terrible blow when he and it were captured at Tobruk. He was then subjected to the dirt and disorganization of Italian prison camps and had to fight for his food with other men who, too, had once known civilized manners. When placed with Indians in Salonika he endeavoured to uphold his own high standards of behaviour and refused to take part in the scramble for garbage, feeling contaminated by and guilty about the primitive savagery of the struggle for existence. When he was transferred to Germany he joined in the ordered intensely democratic life of a German prison camp and settled usefully, but lived for the day when he would be released—Britain would be fine; the people there were decent and homely and clean; there was freedom in Britain, and comradeship and honesty. In his need for affection he often dreamed of his mother, whom he saw as a clean, thrifty Scotswoman, and made all kinds of excuses to himself about why she had never written to him. He had fantasies about his home-coming, felt sure it would resolve all his hopings, and planned to attend night school and become a wireless engineer.

On repatriation he went back to his home street and found a stranger in his home. His mother had moved, and he found her living in one dirty slum room. He was shortly the centre of a drunken civilian cheering party that he tried vainly to enjoy. He had to sleep on a mattress on the floor for a week or two and began to get angry at life; his fantasies had been destroyed and life faced him as it was—difficult, dirty and ill-organized, demanding further efforts of him. It was easy to exchange trivial commonplaces with people, but nobody understood how he felt. He resented sympathy, and felt fury at the bomb stories that defensive civilians thrust upon him. He could not understand how people could hold such empty values and knew that they could never understand his own. In despair he picked up several street women, and there, too, found disgust and despair at the emptiness of the relationship. He spent his gratuity in drink, went to London and slept in air-raid shelters, had violent feelings of destructiveness, and murderous wishes towards policemen—"Smug and happy as if nothing had happened." He was admitted to hospital, violent, suspicious, bitter about Britain, and scornful about any offers of help—"I've seen your sort before; you're trying to get my story so that you can laugh at me." He said he was a slum rat—"Let's have no

pretending—send me back to the filth where I belong.” He ground his teeth and clenched his fists constantly and hit viciously at doors and walls. A week later he was classified as schizophrenic.

These cases are perhaps too violent to be typical, and a fourth case-history is needed. A man of modest intelligence, well adjusted when he was a labourer before the war, was placed in the Pioneer Corps during the war years, and although he missed his wife at first, settled down to good work of a routine nature. He had comradeship and had no worries about money, food or a job. He got on well with his officers and his fellows and felt proud of his uniform. When he returned to civilian life he felt himself a stranger and was badly puzzled by regulations about food and clothing and shortages, and felt inferior in the presence of people who understood these things and handled them casually. Things were too much for him to understand, and he felt foolish and shy before the complexity of life. He kept to the house, could no longer take his wife to the cinema, and resented the fact that his wife was now managing his affairs, and was trying to get him a job, although he recognized that it was necessary for somebody to do this in the face of his own incapacity and lack of initiative. He developed headaches and indigestion and went to his doctor, but was too ashamed to confess his own puzzlement at the civilian world and quietly accepted the medicine which was given him, although he felt it would do him no good. “If only he had asked me what the real trouble was I might have told him, so I just told him about my stomach.”

Many more case-histories than these few are needed to indicate the wide range of clinical reactions to unsettlement. The mildest forms of industrial unsettlement may, however, be present in our own doorsteps, in those employees who have returned from the Services and cannot settle easily into their once familiar regime, who want to apply for other jobs, who are restless and dissatisfied with their careers, who drink more than they did, or who are quieter and less at ease than they were. The most severe disturbances at the social and domestic levels are revealed in the public courts, in the separation orders, in the charges of attempted suicide or murder, or child neglect, and in the Juvenile Courts, where children from a disturbed domestic scene show the social forms of their distress.

There is a general belief that widespread unsettlement is an inevitable consequence of war itself, and that it occurs as a result of human aggression unleashed in wartime, and that the spontaneous individual feelings of peace and co-operation are bound to lag behind the official declaration of V-day. The fear has been expressed that men trained in warfare do not forget their training, in spite of the fact that servicemen are not trained to kill each other, but rather to live together even under privations in loyalty and comradeship. (It is true, of course, that numerous individual clinical problems of aggressiveness and despair are the result of the exhibition of aggression in wartime. One meets violently irritable ex-servicemen with nightmares which began after bloody episodes, and quiet men hiding their mourning for dead comrades from themselves and the world, but these are truly problems of service life, not problems of ex-service stresses.) A glance at one or two other phenomena will show us that the same troubles with which we have so far concerned

ourselves can arise without war, and are implicit rather in any sudden transfer of an individual from one cultural framework to another with which he is unfamiliar or out of touch. They seem to arise whenever people are uprooted from a familiar social environment.

A paper written in 1940 drew attention to a disturbance of emotion severe enough to be called "evacuation psychosis." It arose in old men and women evacuated from their homes to bomb-free areas in the country, and was characterized by depression, apathy and confusion.

In 1944 Lord Rennell, Director of U.N.R.R.A. in Italy, concluded that the greatest handicap in resettling the Italian refugees from the battlefields was neither hunger, malnutrition nor physical disease, but a peculiar distress at being uprooted, which showed itself in irresponsibility, dependency, resentment and apathy. This resulted in carelessness about infestation and personal hygiene, and a serious lowering of the standard of their personal morals and habits of hygiene. Their lack of respect for the latrine was by no means characteristic of them as Italians, but rather as newly displaced persons.

A similar phenomenon was observed in Britain in 1940 when the correspondence columns of our newspapers aired widespread complaints from those who had given hospitality to evacuated children, and found them to be foul carpets and stairways, to be careless of property, rebellious, rude and delinquent. Not realizing that these disorders of behaviour were reactions to the distress of domestic disruption, some correspondents assumed that it was a normal state of affairs among working-class British children and expressed their indignation at the failure of compulsory education, and revived the old remark that the only visible effects of the Education Acts on Britain was that the writing on lavatory walls was now two feet lower than of yore.

Before the war began some of us were familiar with similar phenomena in another setting. Well-meaning city planners condemned the filthy and dilapidated houses of slum dwellers and installed them in clean, well-laid-out housing estates far from the homely, closely integrated communities they once knew. This planned social disruption produced among some of the people so displaced a loneliness and confused distress and a dissatisfaction with their new strange society that expressed itself in poor standards of conduct. Stupid destructive and careless behaviour was reported in the new homes, and the occasional appearance of coals in the bath produced an interest and shocked indignation hitherto reserved only for brides and blood in the bath, or actresses in baths of asses' milk, or chorus girls in baths of champagne.

We may recall, too, the behaviour of some of the Jewish refugees in this country before they had found an accepted place in our society. Their demanding dependency on benevolent organizations, their social immorality, their hungry self-seeking, their touchiness and their lack of gratitude, provided yet another* example of the behaviour disturbances consequent on the transfer of human beings from one social milieu to another, and of the kind of problem that may irritate authorities who procure and manage such changes on a

* "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion . . . and them that wasted us required of us mirth. . . . How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

mechanical basis and in all good faith, but in ignorance of the psychological facts of life.

Sociological studies of the integration of foreign national groups and coloured communities into second generation societies throw a good deal of light upon the difficulties presented to society by immigrants and strangers, but it is sufficient if the examples given help us to understand that the psychological problems arising in ex-servicemen to-day are not specific to our generation or circumstances, and that they are in line with similar problems which face human beings from time to time—whenever they are required to grow satisfying social bonds in a new social milieu.

Many a returning serviceman knew that he had new viewpoints and ideas, and some were and are eager to practise their expression in civilian life, but few had any but a superficial understanding of the emotional strengths and weaknesses that service life has given them. Most men knew that they had a lot to learn, but few were prepared for problems of emotional adjustment in their very homes, and their own workplaces, and among their own familiar communities. In fantasy their civilian life was to be as they left it, with no closing of the emotional ranks when they fell out, and they felt themselves to be basically unchanged. The great barriers of unshared experience that grew up in the war years between them and their familiars in civilian life were and could only be half-realized. The blessing of freedom carries many burdens, and the feeling of these burdens had been forgotten.

The emotional deprivations of service life meant that many men, hungry for home, turned to phantasy and saw civil life through rose-coloured spectacles. Comfort, freedom, tolerance, affection, independence lay there. It was forgotten all too often that wives are not always obedient, loving, good-tempered and dressed in their best clothes, and it was not realized that a warm fire, an armchair, a book (and no bullying sergeants) become boring after three or four hours. Friends are forgetful and may have grown new interests and other ties, and old familiar places are oddly unexciting and unsatisfying. It is both puzzling and disconcerting that the feeling of belonging at home which has been so often wanted can be so elusive, and that the old familiar places should feel so new. The feeling of strangeness, the growing fear of not now being able to grasp the prizes of old feelings and situations, the anxiety that after all it can never be the same are forceful disappointments. A fear of meeting friends in case of failure, an inability to sense atmosphere in old places, and a feeling of emotional isolation from the relatively lawless and selfish civilian life is a terrible tragedy after years of longing. The difficulties are often about intangible and incommunicable deep human values, and the inability of others, wives and friends, to share a subtle but important viewpoint makes for distress and growing anger and a belief that they have forgotten what life is about. Men in such a state are restless, bitter and irritable at home, and feeling cut off from the very sources of understanding affection go for long solitary walks or remain silent and morose for long periods. Alcohol is a commonly sought relief, and may help a man to talk to strangers without uneasiness, but sober mixing with crowds and inactivity at home are alike intolerable.

Coincident with this uneasiness the practical details of a new life must be settled. Work must be found and kept. Who will have him? What is he fitted for? The competition of his fellows is something new again after the common tasks and comradeship and assured pay of the services. Unknown workmates are felt to be potential enemies. Those who prospered in war and have secure homes may be hated.

If these feelings are aired any failure on the part of his family to understand them may meet with fury and a hopeless despair at ever being understood. Family rows may become frequent, and the ex-serviceman has a common habit, distressing to his relatives, of slamming the front door and going off in a rage to walk it off.

It would be wrong even in a rapid survey like this to pretend that the ex-servicemen's home had no wartime problems. Wives, too, were lonely, and grew an independence and freedom of thought that may be unwelcome to their returned husbands, but which they are not always prepared to relinquish. In turn they may have longed for the return of their husbands, and be eager to lay upon these unfitted men the burdens carried alone for so long. A wife may have new tastes, new enthusiasms, unfamiliar viewpoints, and in turn may be hurt and angry that she, too, is not understood and accepted in the old way. Arguments, rows, violence in the home, hopeless impotent rage may follow the thwarting of the repatriate and his wife in their need to regain the homely understanding they so often cherished and yearned for in the past. These outbursts of anger are followed invariably by shocked repentance, and then the whole cycle may begin again on a basis of bitter despair at ever regaining emotional security.

It is not surprising that the uncertainty of being loved and acceptable reflects itself fairly commonly in absolute or relative impotence. This may be transient, and where the wife's attitude is one of tolerance and affection a good prognosis can be given. But the emotional splits between man and wife are often too embarrassing to both for help to be sought, and many decent people suffer the distresses of rows, violence and sexual estrangement in shame and unhappiness.

Emotional unsettlement reflects itself in industry in various ways. The newly assumed domestic responsibility and the high cost of living may make for an unreasoning pursuit of high wages. Hostility and rivalry, jealousy and antagonism for workmates may all be expressed in this way. Common industrial signs of unsettlement vary from withdrawal from communal life of the factory to indiscipline, arguments with foremen, and failure to participate in the leisure activity of workmates. A restlessness, an inability to feel settled and unreasoning dissatisfaction with wages make some men go, anxious and hostile, from one job to another, while others develop feelings of exhaustion at work, and show their distress in common conversion symptoms.

The common feelings of irritability, hostility, bitterness and failure to feel at ease in old surroundings pursue many repatriates in their social lives also. Some men will get up and leave their house if a stranger comes in. Many will go to great lengths to avoid meeting acquaintances and use the back door only, or go out only at night, but the need to be understood may lead some to

public-houses, there to drink in solitary gloom, wishing for the courage to talk to others. The failure to make effective human relationships may be seen further in broken engagements, failure to maintain old friendships, refusal to renew memberships of clubs and societies, or in the ganging-up of ex-comrades.

It is common to hear from these men of the fear of going into public places, an embarrassment at going to church, the cinema, the dog-track, and of difficulty in joking and feeling at ease in company. Among unmarried servicemen contacts with women of their own kind, friendship, affection and marriage may have been a deferred delight, a phantasy elaborated during service life whenever the unsatisfied needs for tender relationship were felt. Now, sheer ignorance of womankind may make for awkwardness and shyness and fear of the very people who were worshipped from afar. Violent feelings may be noted—a belief that women should conform to his fantasies of perfection in understanding and friendliness in their recognition of his needs, in public conduct and in private conversation. The fact that women are ordinary human beings, now wise, now foolish, often tactless, often without intuition, may be felt by him to be a wicked infuriating failure on their part. Again, the feeling of being cheated of a thing he felt sure he was to get may give rise to angry desire to destroy all womenkind as monsters, cocottes, harlots, drunkards, foolish empty-headed hard-boiled gold diggers. So his approach may vary from inability to speak in their presence and a shy avoidance of women in general to a despairing attempt to achieve ultimate relationships with prostitutes and brash attempts at affectionless seduction, with violence if his advances are spurned. Many men who have got as far as escorting a girl home from a dance are in terror when it comes to say good-bye. What is the proper thing to do? Can he kiss her? If he tries and fails he may feel again anger and foolishness. If he succeeds he may be no better off. Has he to go further? Will she think him slow if he does not? What is the correct thing to do?

In general, the distress at being a stranger in his own land and at failing to settle gives rise to a feeling of angry emptiness, and the situation is felt to be worse because the security of service life and the support of comrades are no longer present. He must deal with his anger and his emptiness by himself. Withdrawal of interest from the world as a protection against further hurts may lead to actionless apathy, but all the mental mechanisms used by mankind as protections against intolerable anguish may be seen in the worst cases. Paranoid beliefs about the rottenness of civilians, women, friends, employers, politicians may produce minor disturbances of behaviour, or may flower into psychotic states. Bursts of uncontrollable aggression at near relatives, people, or at a world felt to have failed him after his years of effort may lead some men to the police-court.

Depression of varying depth with feelings of failure and uselessness or with bitter paranoid colouring is perhaps the commonest resultant of severe resettlement difficulties, with suicide as a possibility.

Anxiety states too are common, especially with phobic developments of closed spaces, of cinemas, of crowds; or accompanied by somatic complaints—

breathlessness, headache, fatigue, indigestion. Hysterical conversions occur also, as might be expected, but in my experience they are not common.

Case-histories of unsettlement are typical. Relatives will almost monotonously give the same story: "He was all right the first few days; he was so glad to get home, but he seems changed. He used to be so cheerful. Now I don't know what to do with him. Nothing I do seems right for him. He's a different man." Almost invariably moodiness, outbursts of temper on small provocation, refusal to meet friends, narrowing of social interests and blunted industrial confidence, desire for solitude, restless inability to settle and a new tendency to take long walks precede the grosser clinical states.

This is not the occasion to discuss the treatment and handling of these men, but two warnings are relevant. Many of them have in the past come face to face with loneliness, death, destruction and horror. Their experiences will often have given them a conviction that they know more about life than civilians. The contrasting confidence of civilians often therefore irritates them, and leads them to feel that they can never be understood. The civilians are felt to be wrong and queer. On this account advice to a man to make an effort to pull himself together will meet with quiet hopeless contempt for his adviser.

Secondly, sympathy shocks and hurts, for it sets them apart as "different." Almost universally they have compelling needs to feel integrated again with their own people, and in any case do not feel it is they who have changed. They need understanding and recognition of their distress on an adult basis, as a settlement problem, and all but the very sick are angry or frightened at the idea that they may have a neurotic illness.

Their problems are largely those attendant on a change of social setting, problems of ego development and modification, and of social re-expansion. We would be wise to recognize that our pre-war and wartime experiences do not wholly befit us to understand or treat them. Only a determination to grasp the emotional problems inherent in change of community will enable us to bring therapeutic interest and understanding to this wide and important social problem.
