OUTWITTING OUR NERVES

A PRIMER OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

BY

JOSEPHINE A. JACKSON, M.D.
HELEN M. SALISBURY

NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.

1922

1921, by

THE CENTURY CO.

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

TO

MARY PATTERSON MANLY A LOVER OF TRUTH

FOREWORD

"Your trouble is nervous. There is nothing we can cut out and there is nothing we can give medicine for." With these words a young college student was dismissed from one of our great diagnostic clinics.

The physician was right. In a nervous disorder there is nothing to cut out and there is nothing to give medicine for. Nevertheless there is something to be done,—something which is as definite and scientific as a prescription or a surgical operation.

Psychotherapy, which is treatment by the mental measures of psycho-analysis and re-education, is an established procedure in the scientific world to-day. Nervous disorders are now curable, as has been proved by the clinical results in scores of cases from civil life, under treatment by Freud, Janet, Prince, Sidis, DuBois, and others; and in thousands of cases of war neuroses as reported by Smith and Pear, Eder, MacCurdy, and other military observers. These army experts have shown that shell-shock in war is the same as nervousness in civil life and that both may be cured by psychoanalysis and re-education.

For more than a decade, in handling nervous cases, I have made use of the findings of recognized authorities on psychopathology. Truths have been applied in a special way, with the features of reeducation so emphasized that my home has been called a psychological boarding-school. As the alumni have gone back to the game of life with no haunting memories of usual sanatorium methods, but with the equipment of a fuller self-knowledge and sense of power, they have sent back a call for some word that shall extend this helpful message to a larger circle.

There has come, too, a demand for a book which shall give accurate and up-to-date information to those physicians who are eager for light on the subject of nervous disorders, and especially for knowledge of the significant contributions of Sigmund Freud, but who are too busy to devote time to highly technical volumes outside their own specialties.

This need for a simple, comprehensive presentation of the Freudian principles I have attempted to meet in this primer of psychotherapy, providing enough of biological and psychological background to make them intelligible, and enough application and illustration to make them useful to the general practitioner or the average layman.

JOSEPHINE A. JACKSON.

Pasadena, California, 1921.

CHAPTER I

CONTENTS

PART I: THE STRANGE WAYS OF NERVES

In which most of us plead guilty to the charge of "nerves."

Nervous Folk

3

PAGE

CHAPTER II In which we I The Drama of N	earn what "nerves" are not and get a hint of what they are.	10
CHAPTER III	PART II: "HOW THE WHEELS GO ROUND"	
The Story of the	In which we find a goodly inheritance. Instincts	33
CHAPTER IV		
The Story of the	In which we learn more about ourselves. Instincts (Continued)	51
CHAPTER V In which we lo	ook below the surface and discover a veritable wonderland	l. 77
CHAPTER VI		
Body and Mind	In which we learn why it pays to be cheerful.	
CHAPTER VII		
The Real Troub	In which we go to the root of the matter.	141
OLIA DTED VIII	PART III: THE MASTERY OF "NERVES"	
The Way Out	In which we pick up the clue.	183
CHAPTER IX In which we disc That Tired Feeli	cover new stores of energy and relearn the truth about fatig	gue 219
CHAPTER X		
Dietary Taboos	In which the ban is lifted.	250
CHAPTER XI	In which we learn an old trick.	

The Bugaboo of Constipation		278
CHAPTER XII	la which handiagna are drawned	
A Woman's Ills	In which handicaps are dropped.	300
CHAPTER XIII	In which we look our droad of night	
That Interesting Ins	In which we lose our dread of night. comnia	322
CHAPTER XIV	In which we raise our thresholds.	
Feeling Our Feeling		333
CHAPTER XV	In which we learn discrimination.	
Choosing Our Emo		359
CHAPTER XVI	In which we find new use for our steam.	
Finding Vent in Sub		379
Glossary		386
Bibliography		390
Index		393

OUTWITTING OUR NERVES

CHAPTER I

In Which Most of Us Plead Guilty to the Charge of "Nerves."

NERVOUS FOLK

Who's Who

Whenever the subject of "nerves" is mentioned most people begin trying to prove an alibi. The man who is nervous and knows that he is nervous, realizes that he needs help, but the man who has as yet felt no lack of stability in himself is quite likely to be impatient with that whole class of people who are liable to nervous breakdown. It is therefore well to remind ourselves at once that the line between the so-called "normal" and the nervous is an exceedingly fine one. "Nervous invalids and well people are indistinguishable both in theory and in practice," [1] and "after all we are most of us more or less neurasthenic." [2] The fact is that everybody is a possible neurotic.

[1]

Putnam: Human Motives, p. 117.

[2]

DuBois: Physic Treatment of Nervous Disorders, p. 172.

So, as we think about nervous folk and begin to recognize our friends and relatives in this class, it may be that some of us will unexpectedly find ourselves looking in the mirror. Some of our lifelong habits may turn out to be nervous tricks. At any rate, it behooves us to be careful about throwing stones, for most of us live in houses that are at least part glass.

The Earmarks

Am I "Like Folks"? Before we begin to talk about the real sufferer from "nerves," the nervous invalid, let us look for some of the earmarks that are often found on the supposedly well person. All of these signs are deviations from the normal and are sure indications of nervousness. The test question for each individual is this: "Am I 'like folks'?" To be normal and to be well is to be "like folks." Can the average man stand this or that? If he can, then you are not normal if you cannot. Do the people around you eat the thing that upsets you?

If they do, ten chances to one your trouble is not a physical idiosyncrasy, but a nervous habit. In bodily matters, at least, it is a good thing to be one of the crowd.

Many people who would resent being called anything but normal—in general—are not at all loth to be thought "different," when it comes to particulars. Are there not many of us who are at small pains to hide the fact that we "didn't sleep a wink last night," or that we "can't stand" a ticking clock or a crowing rooster? We sometimes consider it a mark of distinction to have a delicate appetite and to have to choose our food with care. If we are frank with ourselves, some of us will have to admit that our own ailments seem interesting, while the other person's ills are "merely nervous" or imaginary or abnormal. After all, a good many of us will have to plead guilty to the charge of nervousness.

We have only to read the endless advertisements of cathartics and "internal baths," or to check up the quantity of laxatives sold at any drug store, to realize the wide-spread bondage to that great bugaboo constipation. He who is constipated can hardly prove an alibi to "nerves." Then there are the school-teachers and others who are worn out at the end of each year's work, hardly able to hold on until vacation; and the people who can't manage their tempers; and those who are upset over trifles; and those who are dissatisfied with life. To a certain degree, at least, all of these are nervous persons. The list grows.

Half-Power Engines. These people are all supposed to be well. They keep going—by fits and starts—and as they are used to running on three cylinders, with frequent stops for repairs, they accept this rate of living as a matter of course, never realizing that they might be sixty horse-power engines, instead of their little thirty or forty. For this large and neglected class of people psychotherapy has a stimulating message, and for them many of the following pages have been written.

The Real Sufferers. These so-called normal people are merely on the fringe of nervousness, on the border line between normality and disease. Beyond them there exists a great company of those whose lives have been literally wrecked by "nerves." Their work interrupted or given up for good, their minds harassed by doubts and fears, their

bodies incapacitated, they crowd the sanatoria and the health resorts in a vain search for health. From New England to Florida they seek, and on to Colorado and California, and perhaps to Hawaii and the Orient, thinking by rest and change to pull themselves together and become whole again. There are thousands of these people—lawyers, preachers, teachers, mothers, social workers, business and professional folk of all sorts, the kind of persons the world needs most—laid off for months or years of treatment, on account of some kind of nervous disorder.

Various Types of Nervousness. The psychoneuroses are of many forms. [3] To some people "nerves" means nervous prostration, breakdown, fatigue, weakness, insomnia, the blues, upset stomach, or unsteady heart,—all signs of so-called neurasthenia or nerveweakness. To others the word "nerves" calls up memories of strange, emotional storms that seem to rise out of nowhere, to sweep the sky clear of everything else, and to pass as they came, leaving the victim and the family equally mystified as to their meaning. These strange alterations of personality are but one manifestation of hysteria, that myriad-faced disorder which is able to mimic so successfully the symptoms of almost every known disease, from tumors and fevers to paralysis and blindness.

[3]

The technical term for nervousness is *psycho-neurosis*—disease of the psyche. There are certain "real neuroses" such as paralysis and spinal-cord disease, which involve an organic impairment of nerve-tissue. However, as this book deals only with psychic disturbance, we shall, throughout, use the term *neuroses* and *psycho-neuroses* indiscriminately, to denote nervous or functional disorders.

To still other people nervous trouble means fear,—just terrible fear without object or meaning or reason (anxiety neuroses); or a definite fear of some harmless object (phobia); or a strange, persistent, recurrent idea, quite foreign to the personality and beyond the reach of reason (obsession); or an insistent desire to perform some absurd act (compulsion); or perhaps, a deadly and pall-like depression (the blues).

As a matter of fact, the neuroses include all these varieties, and various shades and combinations of each. There are, however, certain mental characteristics which recur with surprising regularity in

most of the various phases—dissatisfaction, lack of confidence, a sense of being alone and shut in to oneself, doubt, anxiety, fear, worry, self-depreciation, lack of interest in outside affairs, pessimism, fixed belief in one's powerlessness, along whatever line it may be.

Underneath all these differing forms of nervousness are the same mechanisms and the same kind of difficulty. To understand one is to understand all, and to understand normal people as well; for in the last analysis we are one and all built on the same lines and governed by the same laws. The only difference is, that, as Jung says, "the nervous person falls ill of the conflicts with which the well person battles successfully."

Summary

Since at least seventy-five per cent. of all the people who apply to physicians for help are nervous patients; and since these thousands of patients are not among the mental incompetents, but are as a rule among the highly organized, conscientious folk who have most to contribute to the leadership of the world, it is obviously of vital importance to society that its citizens should be taught how to solve their inner conflicts and keep well. In this strategic period of reconstruction, the world that is being remodeled cannot afford to lose one leader because of an unnecessary breakdown.

There is greater need than ever for people who can keep at their tasks without long enforced rests; people who can think deeply and continuously without brain-fag; people who can concentrate all their powers on the work in hand without wasting time or energy on unnecessary aches and pains; people whose bodies are kept up to the top notch of vitality by well-digested food, well-slept sleep, well-forgotten fatigue, and well-used reserve energy. That such a state of affairs is no Utopian dream, but is merely a matter of knowing how, will appear more clearly in later chapters.

In which we learn what "nerves" are not, and get a hint of what they are

THE DRAMA OF NERVES

An Exploded Theory

"Nerves" not Nerves. Pick up any newspaper, turn over a few pages, and you will be sure to come to an advertisement something like this:

Tired man, your nerves are sick! They need rest and a tonic to restore their worn-out depleted cells!

No wonder people have believed this kind of thing. It has been dinned into their ears for many years. They have read it with their breakfast coffee and gazed at it in the street cars and even heard it from their family physicians, until it has become part and parcel of their thinking; yet all the time the fundamental idea has been false, and now, at last, the theory is exploded.

So far as the modern laboratory can discover, the nerves of the most confirmed neurotic are perfectly healthy. They are not starved, nor depleted, nor exhausted; the fat-sheath is not wanting, there is no inflammation, there is nothing lacking in the cell itself, and there is no accumulation of fatigue products. Paradoxical as it may sound, there is nothing the matter with a nervous person's nerves. The faithful messengers have borne the blame for so long that their name has gotten itself woven into the very language as symbolic of disease. When we speak of nervous prostration, neurasthenia, neuroses, nervousness, and "nerves" we mean that body and mind are behaving badly because of functional disorder. These terms are good enough as figures of speech, so long as we are not fooled by them; but accepting them in their literal sense has been a costly procedure.

Thanks to the investigations of physiologist and psychologist, usually combined in the person of a physician, "nervousness" has been found to be not an organic disease but a functional one. This is a very important distinction, for an organic disease implies impairment of the tissues of the organ, while a functional disorder

means only a disturbance of its action. In a purely nervous disorder there seems to be no trouble with what the nerves and organs are, but only with what they do; it is behavior and not tissue that is at fault. Of course, in real life, things are seldom as clear-cut as they are in books, and so it happens that often there is a combination of organic and functional disease that is puzzling even to a skilled diagnostician. The first essential is a diagnosis as to whether it be an organic disease, with accompanying nervous symptoms, or a functional disturbance complicated by some minor organic trouble. If the main cause is organic, only physical means can cure it, but if the trouble is functional, no amount of medicine or surgery, diet or rest, will touch it; yet the symptoms are so similar and the dividing line is so elusive, that great skill is sometimes required to determine whether a given symptom points to a disturbance of physical tissue or only to behavior.

If the physician is sometimes fooled, how much more the sufferer himself! Nausea from a healthy stomach is just as sickening as A fainting-spell nausea from а diseased one. uncomfortable, whether it come from an impaired heart or simply from one that is behaving badly for the moment. It must be remembered that in functional nervousness the trouble is very real. The organs are really "acting up." Sometimes it is the brain that misbehaves instead of the stomach or heart. In that case it often reports all kinds of pains that have no origin outside of the brain. Pain, of course, is perceived only by the brain. Cut the telegraph wire, the nerve, and no amount of injury to the finger can cause pain. It is equally true that a misbehaving brain can report sensations that have no external cause, that have not come in through the regular channel along the nerve. The pain feels just the same, is every bit as uncomfortable as though its cause were external.

Sometimes, instead of reporting false pains, the brain misbehaves in other ways. It seems to lose its power to decide, to concentrate, or to remember. Then the patient is almost sure to fancy himself going insane. But insanity is a physical disease, implying changes or toxins in the brain cells. Functional disorders tell another story. Their cause is different, even though the picture they present is often a close copy of an organic disease.

Distorted Pictures. It should not be thought, however, that the

symptoms of functional and organic troubles are identical. Hysteria and neurasthenia closely simulate every imaginable physical disease, but they do not exactly parallel any one of them. It may take a skilled eye to discover the differences, but differences there are. Functional troubles usually show a near-picture of organic disease, with just enough contradictory or inconsistent features to furnish a clue as to their real nature. For this reason it is important that the treatment of the disease be solely the province of the physician; for only the carefully trained in all the requirements of diagnosis can differentiate the pseudo from the real, the innocuous from the disastrous.

False or nervous neuritis may feel like real neuritis (the result of poisons in the blood), but it gives itself away when it localizes itself in parts of the body where there is no nerve trunk. The exhaustion of neurasthenia sometimes seems extreme enough to be the result of a dangerous physical condition; but when this exhaustion disappears as if by magic under the proper kind of treatment, we know that the trouble cannot be in the body. Let it be said, then, with all the emphasis we can command, "nerves" are not physical. Laboratory investigation, contradictory symptoms, and response to treatment all bear witness to this fact. Whatever symptoms of disturbance there may be in pure nervousness, the nerves and organs can in no way be shown to be diseased.

The Positive Side

"Nerves" not Imaginary. "But," some one says, "how can healthy organs misbehave in this way? Something must be wrong. There must be some cause. If 'nerves' are not physical, what are they? They surely can't be imaginary." Most emphatically, they are real; nothing could be more maddening than to have some one suggest that our troubles are "mere imagination." No wonder such theories have been more popular with the patient's family than with the patient himself. Many years ago a physician put the whole truth into a few words: "The patient says, 'I cannot'; his friends say, 'He will not'; the doctor says, 'He cannot will.'" He tries, but in the circumstances he really cannot.

The Man behind the Body. The trouble is real; the organs do "act up"; the nerves do carry the wrong messages. But the nerves are merely telegraph wires. They are not responsible for the messages

that are given them to carry. Behind the wires is the operator, the man higher up, and upon him the responsibility falls. In functional troubles the body is working in a perfectly normal way, considering the perverted conditions. It is doing its work well, doing just what it is told, obeying its master. The troubles are not with the bodily machine but with the master. The man behind the body is in trouble and he really has no way of showing his pain except through his body. The trouble in nervous disorders is in the personality, the soul, the realm of ideas, and that is not your body, but you. Loss of appetite may mean either that the powers of the physical organism are busily engaged in combating some poison circulating in the blood, or that the ego is "up against" conditions for which it has "no stomach." Paralysis may be due to a hemorrhage into the brain tissues from a diseased blood vessel, or it may symbolize a sense of inadequacy and defeat. Exaggerated exhaustion, halting feet, stammering tongue, may give evidence of a disturbed ego rather than of a diseased brain.

All Body and no Mind. At last we have begun to realize what we ought to have known all along,—that the body is not the whole man. The medical world for a long time has been in danger of forgetting or ignoring psychic suffering, while it has devoted itself to the treatment of physical disease.

By way of condoning this fault it must be recognized that the five years of medical school have been all too short to learn what is needed of physiology and anatomy, histology, bacteriology, and the various other physical sciences. But at last the medical schools are realizing that they have been sending their graduates out only half-prepared—conversant with only one half of a patient, leaving them to fend for themselves in discovering the ways of the other half. Many an M.D. has gone a long way in this exploration. Native common sense, intuition, and careful study have enabled him to go beyond what he had learned in his text-books. But in the best universities the present-day student of medicine is now being given an insight into the ways of man as a whole—mind as well as body. The movement can hardly proceed too rapidly, and when it has had time to reach its goal, the day of the long-term sentence to nervousness will be past.

In the meanwhile most physicians, lacking such knowledge and with the eye fixed largely on the body, have been pumping out the

stomach, prescribing lengthy rest-cures, trying massage, diet, electricity, and surgical operations, in a vain attempt to cure a disease of the personality. Physical measures have been given a good trial, but few would contend that they have succeeded. Sometimes the patient has recovered—in time—but often, apparently, despite the treatment rather than because of it. Sometimes, in the hands of a man like Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, results seem good, until we realize that the same measures are ineffective when tried by other men, and that, after all, what has counted most has been the personality of the physician rather than his physical treatment.

No wonder that most doctors have disliked nervous cases. To a man trained in all the exactness of the physical sciences, the apparent lawlessness and irresponsibility of the psychic side of the personality is especially repugnant. He is impatient of what he fails to comprehend.

All Mind and no Body. This unsympathetic attitude, often only half conscious on the part of the regular practitioners, has led many thousands of people to follow will-o'-the-wisp cults, which pay no attention to the findings of science, but which emphasize a realization of man's spiritual nature. Many of these cults, founded largely on untruth or half-falsehood, have succeeded in cases where careful science has failed. Despite fearful blunders and execrable lack of discrimination in attempting to cure all the ills that flesh is heir to by methods that apply only to functional troubles, ignorant enthusiasts and quacks have sometimes cured nervous troubles where the conscientious medical man has had to acknowledge defeat.

The Whole Man. But thinking people are not willing to desert science for cults that ignore the existence of these physical bodies. If they have found it unsatisfactory to be treated as if they were all body, they have also been unwilling to be treated as if they were all mind. They have been in a dilemma between two half-truths, even if they have not realized the dilemma. It has remained for modern psychotherapy to strike the balance—to treat the whole man. Solidly planted on the rock of the physical sciences, with its laboratories, physiological and psychological, and with a long record of investigation and treatment of pathological cases, it resembles the mind cure of earlier days or the assertions of Christian Science about as much as modern medicine resembles the old bloodletting,

leeching practices of our forefathers.

For the last quarter-century there have been scattered groups of physicians,—brilliant, patient pioneers,—who, recognizing man as spirit inhabiting body, have explored the realm of man's mind and charted its paths. These pioneers, beginning with Charcot, have been men of acknowledged scientific training and spirit, whose word must be respected and whose success in treating functional troubles stands out in sharp contrast to the fumblings of the average practitioner in this field. The results of their work have been positive, not negative. They have not merely asserted that nervous disorders are not physical; they have discovered what the trouble is and have found it to be discoverable and removable in almost every case, provided only that the right method is used.

Ourselves and Our Bodies. If the statement that "nervous troubles are neither physical nor imaginary but a disease of the personality," sounds rather mystifying to the average person, it is only because the average person is not very conversant with his own inner life. We shall hope, later on, to find some definite guide-posts and landmarks which will help us feel more at home in this fascinating realm. At present, we are not attempting anything more than a suggestion of the itinerary which we shall follow. A book on physical hygiene can presuppose at least a rudimentary knowledge of heart and lungs and circulation, but a book on mental hygiene must begin at the beginning, and even before the beginning must clear away misconceptions and make clear certain fundamental principles. But the gist of the whole matter is this: in a neurosis, certain forces of the personality—instincts and their accompanying emotions—which ought to work harmoniously, having become tangled up with some erroneous ideas, have lost their power of coöperation and are working at cross purposes, leaving the individual mis-adapted to his environment, the prey of all sorts of mental and physical disturbances.

The fact that the cause is mental while the result is often physical, should cause no surprise. In the physiological realm we are used to the idea that cause and effect are often widely separated. A headache may be caused by faulty eyes, or it may result from trouble in the intestines. In the same way, we should not be too much surprised if the cause of nervous troubles is found to be even more

remote, provided there is some connecting link between cause and effect. The difficulty in this case is the apparent gulf between the realm of the spirit and the realm of the body. It is hard to see how an intangible thing like a thought can produce a pain in the arm or nausea in the stomach. Philosophers are still arguing concerning the nature of the relation between mind and body, but no one denies that the closest relation does exist. Every year science is learning that ideas count and that they count physically, as well as spiritually.

Such Stuff as "Nerves" are Made Of. Dr. Tom A. Williams in the little composite volume "Psychotherapeutics" says that the neuroses are based not on inherently weak nervous constitutions but on ignorance and on false ideas. What, then, are some of these erroneous ideas, these misconceptions, that cause so much trouble? We shall want to examine them more carefully in later chapters, but we might glance now at a few examples of these popular bugaboos that need to be slain by the sword of cold, hard fact.

Popular Misconceptions about the Body.

- 1 "Eight hours' sleep is essential to health. All insomnia is dangerous and is incompatible with health. Nervous insomnia leads to shattered nerves and ultimately to insanity."
- 2 "Overwork leads to nervous breakdown. Fatigue accumulates from day to day and necessitates a long rest for recuperation."
- 3 "A carefully planned diet is essential to health, especially for the nervous person. A variety of food, eaten at the same time, is harmful. Acid and milk—for example, oranges and milk—are difficult to digest. Sour stomach is a sign of indigestion."
- 4 "Modern life is so strenuous that our nerves cannot stand the strain."
 - 5 "Brain work is very fatiguing. It causes brain-fag and exhaustion."
- 6 "Constipation is at the root of most physical ailments and is caused by eating the wrong kind of food."

Some of these misconceptions are household words and are so all but universally believed that the thought that they can be challenged is enough to bewilder one. However, it is ideas like this that furnish the material out of which many a nervous trouble is made. Based on a half-knowledge of the human body, on logical conclusions from faulty premises, on hastily swallowed notions passed on from one person to another, they tend by the very power of an idea to work themselves out to fulfilment.

The Power Behind Ideas

Ideas Count. Ideas are not the lifeless things they may appear. They are not merely intellectual property that can be locked up and ignored at will, nor are they playthings that can be taken up or discarded according to the caprice of the moment. Ideas work themselves into the very fiber of our being. They are part of us and they do things. If they are true, in line with things as they are, they do things that are for our good, but if they are false, we often discover that they have an altogether unsuspected power for harm and are capable of astonishing results, results which have no apparent relation to the ideas responsible for them and which are, therefore, laid to physical causes. Thinking straight, then, becomes a hygienic as well as a moral duty.

Ideas and Emotions. Ideas do not depend upon themselves for their driving-power. Life is not a cold intellectual process; it is a vivid experience, vibrant with feeling and emotion. It therefore happens that the experiences of life tend to bring ideas and emotions together and when an idea and an emotion get linked up together, they tend to stay together, especially if the emotion be intense or the experience is often repeated.

The word emotion means outgoing motion, discharging force. This force is like live steam. An emotion is the driving part of an instinct. It is the dynamic force, the electric current which supplies the power for every thought and every action of a human life.

Man is not a passive creature. The words that describe him are not passive words. Indeed, it is almost impossible to think about man at all except in terms of desire, impulse, purpose, action, energy. There are three things that may be done with energy: First, it may be frittered away, allowed to leak, to escape. Secondly, it may be locked up; this results usually in an explosion, a finding of destructive outlets. Finally, it may be harnessed, controlled, used in beneficent ways.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- > Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

