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Frightful Dreams of Wounded Soldiers

Major Mott, British Army Surgeon Explains How Music is Used to Cure the Agonies of Men Made Deaf, Dumb, Blind and Insane by Shell-Shock.

Two observations of great interest have recently been made by medical officers attending the wounded in the European war.

One is that the wounded soldier suffers constantly from the most persistent and frightful dreams recurring night after night. The other is that music is very efficacious in restoring the minds of soldiers unbalanced by terrifying experiences, when all other remedies have failed.

Major Fred W. Mott, a British army surgeon attached to the Fourth London General War Hospital, has given a remarkably interesting description of his experiences with soldiers suffering from disorders of the mind and nervous system.

A large proportion of patients of this class are troubled with agonizing dreams which prove the most obstinate feature of their condition for the doctors.

The poor fellows make the hospitals resound with their shrieks and yells as they dream at night. Men who when waking are idiotic, helpless and sometimes even speechless become raving, yelling demons again in their sleep. They go through their fight again and succumb once more to the horrors of the last great catastrophe that deprived them of their reason.

Music, it is interesting to know has been found the most effective agency in restoring to sanity mind unbalanced by shell-shock. It has had the effect of bringing back memory speech, hearing and even sight. In those cases, where various centres of the brain have been disconnected and put out of gear by shock without gross physical injury, music has the power of linking them together again. This action of music is explained by Major Mott on psychological grounds that appear very convincing. Here is an interesting example of the treatment in the case of a soldier who was picked up insane from shell-shock:

Memory Brought Back by a Bar of Music.

"The patient's mind was a complete blank, and this condition was reflected in a dazed, mindless, mask-like expression. He did not know the address of his home, and when shown a letter from his father with the address on the top he did not recognize it or his father's handwriting. When shown a photograph of his home with a group of his father, mother and three brothers and himself in front of it, he maintained the same wondering, dazed expression and failed to recognize the nature of the picture. His father had heard from a comrade that he had been buried by the explosion of a shell in the trench; he had been unconscious for some time and lost his speech.

"We heard from his father that he was a good musician, and I said to him, 'I hear you are a good musician,' and I asked him if he could play the piano or sing; there was the same wondering, bewildering look and he muttered something which was to the effect that he could not sing or play. Three days later I said, 'Come, you can whistle 'God Save the King.' He took no notice, but upon pressing him he looked up and a glint appeared in his eyes, and he said, 'You start me.' I whistled the first bar, he took it up, and whistled it admirably.

"I then asked him to whistle 'Tipperary,' but he could not do it till I started him, and the same with several other tunes, but once started he had no difficulty, and I recognized from the admirable intonation that he was, as his father described him, an excellent musician. I could not, however, that day get him to start upon his own initiative any one of the tunes he had whistled. The next visit, three days later, I observed that his expression had changed. He smiled when I spoke to him, and I recognized clear evidence of a mind that had partly found itself.

"He could now whistle any of the tunes I had previously started him on by himself when I called for the tunes. I then said, 'Come along to the piano.' He came, and I got him to sit down in front of it. I said, 'Play.' He looked at the instrument with a blank expression, as if he had never seen such a thing before, and I could not get him even to put his fingers on the keys. I then took one of his hands, and, holding his forefinger, I made him play the melody of 'Tipperary.' He looked at me, and again I noticed a glint in the eye and a chance of his blank expression indicative of association and recollective mem-

who would narrate in writing his terrifying dreams, did not cry out as some mutes do, but systematically in his sleep went through the pantomime of bayoneting the enemy, and even would get out of bed and look under, and of this performance he remembered nothing. He did not act thus when hypnotized. Under an anesthetic soldiers sometimes may perform the pantomime of such habitual acts as raising the gun to the shoulder and pulling the trigger.

"An officer who had served in South Africa told me that he had had a dream from which he awoke in a fright," says Major Mott. "He was in a mine passage at the front when he met a leper, who came towards him. Upon questioning him and asking him if he could recall some period of his life in which his mind had been disturbed by a leper, he remembered that he and his comrades became alarmed and protested against a leper being allowed to remain in an adjoining hangar. Evidently this had left a deep impression graven on the mind, the principal subject, the leper, was dissociated from concomitant experiences in the South African war, and became linked up with a recent terrifying experience in a mine passage, which likely enough was also an experience in which the emotion fear occurred. Both incidents suffused with very strong feeling tone, in all probability were deeply graven on the mind and became firmly fixed by subconscious associations."

A sergeant who had been a schoolmaster was asked to write down his dream. The first was as follows: "I appeared to be resting on the roadside when a woman (unknown) called me to see her husband's (a comrade) body which was about to be buried. I went to a field in which was a pit, and near the edge four or five dead bodies. In a hand cart near by was a legless body the head of which was hidden from sight by a slab of stone. (He had seen a legless body which was covered with a mackintosh sheet, which he removed.) On moving the stone I found the body alive, and the head spoke to me, imploring me to see that it was not buried. Burial party arrived, and I was myself about to be buried with legless body when I awoke."

Dreamed Persistently of Legless Bodies.

The second dream was as follows: "After spending an evening with a brother (dead eleven years ago) I was making my way home when a violent storm compelled me to take shelter in a kind of culvert, which later turned into a quarry situated between two houses. Men were doing blasting operations in the quarry, and while watching them I saw great upheavals of rock and eventually the buildings all around collapsed (explosion of a mine.) Among the debris were several mutilated bodies, the most prominent of which was legless. I tried to proceed to the body, but found that I myself was pinned down by masonry which had fallen on top of me. As I struggled to get free the whole scene appeared to change to a huge fire, everything being enveloped in flames, and through the flames I could still see the legless body which now bore the head of my wife, who was called for me. I was struggling to get free when my mother seemed to be coming to my assistance, and I awoke to find the nurses and orderlies standing over me."

This patient had been shouting in his sleep, beginning in a low voice and gradually becoming louder until eventually he was shrieking. The legless body occurred in all his dreams: the sight of this had evidently produced a profound emotional shock.

"He had worried a great deal about his wife, who was much younger than himself," says Major Mott, "so that we have this incongruous association of the legless body and the head of his wife calling him; finally, who more natural than his mother to come to his help. The emotional complex is not incongruous in this dream, for fear is linked up with the tender emotion."

A young officer of twenty dreamt for months that the air was filled with "flying arms and legs."

About one in twenty of those suffering from shell shock were unable to speak. Many of these dumb men would call out in their dreams expressions they have used in trench warfare and battle.

One man recovered voluntary speech after signing the old year out, eight months after receiving his injury.

An artilleryman, disabled by a shell explosion at Ypres, constantly dreams of shells bursting, and a fellow patient says he has disturbed everybody's sleep by his groans and moans, and wakes up at the least noise. This man, unlike many others, has not lost speech or hearing, but continually repeats words without meaning.

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