

### CHAPTER III

## *The War Neuroses—Their Nature and Significance*<sup>1</sup> (1943)

**I**N what follows I propose to record some conclusions which I have reached regarding the nature of the so-called 'War Neuroses'. These conclusions are based in no small measure upon my experience of psychopathological conditions among military personnel while I was acting in the capacity of Visiting Psychiatrist to a special hospital in the Emergency Medical Service during the war which broke out in 1939; and I am indebted to the Department of Health for Scotland for permission to publish this paper in so far as it is based on this experience. Needless to say, the Department accepts no responsibility for any of the views expressed.

#### THE TRAUMATIC FACTOR

The term 'war neuroses' is an omnibus term covering a great variety of clinical conditions; and there is now fairly general agreement among psychiatrists that, so far as symptomatology is concerned, the war neuroses possess no distinctive features differentiating them sharply from the various psychoneurotic and psychotic states which prevail in time of peace. It has been proposed by some psychiatrists, accordingly, that it would be more accurate to speak of 'the neuroses in wartime' than to speak of 'the war neuroses'. On the other hand, there are psychiatrists who maintain that, where cases among military personnel are concerned, a distinction must be drawn between (1) a group of psychopathological states which appear to be precipitated by active warfare, and (2) familiar psychopathological states which

<sup>1</sup> A much abbreviated version of this paper was published in the *British Medical Journal*, 13 February 1943.

## *The War Neuroses—Their Nature and Significance*

chance to occur during the course of military service, but which might equally well have occurred in civilian life. This attempted distinction appears to be based upon the observation that in a certain proportion, albeit only in a certain proportion, of military cases a psychopathological state is found to have supervened upon some traumatic experience associated with active warfare (e.g. a near shell-burst or bomb-explosion). In contrast to this observation it is to be noted that 'traumatic neuroses' are by no means unknown in time of peace; and here it must be kept in mind that, if such neuroses are less common in peacetime than in wartime, so also are violent traumatic experiences themselves. Actually it is not uncommon to find that a soldier suffering from a traumatic neurosis acquired in war has a previous history of a traumatic neurosis acquired in civilian life. In a considerable percentage of military cases also the trauma upon which a 'war neurosis' has supervened is found to be one (e.g. a motor accident) which is only incidentally associated with conditions of war. It is impossible, however, to dismiss the question of the part played by traumatic experiences in the precipitation of war neuroses without pausing to consider what constitutes a traumatic experience.

It is all too often assumed that a traumatic experience is one which produces a psychopathological state *de novo*. Yet, when investigation is sufficiently painstaking, it is rare to find a case in which evidence of pre-existing psychopathological characteristics cannot be detected in the previous history. It is reasonable to conclude, accordingly, that a traumatic experience is one which serves to precipitate a psychopathological reaction through the activation of pre-existing, but hitherto latent, psychopathological factors. The correctness of this conclusion is confirmed by the fact that in certain cases it is possible to detect a very high degree of specificity in the traumatic experience. In illustration of this point I may cite the following case.

*Case 1.* Gunner W. I.; R.A.; aged twenty-seven; single.

This soldier developed an acute anxiety state accompanied by incapacitating phobic symptoms after an oil-tanker in which he was serving as a maritime gunner was sunk by aerial attack. The vessel was hit by bombs and was almost immediately converted into a raging inferno owing to the inflammable nature of the cargo. He thought at first that he was going to be trapped in the burning vessel; but he managed to make his way to a boat, which proved to

### *Miscellaneous Papers*

be the only one successfully launched. There was some delay in the casting off of the boat, however; and, anticipating (quite correctly as it turned out) that the boat would also catch fire, he plunged into the water and swam away from the ship. It was fortunate for him that he did so, since the other occupants of the boat were burned to death; but, as he swam, he was pursued by burning oil which spread outwards from the ship on the surface of the water, with the result that he had a race for his life before he was picked up. During the course of the incident he was thus faced with a whole series of dangerous situations—being bombed, being trapped in the burning ship, finding his most promising hope of escape (the boat) to be but an additional menace to his life, being pursued by burning oil as he swam, and finally facing the risk of being drowned. On the surface it would appear that any one of these situations might in itself have served to constitute a traumatic experience; but in the case of this soldier none of them actually did so. It must now be added that, just as he felt that he was making some headway in his race against the pursuing flames, he found himself grasped and pulled down by a drowning Chinaman who was a member of the ship's crew. In a desperate effort of self-preservation he gave the Chinaman a blow on the head and saw him sink back into a watery grave; and it was this quite specific situation that constituted for him the traumatic experience. It functioned as a traumatic experience because, as investigation revealed, it brought to a focus in an act of 'murder' an intense and long-standing hatred of his father, which in the past had been deeply repressed owing to the anxiety and guilt attendant upon it. The experience thus acquired for him all the emotional significance of patricide; and it precipitated all the latent anxiety and guilt attached to his repressed hatred of his father, as well as activating various psychopathological defences which had already been prepared in his mind to deal with patricidal contingencies.

It is by no means always so easy to demonstrate the specificity of a traumatic experience as in the case quoted; but this fact in itself may not be without its significance, once the principle of specificity has been established. It is also not without significance that in many cases it is far from obvious why a situation precipitating a psychopathological state should possess any traumatic quality at all, even when it is a situation which has been repeatedly experienced and may be presumed to have acquired a cumulative effect; for many experiences which prove to be traumatic appear comparatively trivial in

## *The War Neuroses—Their Nature and Significance*

themselves. Investigation reveals a remarkable range of traumatic experiences, as may be illustrated by the following examples chosen more or less at random from cases which have come under my notice: being blown up by a bomb, being trapped in the cabin of a torpedoed ship, seeing civilian refugees massacred, having to throttle a German sentry in self-defence, being let down by an officer in a tight corner, being accused of homosexuality by another soldier, being refused compassionate leave to go home for a wife's confinement, and even being shouted at by the sergeant-major. When we consider the wide range of such a series, the question may well occur to us whether in many cases the traumatic experience which precipitates a war neurosis may not be constituted by military service itself.

### THE FACTOR OF INFANTILE DEPENDENCE

On the basis of data collected in the course of private psychotherapeutic practice I have gradually found myself driven to the conclusion that all psychopathological developments in the adult are ultimately based upon a persistence into later life of an exaggerated degree of that emotional dependence which is characteristic of childhood, and more particularly of infancy.<sup>1</sup> The all-round dependence which distinguishes childhood requires little emphasis. It is a biological fact bound up with the extreme helplessness of the human infant at birth, and embedded in the very structure of human society. It is a fact of which the institution of the law takes special cognizance; and it provides the rationale of that most basic of all social institutions, the family. In conformity with the fact that the family constitutes the primal social group, the dependence of the child is focused essentially upon his parents. It is upon his parents that he depends for the satisfaction of his psychological, no less than his physical, needs. It is to them that he looks for moral, no less than for physical, support; and it is upon them that he largely relies for the regulation of his behaviour and the control of his wayward desires. In particular, it is round his parents that his emotional life revolves; for his parents are not only his original love-objects, but also the original objects of his hate and the

<sup>1</sup> The various considerations upon which this conclusion is based have already been recorded in my paper, *A Revised Psychopathology of the Psychoses and Psychoneuroses* (included in the present volume).

### *Miscellaneous Papers*

objects to whom his earliest fears and anxieties are attached. In the ordinary course of development the individual's dependence upon his parents (and upon parental figures who come to deputize for them) undergoes a progressive decrease throughout the phases of childhood and adolescence until the comparative independence of maturity is reached. It is uncommon, however, for the process of emotional emancipation to prove a smooth passage; for, even under the most favourable of conditions, there is always a certain conflict between (1) a progressive urge to abandon the state of infantile dependence on account of the many limitations which it imposes, and (2) a regressive urge to cling to it on account of the many advantages which it confers. Where conditions are unfavourable, this conflict assumes exaggerated proportions, is accompanied by marked anxiety and gives rise to exaggerated reactions. Whatever adjustments and compromises may issue from an acute conflict of this nature, its most significant consequence is the perpetuation of an attitude of infantile dependence in the emotional sphere—an attitude which is none the less present at deep levels of the psyche even when at more superficial levels it is over-compensated by an attitude of quasi-independence representing nothing more than a denial of the dependence which persists at a deeper level. It is the undue persistence of such an attitude of infantile dependence that I have come to regard as the ultimate factor predisposing to all psychopathological developments; and, in conformity with this view, all psychoneurotic and psychotic symptoms must be interpreted as essentially either (1) effects of, or (2) defences against the conflicts attendant upon a persistent state of infantile dependence.

At the time when war broke out in 1939 I was already approaching the point of view which has just been indicated; and I was well on the way towards formulating my conclusions when it became one of my duties to investigate cases of 'psychoneurosis' among military personnel on a considerable scale. I was thus most conveniently presented at the appropriate moment with a unique opportunity to test the validity of my emergent views. My views were originally based upon an intensive study of a comparatively small number of patients living in their normal environment; but I was now placed in a position to check up these views by means of a comprehensive survey of a large number of patients who had been suddenly removed from their normal environment, separated from their love-objects and isolated from all the accustomed props and supports upon which a dependent person would

## *The War Neuroses—Their Nature and Significance*

ordinarily rely. It was almost as if a laboratory experiment under controlled conditions had been gratuitously provided for the testing of my conclusions. The result of this experiment was to confirm those conclusions in a most striking manner, as may perhaps be most conveniently illustrated by the description of a case in which dependence assumed such exaggerated proportions as to leave no room for doubt regarding its etiological significance.

*Case 2.* Gunner A. M.; R.A.; aged twenty-four; married for eighteen months.

This soldier had a small one-man business in civilian life; and his calling-up papers were deferred for three months on business grounds. When he reported for duty at the end of this period of deferment, he insisted upon his wife accompanying him to the barracks, which were situated about 250 miles from his home. He also insisted upon her remaining in the town in which the barracks were situated until, at the end of six weeks, circumstances necessitated her returning home. The prospect of her departure alarmed him so much that he applied for week-end leave with a view to accompanying her. He was successful in his application and was thus able to postpone the date of separation by several days. During his leave he never left the house; and it was with great difficulty that he tore himself away from his wife when his leave came to an end. After his return to duty he made frantic efforts to keep in touch with her by telephone, putting through a trunk call to her every day unless circumstances rendered this quite impossible. Interestingly enough, his preoccupation with thoughts about his wife was such as to render him quite unable to mobilize sufficient power of concentration to write letters to her. Inability to concentrate also resulted in his being the only man who failed to pass the prescribed test at the end of a course of instruction in gunnery; and owing to this failure, combined with a fear of guns which he displayed, he was allocated to routine telephone duties. Throughout the day his mind was constantly preoccupied with thoughts about his wife and about the distance which separated him from her; and at night he found difficulty in sleeping owing to the pressure of similar thoughts. He was very self-conscious and felt 'different' from the other men. He tended to feel that his company was not wanted; and he made no friends in the Army with the exception of one man fifteen years older than himself. He had felt 'depressed' from the day that he entered the Army; and, in the absence of his wife, he felt completely 'alone'. It seemed to him that everything was against him; and he felt that his only

## *Miscellaneous Papers*

hold on life resided in the hope of seeing his wife again—a fact in explanation of which he volunteered the remarks, ‘She is like a mother to me’, and ‘She is all I have’.

This soldier was admitted to hospital within three months of entering military service, having reported sick ten days previous to his admission on account of two fainting attacks, which occurred on successive days, and the first of which came on while he was sitting in the confined space of the telephone exchange. It emerged that he had been subject to such attacks for a period of nine years—ever since an occasion when, at the age of fifteen, he had seen a woman collapse in the street. This spectacle precipitated in him a state of acute anxiety, which persisted throughout the remainder of the day until, in the evening, his first fainting attack occurred. Similar attacks occurred with great frequency for a period of several months, during which he was kept off school and was not allowed to go out of sight of his home unescorted. When his condition had improved sufficiently to enable him to resume attendance at school, he was afraid to go to school alone and always required to be accompanied. Even after leaving school at the age of sixteen, he remained afraid to go out alone in case an attack should occur when he was at any distance from his home. When he did venture to go out alone, he adopted the expedient of going on a bicycle in order that he might reach home with a minimum of delay if he felt an attack coming on. His bicycle thus came to assume for him the significance of a link with home. It became like an umbilical cord connecting him with the doting maternal grandmother who had performed all the functions of a mother for him since the age of three, when his actual mother had died.

His dependence upon his grandmother was very great. An only child, he had gone to live with his maternal grandparents when his mother died; and he saw very little of his father, towards whom he displayed an unnatural, and almost complete, absence of feeling. After his first fainting attack he ‘slept between’ his grandparents until the death of his grandfather, which took place a few months later; and after his grandfather’s death he occupied the same room as his grandmother until, when he was eighteen years of age, she also died. As his grandmother’s health declined and the prospect of his losing her began to dawn upon him, he spent more and more of his time in her company, receiving no little encouragement to do so from the old lady herself. His devotion to her was tempered, however, by considerable concern regarding

*The War Neuroses—Their Nature and Significance*

the state of isolation and loneliness, into which his impending bereavement threatened to plunge him. He had made no male friends; and he had never taken up with any girl. Consequently he felt faced with the appalling prospect of finding himself completely alone in the world when an inexorable fate deprived him of the person upon whom he had hitherto depended for everything. His anxiety over this prospect was, however, considerably relieved through the agency of a *deus ex machina* in the form of the bicycle upon which he had relied so much in the past as a means of allaying his separation-anxiety; for one day, as he was hurrying back to his grandmother's bedside from a necessary expedition on his bicycle, he was fortunate enough to bump into a young woman who was crossing the street. His bicycle thus proved to justify more than all the confidence which he had placed in it as an umbilical cord. It provided him with another point of attachment, another woman upon whom he could depend; for this was the woman who eventually became his wife. Discreetly enough, he did not disturb the peace of his grandmother's last days by informing her of the new attachment which he had contracted. His attentions to his grandmother were not allowed to suffer; but, with an eye to his own future security, he did make a point of arranging frequent surreptitious meetings with the girl. He persuaded her to come to the door for him when they went out together, and often to see him well on his way home when the time came for him to return. She gradually came to be the means of conferring upon him the only confidence that he had in himself. What sense of security he derived from her friendship did not, however, prevent his being plunged into the depths of desolation by the death of his grandmother, when this event occurred. His sense of desolation was certainly mitigated by his friendship with the girl; and indeed it was only this attachment that reconciled him to the prospect of continued life. Nevertheless, the fact that his financial position was too precarious to permit of his marrying her proved a perpetual source of anxiety to him. Refusing his father's offer of a home, he went to live with an aunt, hoping all the time that something would turn up to place him in a position to marry. Meanwhile he constantly 'went about in a trance waiting for the girl'. Providence again turned out to be kind, however; for, besides coming into some money which his grandfather had left, he achieved some remarkable success in football pools. The result was that he accumulated enough money to buy a small 'gent's outfitter' business; and on the strength of this he was able to marry. Marriage in itself did not, however, provide art



### *Miscellaneous Papers*

adequate solution of his problems; and indeed his clamouring need for safeguards against separation-anxiety tended to become whetted, rather than allayed. The fact that his shop was a one-man business proved a special stumbling-block; for, whilst he found himself unable to bear being alone in the shop, the demands of housekeeping made it impossible for his wife to be at his side constantly during business hours. He attempted to strike a compromise by engaging a boy as an assistant; but the boy proved such an inadequate deputy for his wife that this compromise was not a success. He then sought to support a waning faith in the umbilical virtues of his bicycle by installing telephones in his shop and in his house, thus establishing a means of almost immediate, if somewhat ethereal, contact with his wife. Finally he took advantage of another smile on the part of fortune and secured the lease of a flat above his shop, with the result that at last he was able to achieve his ambition to have his wife constantly at his side. Once this ambition had been achieved, however, fortune provided him with some evidence of her proverbial fickleness; for, with the inexorability of a cruel fate, his final calling-up notice duly arrived to set at nought all his efforts to meet the demands of his dependence and safeguard himself against the distress of separation-anxiety. Although he made a desperate attempt to maintain the closest contact with his wife compatible with the conditions of military service after his call-up, the extent to which this attempt failed to satisfy his emotional needs may be judged from the disabling nature of the symptoms which he was not slow to develop. At the same time the development of these very symptoms served the purpose of enabling him to achieve what, without them, he would have failed to achieve, viz. a discharge from the obligations of military service and a return to the wife, who, by a sort of apostolic succession through his grandmother, had acquired for him all the virtues of a mother towards whom, in death as in life, he had always retained an attitude of infantile dependence.

The above case may appear to represent such an extreme degree of dependence that it should be regarded as constituting an isolated instance rather than a paradigm of the endopsychic situation which characteristically underlies the development of a war neurosis. It would be quite possible, however, to quote numerous instances in which the relationship of a war neurosis to a persistence of infantile dependence from days of childhood would be almost equally obvious; and, once such a relationship has been

## *The War Neuroses—Their Nature and Significance*

recognized to exist, it may be detected in every case, if only investigation is sufficiently thorough and is pursued to a sufficient depth of psychic level. If the relationship in question is not equally obvious in all cases, this is due partly to the fact that the persistence of infantile dependence is subject, in common with all characteristics, to an infinite degree of variation, but chiefly to the fact that the anxieties to which the state of dependence exposes the individual call into operation, in varying degrees and combinations, a number of mental defences which have the effect of concealing the real position. From these facts it follows (1) that the amount of stress required to produce a breakdown varies from individual to individual, and (2) that the incidence of the war neuroses is determined not only by the degree to which infantile dependence has persisted in the individual, but also by the nature and strength of the mental defences which he has erected to control its disturbing effects. In most cases it is only after such defences have been worn down that the underlying dependence becomes apparent; and it is seldom that they are quite so precarious as in the last-mentioned case. Appreciation of the relationship existing between the development of a war neurosis and an underlying state of infantile dependence is to some extent obscured by the fact that a number of psychopathological symptoms themselves constitute desperate forms of defence against the conflicts attendant upon infantile dependence; and this would appear to apply particularly to phobic, hysterical, paranoid and obsessional symptoms. There are, however, other classes of symptom which must be regarded as products of a fundamental attitude of infantile dependence rather than as defences against its effects. Depressive and schizoid states would appear to come essentially under this heading; but the most obvious and significant symptom belonging to this category is unquestionably separation-anxiety. Not only is separation-anxiety invariably present in war neurotics, but it is the only single symptom which is universally present. This symptom must, accordingly, be regarded as the greatest common measure of all forms of war neurosis.

### SEPARATION-ANXIETY

Separation-anxiety is so universal a feature of the war neuroses that it is difficult to believe that its prevalence can have escaped observation hitherto;

## *Miscellaneous Papers*

and indeed the literature of the war neuroses does contain various passing references not only to this phenomenon, but also to the occurrence of an exaggerated degree of dependence among neurotic soldiers. To the best of my knowledge, however, the universality and the real significance of these phenomena (separation-anxiety and exaggerated dependence) have never been properly appreciated, even by those who have not been oblivious to their existence. The commonest interpretation placed upon them is to the effect that, like many a physically disabled soldier, the neurotic soldier wants to go home because he is ill. Even on this assumption, however, it should be remembered that the effect of illness of any kind is to produce a state of helplessness, which tends to revive an attitude of infantile dependence; but, so far as the neurotic soldier is concerned, the truth would appear to be, not so much that he craves to go home because he is ill as that he becomes ill because he craves to go home. It is impossible, therefore, to draw any fundamental distinction between the war neuroses and the neurotic state popularly described as 'homesickness'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed the term 'homesick' could quite appropriately be applied to the neurotic soldier in view of the outstanding part played by separation-anxiety amongst his symptoms and the compulsive nature of his urge to return home at all costs.

Another common, and misleading, interpretation of the phenomenon of separation-anxiety is that it is really secondary to anxiety over situations of danger, and that it is therefore a by-product of the so-called 'self-preservative' tendency. This point of view would appear to ignore the prevalence of suicidal thoughts and impulses among neurotic soldiers—a fact which is difficult to explain in terms of self-preservation. It would also appear to ignore the frequency with which breakdowns occur under military conditions involving little prospect of personal danger, e.g. among troops stationed in the Shetlands, where isolation, rather than danger, is the predominant feature of the soldier's life. It may be argued, however, that the wounded, no less than the neurotic, soldier is often found to exploit, if not actually to welcome, his disability as a means of escape from the dangers of the battlefield, and that the hope of receiving a 'blighty' (to use the terminology of the 1914–18 war) is not far from

<sup>1</sup> I had not been long engaged in the study of the war neuroses when I was vividly reminded of a homesick Welsh student with whom I was brought into contact at Strasbourg University in my younger days. I could not avoid being impressed in retrospect by the essential similarity of the picture presented by this student and the characteristic picture presented by the soldier suffering from a war neurosis.

## *The War Neuroses—Their Nature and Significance*

the conscious thoughts of many a good soldier in the face of the enemy. It would be idle, of course, to deny the strength of self-preservative motives or the influence of personal danger in provoking a state of anxiety; but it still remains to be explained why some soldiers should break down in face of danger, whilst others should not. The explanation would appear to be that the capacity to endure danger varies with the extent to which the individual has outgrown the stage of infantile dependence; and this explanation is in conformity with the notorious proneness to anxiety which characterizes the child as compared to the mature adult.

In military circles soldiers have been traditionally classified as falling into three groups according to their attitude to military service: (1) those who like it, (2) those who don't like it, but stick it, and (3) those who don't like it and don't stick it. Where the conditions of modern warfare are concerned, those who 'don't like it, but stick it' would appear to represent the average individual who has been relatively successful in outgrowing the stage of infantile dependence, whereas those who 'don't like it and don't stick it' would appear to represent the neurotic individual who has, relatively speaking, failed to take this momentous step in emotional development. As for the group of those who 'like it', this would appear to include a considerable proportion of psychopaths who have developed a denial of infantile dependence into such a fine art that callousness and indifference to ordinary human relationships have become embodied in the very structure of their personalities.

### PSEUDO-INDEPENDENCE

The category of soldiers who 'like it' is not without its significance for the problem of the war neuroses; for it by no means follows from the fact that they 'like it' that they are necessarily able to 'stick it'. Accordingly, it is quite a common experience for the psychiatrist to find himself called upon to deal with individuals of this class. In some cases they become psychiatric problems because, in an attempted denial of infantile dependence amounting to the adoption of an attitude of pseudo-independence, they react in an exaggerated way against such dependence as is necessarily involved in membership of a military organization. In other cases they become psychiatric problems because they are unable to prevent the deep underlying state of infantile dependence, which is concealed by their superficial pseudo-independence, from reasserting

### *Miscellaneous Papers*

itself under military conditions. They are thus liable either (1) to present aberrations of behaviour upon which disciplinary action has little influence, or (2) to develop symptoms in just the same way as do those individuals who 'don't like it and don't stick it'; and indeed quite commonly both disciplinary difficulties and symptoms are found to arise in conjunction in such cases. In the following case it can hardly be said that disciplinary difficulties actually arose during military service; but there was a previous history of trouble with the police. It may also be presumed with some confidence that disciplinary difficulties would have arisen very shortly if the exacerbation of a pre-existing symptom, which might almost be described as an unconscious manifestation of indiscipline, had not occurred in time to save the situation before disciplinary measures became inevitable.

*Case 3.* Driver J.T.; R.A.S.C.; aged twenty-five; single.

This soldier had suffered from nocturnal enuresis since childhood. His father had been a seafaring man; and during the period of six years immediately previous to his entering military service he himself had spent a total of three years at sea. The seafaring life provided him with an occupation in which his enuresis was a minimal disability, both because the system of four hour watches ensured that he was frequently wakened, and because the habit of merchant seamen either to ignore the peculiarities of their fellows or else to treat them as a joke ensured that he 'was never made to feel a nuisance'. In spite of these favourable circumstances, however, he could never bring himself to settle down to a permanently seafaring life; and he was in the habit of taking various shore jobs between voyages. When war broke out in 1939, as it happened, he was driving a bus; and, having joined the Supplementary Reserve on the day before war was declared, he was duly called up and employed as a driver. He was sent to France in September 1939. During the earlier part of his service he was comparatively immune from enuretic 'incidents'; and, while in France, he remained quite pleased with himself and quite contented. His maternal grandfather had been a regular soldier; and his 'idea of wartime was to be in the Army'. He had volunteered 'in good faith'; and it gave him particular satisfaction to serve in France—a country which had always exercised a special fascination for him, largely because his father and one of his uncles had held it in special esteem and were always talking about it in his childhood. After the German attack was launched in the spring of 1940, he remained in

## *The War Neuroses—Their Nature and Significance*

good spirits; and he felt 'perfectly in order' during the retreat to Dunkirk. During the passage from Dunkirk to Dover, however, he began to experience 'a feeling of displacement quite apart from the Dunkirk affair'. He found 'seeing sailors go to fetch soldiers' much more impressive than 'military operations'; and the old call of the sea reasserted itself in strength. This fact, as he himself came to feel in retrospect, had a great deal to do with the circumstances which eventually led him to report sick, viz. circumstances attending a marked exacerbation of his nocturnal enuresis. This exacerbation caused him considerable embarrassment when quartered in a room with several others; and the situation developed in such a way that, after a stormy scene with the N.C.O. in charge of his room, he reported sick on his own initiative in order to avoid being reported by the N.C.O. for bed-wetting. Meanwhile, since his return from France, he had become definitely 'homesick for the sea' and had suffered from a 'displacement and general depression', which became progressively worse until he reported sick. After his admission to hospital, he adopted an extremely reserved attitude towards members of the medical staff; but, on occasions on which this reserve was to some extent overcome, he admitted that he had a definite tendency to regard others as hostile, that he nursed grudges, that he often felt himself to be an enemy of society and that he sometimes experienced a strong temptation to commit crimes. In a moment of unwonted frankness he also disclosed the carefully guarded secret that, at the age of thirteen, he had written a story in the first person about a boy of his own age, who lost both parents and ran away to sea. Having made this disclosure, he immediately volunteered that 'this was a cruel idea' (referring to his having represented the boy as losing both parents), and admitted that he himself had entertained death wishes towards his parents during childhood.

An only child, he had been extremely unhappy in his early life, which had been characterized by an atmosphere of great insecurity. His father drank, his mother was nervous, and there were constant quarrels between his parents. At the age of four he had seen his father knock his mother down, with the result that she fell with her head in the grate; and he recalled many subsequent incidents of a similar character—incidents which would appear to have been always followed by nocturnal enuresis. The police were constantly being called in to deal with domestic disturbances; and, on account of his father's violence, his mother often took him out of the house about midnight to spend the rest of the night with her in a hotel. The family never remained long in one

### *Miscellaneous Papers*

house; and, wherever the household went, there were rows with the neighbours. Eventually his father left home never to return; and, on his own return from his first voyage, he learned that his father had been killed in a motor accident. Once he had tasted life at sea, he lost all 'fancy' for being at home. Nevertheless, from time to time he experienced an overwhelming compulsion to go to stay with his mother between voyages. He was always overjoyed to see her on his arrival; but they invariably got on one another's nerves after a few days, with the result that it became as much as he could manage to remain at home for so long as a fortnight. In addition, he often wished quite frankly that his mother were dead.

This case is especially interesting and informative as an example of the way in which a deeply repressed attitude of infantile dependence may persist underneath, and be masked by, a more superficial attitude of exaggerated independence or pseudo-independence. In his early childhood—a period of life in which it is not only natural to be childishly dependent, but necessary for satisfactory development to be able to depend safely—his soldier was exposed to conditions which made it impossible for him to depend with any confidence upon either of his parents. He had no security of tenure even in his home itself, since the family was constantly moving from one house to another; and, owing to his father's bouts of drunkenness and his mother's anxiety, he never knew, when he went to bed, where he would find himself in the morning. He was thus brought up in an atmosphere of the greatest insecurity. His method of dealing with this situation resolved itself into an attempt to convert his liabilities into assets at the expense of turning himself into a psychopathic personality. He capitalized his insecurity and his inability to depend safely by renouncing all intimacy of social contact and all but the more remote of group bonds. The consequence was that he never made friends, and that he could reconcile himself to no discipline except such as prevails on board a merchant ship—discipline characterized by the principle that 'so long as you do your job, no one interferes with you'. At the same time he placed a premium on his own insecurity by developing a continued 'Wanderlust' and an incapacity to sustain any continuity of employment. By the adoption of a paranoid attitude he also sought to safeguard himself against the risks of that insecurity which dependence of any kind seemed to him to involve. Nevertheless, in spite of all the measures which he adopted to establish

## *The War Neuroses—Their Nature and Significance*

himself on a basis of exaggerated independence (pseudo-independence), traces of an underlying state of infantile dependence could be detected in his behaviour. Although, as the story which he wrote in his early adolescence bears witness, he was prompted to go to sea by hatred of his parents and a desire to be independent of them, yet he never remained free for long from a compulsion to go back to stay with his mother. The situation was complicated by the fact that the sea itself came to represent for him the mother upon whom, in his childhood, he had longed to depend, but upon whom he found it impossible to depend safely; and it was for this reason that he became 'homesick for the sea' after a period of separation from it, whilst at the same time he found it impossible to reconcile himself to a permanently seafaring life. He was thus reduced, at the deeper mental levels, to the position of a child tossed to and fro between two mother-figures, neither of whom he could trust, and neither of whom he could do without. The case of this psychopathic personality serves to illustrate the extent to which a deep attitude of infantile dependence may be seen to underlie a superficial attitude of pseudo-independence, which, by its very exaggeration, reveals itself as but a defence against the infantile dependence underlying it.

### THE COMPULSION TO RETURN HOME

The significance of the part played by infantile dependence in the etiology, and by separation-anxiety in the symptomatology, of the war neuroses may perhaps best be judged by the compulsiveness of the desire to return home, which is such a marked feature in all cases, and which manifested itself even in the case of the pseudo-independent psychopath just quoted. In cases in which the general symptomatology assumes a psychoneurotic form, this compulsion, although experienced, is seldom so urgent as to give rise to marked disturbances of behaviour. In cases in which the general symptomatology assumes a psychotic form, however, the situation is otherwise; and in such cases it is not uncommon for the compulsion in question to manifest itself either in a fugue or in a consciously executed flight such as to constitute, from a disciplinary point of view, either absence without leave or desertion, or else, where the individual's sense of duty is sufficiently strong, in an attempt at suicide. The compulsiveness of the desire to return home is



### *Miscellaneous Papers*

typically illustrated in the following case of an N.C.O. in whom separation-anxiety assumed a psychotic complexion.

*Case 4.* Cpl. J. F., K.O.S.B.; aged twenty-six; married.

This N.C.O. was admitted to hospital in a state of depression accompanied by a certain degree of agitation, as well as by various phobic and obsessional symptoms (e.g. a fear of enclosed spaces and a compulsion to go back to make sure that he had extinguished cigarette ends). He was extremely tense and anxious in his appearance; and he experienced a constant sense of separation-anxiety. During the day his attention was constantly preoccupied with thoughts about his wife and about returning home; and dreams about being back at home were a regular feature of such sleep as he was able to obtain.

He had first begun to 'feel queer' in September 1938, while serving with the Regular Army in India. He had enlisted in 1932 and had married just a few weeks before his departure for India in 1934. Since he was not old enough to be on the married strength, his wife was unable to accompany him; and he felt the parting acutely. However, throughout the whole of his service in India he was buoyed up by thoughts of the day on which his time would expire and he would become free to settle down in a home of his own with his wife. He 'got on all right in the Army' because he knew he 'had to'; but his heart was really at home all the time. He found it a great consolation in the loneliness which he often experienced to make plans for the golden age of home life, to which he looked forward with increasing anticipation, particularly after learning that his wife had given birth to a child; and, as the term of his unexpired service became shorter, he built more and more upon the prospect of his discharge from regular service. However, this prospect was doomed to be blighted just when it appeared to be on the point of realization; for, owing to the international crisis of September 1938, the sailing of the troopship, upon which he was due to return to the U.K. for discharge, was suddenly cancelled. It was the resulting postponement of his discharge and the accompanying interference with his carefully laid plans that precipitated the first onset of recognizable symptoms. He felt that the ground had been taken from under his feet; and he was instantly plunged into a state of extreme despair, in explanation of which he volunteered the remark, 'The separation from my wife got on top of me'. In conformity with this statement, he experienced an intense degree of separation-

### *The War Neuroses—Their Nature and Significance*

anxiety, which was accompanied by a number of other symptoms (e.g. headache, loss of appetite and suicidal impulses) clearly indicating that he was suffering from an attack of acute depression. When the crisis passed and the prospect of war receded, the cloud which had descended upon his hopes of discharge began to lift; and, as the cloud lifted, his depression lifted with it. When he eventually obtained his discharge (actually a transfer to the Reserve) in April 1939, it would appear that he passed into a hypomanic state; for, after he had been reunited to his wife and had obtained a Post Office job in his native town of Z, he felt 'on top of the world' and 'got on rare' at his work. As it turned out, his newly found happiness was short-lived; for he had not been at home for many weeks when, as a Reservist, he received instructions from the War Office to report at his Depot on 15 June 1939 for employment in the instruction of recruits under the Military Training Act. Upon receipt of these instructions he immediately became preoccupied with thoughts about the impending separation; and he again began to suffer from separation-anxiety, accompanied by loss of appetite and severe headaches. Having received an assurance, however, that his services would only be required for two months, he reconciled himself to the situation and duly reported at the Depot. Here his anxiety was further mitigated by the fact that he was permitted to go home for each week-end (a fact, incidentally, which did not free him of the necessity to write to his wife twice a day during the week); and it was an intense relief to him when his services were dispensed with on 26 August 1939. On this occasion, however, his relief was even more short-lived than before; for the country was already on the eve of war and on 27 August 1939 he learned from a wireless announcement that, as a Reservist, he was required to report at his Depot without delay. This he duly did on the following day, but not without fainting in the lobby as he was about to leave home. On his return to the Depot he was immediately absorbed into the establishment as an Instructor; but the fact that this reduced his prospects of being sent abroad to a minimum did little to prevent him once again becoming the prey of intense separation-anxiety. Having taken advantage of every opportunity of short leave which he could obtain in the meantime, he was granted compassionate leave in December 1939, to be present at a confinement which his wife was expecting. The confinement proving a difficult one, he obtained a two days' extension of leave on the grounds of his wife's illness; but, in spite of this, he overstayed his leave and thus, for the first time in his military history, committed a breach

### *Miscellaneous Papers*

of discipline at the instance of his separation-anxiety. The offence was overlooked in view of his good record for conduct; but his symptoms now assumed a proportion which compromised his efficiency. In particular, his efficiency was compromised by a failure of concentration, in consequence of which he often found himself unable to remember what he was talking about while in process of instructing a squad. The one thing that obsessed his mind constantly was his need for his wife. Nothing else mattered to him; and his whole attitude was summed up in the remark, 'I just wanted to be beside my wife, war or nothing'. In March 1940 he received a letter from his wife to say that his baby was about to have an operation for hernia; and he obtained compassionate leave to enable him to be at home at the time of the operation. As it happened, the operation was postponed. Being unable to obtain an extension of leave until after it should take place, he set out for the Depot; but the tug of home proved too much for him during the journey. He accordingly turned back and remained at home until the operation was safely over. Thereupon he again set out for the Depot; but again he turned back. This time, however, he did not proceed to his home on his arrival at the railway station of his home town. Instead, he went to a chemist's, bought a bottle of lysol, returned to the station and drank the contents of the bottle. The conflict between his sense of duty and his compulsion to return home had proved too much for him; and he sought what to him seemed the only solution. As it happened, his attempt at suicide was a failure; and, instead of finding his way to death, he found his way to hospital.

His early life had been unhappy; and he retained many painful memories of quarrels between his parents—particularly of one quarrel which led to his mother leaving home for four days. Her departure left him desolate. He had no hope that she would ever return; and he felt that 'the light had gone out of life' for him. He was very much attached to his mother and very dependent upon her; and he often sat for hours talking to her. She died when he was sixteen years of age; and, on learning of her death, he became speechless for twenty minutes and remained off work for seven days. He was employed in a butcher's shop at this time; and he imagined himself under the circular saw in the shop. After his mother's death his father broke up the home; and he went to live with an aunt. He missed his mother so badly, however, that he was miserable at his aunt's; and it was under the influence of this misery that he enlisted in an impulsive moment.

## *The War Neuroses—Their Nature and Significance*

### EMOTIONAL IDENTIFICATION

The compulsion to return home, which assumed such exaggerated proportions in Case 4, is a characteristic accompaniment of separation-anxiety; and it is in no sense robbed of its characteristic quality by the fact that in certain cases it may assume the restricted form of an insatiable longing. The presence of such a compulsion in association with separation-anxiety is of special significance on account of the light which it sheds upon the psychology of infantile dependence; for it serves to direct our attention to the mental process which constitutes the distinctive psychological feature of this state. The process in question is that of *identification*—a process in virtue of which the individual fails to differentiate himself from, and thus spontaneously identifies himself emotionally with those upon whom he depends. So intimate is the connection between identification and infantile dependence that, psychologically speaking, they may be treated as the same phenomenon. So far as we can conceive the mental state of the child before birth, we must regard it as characterized by a degree of primary identification so absolute as to preclude his entertaining any thought of differentiation from the maternal body, which constitutes his whole environment and the whole world of his experience. The process of identification which subsequently characterizes the emotional relationships of childhood would thus appear to represent the persistence into extra-uterine life of an emotional attitude existing before birth. So far as it influences behaviour, it would also appear to represent an attempt to restore emotionally an original state of security which was rudely disturbed by the experience of birth.

It requires little imagination to appreciate that the experience of birth must come as a profound shock to the child accustomed, while *in utero*, to a blissful state of absolute identification; and there is good reason to believe that birth constitutes not only an extremely unpleasant and painful experience, but also one fraught with acute anxiety. It may be presumed, further, that birth provides the occasion of the child's *first* experience of anxiety; and, since birth also represents the child's first experience of separation from his mother, birth-anxiety must be regarded as the prototype of all the separation-anxiety which is subsequently experienced. This being so, it can be readily appreciated that separation-anxiety will always retain the impress of the birth trauma by

### *Miscellaneous Papers*

which it was originally evoked, and that any postnatal experience which provokes separation-anxiety will in some measure assume the emotional significance of the original birth trauma. It is not implied, of course, that any conscious memory of the birth trauma is retained; but that the experience is perpetuated at a deep mental level and is capable of reactivation under certain conditions may be inferred from a number of psychopathological phenomena. As an instance of such phenomena may be cited the common nightmare about going along an underground passage which becomes so narrow that the dreamer feels unable to move and wakes in a state of acute anxiety. A similar significance is attached to the even commoner nightmare about falling from a height—a nightmare which, in my experience, is perhaps the commonest of all nightmares amongst soldiers suffering from a war neurosis. These considerations shed a new light upon the phenomenon of the traumatic experience which is so commonly found to precipitate a war neurosis. It can now be seen that such experiences not only function in the same manner as the birth trauma, but actually precipitate a revival of the birth trauma at the deep mental level at which it lies buried. It can also be understood in a more profound sense why such traumatic experiences should have the characteristic effect of producing a state of acute separation-anxiety.

In the light of what has just been said it can now be stated that separation-anxiety is a characteristic product of the tendency of individuals who have remained in a state of infantile dependence to make identification the basis of their emotional relationships with those upon whom they depend. The figure with whom the dependent individual is originally identified is, of course, his mother; and, whilst it is not long before he begins to identify himself with other figures, particularly his father, the original identification persists underneath all others subsequently made. The extent to which this original identification persists, even in individuals who have relatively outgrown the state of infantile dependence, may be judged from the frequency with which the wounded soldier is known to cry for his mother in his agony. It remains true, nevertheless, that the more emotionally mature an individual becomes, the less his emotional relationships are characterized by identification. In the necessarily dependent phase of early childhood it is, of course, both natural and inevitable that identification should play a predominant role; but, when emotional development is satisfactory, there is a progressive decrease in

### *The War Neuroses—Their Nature and Significance*

identification throughout the years of childhood and adolescence until the relative independence of emotional maturity is reached. This progressive decrease in identification is accompanied by the progressive increase of a capacity on the part of the individual to differentiate himself from emotionally significant figures. At the same time the importance of the figures with whom he originally identified himself (parents and parent substitutes) tends to diminish. Emotional maturity is consequently characterized, not only by a capacity to sustain relationships with other individuals on a basis of mutual independence, but also by a capacity to contract fresh relationships. In the case of the individual who fails to outgrow the stage of infantile dependence both of these capacities are deficient. His capacity to sustain relationships with others on an independent basis remains inadequate; and so does his capacity to establish fresh relationships. The relationships which he is best able to sustain are such as conform most to the pattern of his early relationship with his mother; and the only relationships which he is able to establish with any measure of stability are relationships calculated to assume for him, by a process of transference, all or much of the significance of his original relationship. Such then is the condition of the individual who develops a war neurosis. He is an individual who has retained an undue measure of childish dependence upon his home and his loved ones; and he is too closely identified with them to be able to endure any great measure of separation from them. They still tend to constitute for him, as was the case in his childhood, not only his emotional world, but even, in a sense, himself. He tends to feel that he is part of them, and equally that they are part of him. In their absence his very personality tends to be diminished—and, in extreme cases, even his sense of personal identity may be compromised. Such being the case, it is not difficult to understand why a compulsion to return home should be so universal and characteristic a feature of the war neuroses—a feature no less universal and characteristic than the symptom of separation-anxiety, with which it is so intimately associated. The explanation of this compulsion lies in the process of identification as it is found to operate in an individual who has failed to emerge adequately from the state of infantile dependence. Unlike the emotionally mature soldier, such an individual, when placed under military conditions, finds it too difficult a task to establish himself as a separate personality within the framework of the military organization, subordinate

### *Miscellaneous Papers*

himself to the aims of the military group without any surrender of independence, and maintain stable emotional bonds with the group whilst remaining differentiated from it. On the other hand, the dependent individual usually finds great difficulty either in establishing or in maintaining a reliable relationship with the military group on a basis of identification. This is due, of course, to the fact that his identification with his home and his loved ones does not readily admit of a competitor; and it is to the strength of this identification above all that the development of a war neurosis must be attributed.

Actually there is a certain proportion of soldiers who actually do succeed in establishing a relationship with the military group on a basis of identification. It remains true, however, that such a relationship is one which they find it difficult to maintain, especially in face of frustration or stress; and, since frustration and stress are such characteristic features of the soldier's lot, the percentage of those who prove capable of maintaining such a relationship indefinitely is extremely small. A significant feature of this group of soldiers is a tendency on their part to establish such a strong identification with the military group that with them soldiering actually assumes a quality as compulsive as does the desire to return home in dependent individuals who fail to make this identification. Such soldiers are apt to convey the impression of being as keen as mustard; but it by no means follows that they make reliable soldiers. On the contrary, they are usually so consumed with military zeal that they itch impatiently to be in the forefront of the fray, are intolerant of such delays as are involved in training, become irritated by routine duties and soon begin to smart under the imagined failure of the military authorities to reward their devotion with promotion to match what they feel to be their deserts. Paradoxical as it may appear, these keen soldiers are particularly liable to develop a state of acute 'separation-anxiety' —the traumatic 'separation' here being constituted by the apparent rejection which they experience at the hands of the military authorities when, as it seems to them, their enthusiasm is found to meet with so little recognition.

#### THE FACTOR OF MORALE

It should now be evident that identification, which is such a characteristic

## *The War Neuroses—Their Nature and Significance*

feature of the emotional life of the dependent individual, is not only the fundamental process underlying the development of a war neurosis, but also a process imposing serious limitations upon the social adaptability of the potential war neurotic. That the process of identification should prove to be a common factor operating both in the direction of compromising social relationships and in the direction of promoting psychopathological developments in the soldier is a consideration of the greatest significance. It is a consideration in the light of which the whole problem of the war neuroses assumes an aspect which has hitherto suffered from almost complete neglect in medical literature. During the course of the 1914–18 war a remarkable scientific advance was undoubtedly registered by the abandonment of the term ‘shell-shock’ in favour of the term ‘war-neurosis’; for this change of terminology indicated a recognition of the fact that the states to which these terms were successively applied were essentially of psychological, and not of neurological, origin. In spite of this advance, however, the tendency to regard each case as ‘individual’, which was an inevitable feature of the neurological approach, was in large measure carried over into the newer psychological approach. It is true that during the 1914–18 war there arose a powerful school of psychotherapists who regarded the war neuroses as products of a conflict between the soldier’s instinct of self-preservation and his sense of military duty—the symptoms of the war neurotic being interpreted as motivated, albeit quite unconsciously, by a desire to find a means of escape from the danger zone without experiencing the sense of guilt which a deliberate dereliction of duty would involve. This view at any rate had the merit of recognizing the bearing of questions of social responsibility upon the etiology of the war neuroses. Nevertheless, quite apart from what is now seen to be the superficiality of such an interpretation of the war neurotic’s symptoms, no real attempt was made to explain the incidence of the war neuroses; and the conflict in which they were held to originate was treated as essentially a problem of individual psychology. In particular, no account was taken of the general character of the war neurotic’s social relationships, or of the underlying factors which determine it. Subsequent to the war of 1914–18, attempts were made, particularly under the influence of Freud’s conceptions, to obtain a deeper understanding of the war neuroses; but the general tendency was to lay even greater, rather than less, emphasis upon the individual nature of the war neurotic’s emotional conflicts. This might have been otherwise if the line



### Miscellaneous Papers

of thought pursued by Freud in his *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921) had received more of the attention which it deserved.

Among the various conclusions recorded by Freud in the work in question is one to the effect that the state of panic notoriously associated with the collapse of an army in the field is essentially due to a breakdown of the emotional bonds which unite members of the military group to one another under common leaders. According to the ordinary view, of course, it is when the situation of 'every man for himself' arises that the group spirit ('esprit de corps') disintegrates. According to Freud, on the contrary, it is when the group spirit becomes weakened that the situation of 'every man for himself' arises, and that panic invades the individual heart. It is thus not a case of the group spirit collapsing because the individuals who compose the group have given way to panic, but of panic assailing these individuals because, owing to the collapse of the group spirit, they have ceased to be members of the military group. The essential feature of the situation is that each *quondam* member of the military group becomes deprived of the support both of his former fellow-soldiers and of the military group as a whole, and is relegated to the status of an isolated individual facing the combined strength of a hostile force without any support. Confronted with such a perilous situation, it is small wonder if the soldier is assailed by panic—panic which, as Freud points out, is not solely due to interests of self-preservation, but is partly conditioned by anxiety over the aggressive impulses which he is now tempted to direct against his former associates and his former leaders. It is, of course, *mass* anxiety that Freud is here discussing; but the reader who has followed the argument of the present paper will have little difficulty in recognizing that the phenomenon of panic to which he refers is essentially one of separation-anxiety affecting all (or nearly all) the members of a military group simultaneously. The panic-stricken condition of soldiers belonging to an army which has collapsed in the field must, accordingly, be regarded as one of transient war neurosis occurring under special conditions in individuals who are preponderantly 'normal'. The difference between the state of such soldiers and that of soldiers suffering from a frank war neurosis is then seen to lie in the fact that, whereas in the case of the 'normal' soldier separation-anxiety only occurs when the bonds uniting the group as a whole are dissolved, in

### *The War Neuroses—Their Nature and Significance*

the case of the neurotic soldier separation-anxiety may occur even when the bonds uniting the group as a whole remain intact. This means, of course, that the emotional bonds uniting the neurotic soldier to the military group are unduly slender and precarious. How this comes to be so has already been considered at some length. In a word, it comes to be so because the neurotic soldier has retained from his childhood an excessive degree of infantile dependence and has remained, at any rate at the deeper mental levels, so closely identified with his original love-objects within the family group that he is incapable of establishing any stable emotional relationship with the military group, or of participating adequately in that group spirit which is so indispensable to military efficiency, and which constitutes the essence of 'morale'. It should be added that, in the case of such a soldier, the anxiety which develops over separation from those upon whom he depends in the home environment is accompanied by anxiety over the aggressive impulses which he comes to entertain towards the military group, and which have a disintegrating effect upon such morale as he possesses.

We are now in a position to appreciate that the question of the war neuroses and the question of morale are inseparably bound up with one another. The fact that, as we have seen, even the 'normal' soldier may develop a war neurosis, albeit a transient one, in circumstances in which morale becomes impaired can leave us in no doubt regarding the intimate connection of the two questions. This phenomenon also serves to show that some measure of infantile dependence may be revealed in the case of the most 'normal' individual. The truth is that emotional maturity is never absolute, but always a matter of degree. Infantile dependence is equally a matter of degree, never being entirely absent, but being subject to an infinite degree of variation from individual to individual; and, of course, individuals vary likewise in the degree of stress which they can endure without experiencing anxiety under conditions of separation from their loved ones. In the light of what happens when an army collapses in the field we are further entitled to draw the conclusion that, whilst any high degree of infantile dependence is, in itself, inimical to morale, the existence of a high state of morale within a group can exercise a profound influence in counteracting the ill effects of infantile dependence among its members. In conformity with this fact, it has been strongly maintained by

## Miscellaneous Papers

well-informed military opinion that during the war of 1914–18 the incidence of war neurosis varied between units in inverse proportion to the morale of the unit concerned; and this opinion would appear to be capable of statistical verification, even when allowance is made for the idiosyncracies of regimental medical officers.

It has always been the tendency of the military mind, of course, either to interpret a war neurosis as evidence of cowardice or to dismiss it as a sheer case of malingering. So far as cowardice is concerned, it must be admitted that the soldier suffering from a war neurosis does usually, although by no means invariably, tend to behave as a coward in fact of external danger; but this in no way affects the fact that such a soldier does actually suffer from incapacitating symptoms. In any case, it always remains more important to know why he should behave as he does than simply to treat him as a coward; for treating him as a coward will certainly not in itself convert him into an efficient soldier. As regards the question of malingering, my own experience is that, where cases of war neurosis reaching hospital are concerned, not more than 1 per cent. can possibly be regarded as true malingerers, i.e. as failing to present *bona fide* symptoms; and even this small proportion of individuals are usually found, in my experience, to have the characteristic history of a psychopathic personality. It is impossible, nevertheless, to dismiss the traditional military attitude towards the war neuroses as entirely irrelevant from a psychiatric standpoint. It must be insisted, of course, that the neurotic soldier does suffer from genuine symptoms. At the same time, there can be no doubt that, characteristically, his consuming desire is to get out of the Army and back to his home at all costs, war or no war; and this is a fact about which no one can possibly remain a sceptic if he has once witnessed the wave of enthusiasm which sweeps over a body of neurotic soldiers leaving hospital for home on discharge from military service.<sup>1</sup> Whilst, therefore, it is impossible to accept any explanation of the war neuroses couched simply in terms of cowardice and malingering, it must be recognized that the traditional military attitude towards these conditions contains more than a grain of truth. The real truth

<sup>1</sup> It may now be stated that, during the course of the 1939–45 war, the earlier practice of granting neurotic soldiers their discharge direct from hospital was abandoned on account of this very phenomenon.

## *The War Neuroses—Their Nature and Significance*

embodied, however imperfectly, in this attitude is that the incidence of the war neuroses is a criterion of morale; and, as it seems to me, this is a truth which has suffered from sad neglect in the literature of the war neuroses.

Morale is an extremely difficult quality to assess; and it is a quality in respect of which it is particularly difficult to draw comparisons. It would be interesting, if it were possible, to compare the state of morale prevailing in the British Army at the time of writing (1942) with that which prevailed during the corresponding period of the war of 1914–18; but the conditions under which the 1939 war is being waged are so different from those under which the 1914–18 war was waged that it seems impossible to establish a reliable criterion. It may be remarked, however, that, since under war conditions the British Army is essentially a citizen army, its morale cannot be considered apart from the morale of the country as a whole. At this point it therefore becomes pertinent for us to ask ourselves whether the developments which have taken place in national life between the two wars have been calculated to raise, to maintain or to lower national morale. Whatever answer the individual reader may be disposed to give to this question, there can be no doubt, at any rate, as to the verdict reached by the dictators prior to the outbreak of the 1939 war; for ‘the degeneracy of the democracies’ had for long been one of their favourite slogans. Indeed the estimate of democratic morale embodied in this slogan provided them with one of their chief incentives in precipitating the struggle unleashed in 1939.

In speaking of ‘the degeneracy of the democracies’ the dictators would appear to have had in mind a certain lack of public spirit which crept insidiously over the British and other similarly constituted nations in response to the disillusionment of hopes, which followed the Armistice of 1918. So far as Great Britain is concerned, this lack of public spirit was reflected in a marked inconclusiveness and ineffectiveness of international policy. It also manifested itself in an obvious reluctance on the part of the individual to make personal sacrifices in the interests of the national group, and in a very ‘bourgeois’ preoccupation with narrow personal, sectional and familial interests. This development must be regarded as registering a definite deterioration of national morale since 1918; and, in the light of what precedes, it can now be appreciated that this deterioration of morale was accompanied by a regressive resurgence of infantile dependence throughout the community as a whole. Such then is the general background of the national war effort and the recruitment of the

## Miscellaneous Papers

British Army following the outbreak of war in 1939. There can, of course, be no denying that the impact of war had the immediate effect of, in some measure, reviving the waning group spirit, and that this revival became markedly intensified after the evacuation from Dunkirk. But, if we are to be frank, we must ask ourselves seriously whether at the time of writing (1942) all the leeway has been made up. I venture to suggest that any attempt to deal radically with the problem of the war neuroses must involve not only the making up of leeway, but an actual making of headway within the field of morale.

If it is difficult to draw any valid comparison between the morale of the British Army in the Second World War and its morale at the corresponding stage of the First World War, it is certainly not easy to make a comparative assessment of the state of morale prevailing in the armies of the various combatant powers. It must be recognized, however, that the cultivation of morale was a leading article of policy with the totalitarian states for many years prior to the outbreak of war in 1939. That this policy met with considerable success both in Germany and Russia is evident from the extent to which the populations of those countries proved as a whole willing to sacrifice both personal and familial interests to the interests of the national group; and there can be little doubt that, even after the outbreak of war in 1939, they showed themselves capable of sacrifices far in excess of any required of the population of Great Britain. The result is that Goering's 'Guns for butter' became much less of a joke than it had seemed in the ostrich-like days of pre-war wishful thinking.

In view of the central thesis of the present paper, the characteristic totalitarian technique for the cultivation of morale is not without its interest; for it is an essential feature of this technique to take all possible steps to wean the individual from family ties and family loyalties. In so far as such steps meet with success, we should expect the soldier who has been brought up under such a régime to be correspondingly less subject to separation-anxiety under conditions of active service. At the same time, it by no means follows that steps taken to wean the prospective soldier from familial bonds will, *ipso facto*, wean him from a state of infantile dependence; for, under the Nazi régime at least, it also became part of the technique deliberately to cultivate dependence upon the State as a substitute for dependence upon familial love-objects—and thus actually to exploit infantile dependence in the national

## *The War Neuroses—Their Nature and Significance*

interest. Under conditions of political or military success this technique would appear to achieve its object owing to the sense of security which success engenders; but it may be expected that under conditions of persistent political or military failure the resulting sense of disillusionment regarding the capacity of the State to provide security would lead to a revival of the individual's original infantile attachments, and so to an outbreak of acute separation-anxiety accompanied by a collapse of morale. Indeed, this is what actually occurred in Germany in 1918. It would appear, accordingly, that national failure constitutes the greatest test of totalitarian morale. On the other hand, comparative national success would appear to constitute the greatest test of democratic morale; for, since in a democracy the individual is less dependent upon the State and more dependent upon his familial love-objects for a sense of security, the conditions of national success will tend to promote undue complacency regarding national issues.

Reference has already been made to the view, widely held by psychotherapists during the 1914–18 war, that the war neuroses derived their significance from the fact that their symptoms provided the affected soldier with an unconsciously motivated means of escaping from the dangers of the battlefield with a good conscience. The limitations of this view at once become obvious when we consider that many soldiers contract typical war neuroses without ever having been near a battlefield, and even in the absence of any great prospect of being near one. Actually, it is to the symptom of separation-anxiety, as I have tried to show, that we must look for the real significance of the war neuroses. It is towards a return to his home and his loved ones, rather than towards an escape from the dangers of the battlefield, that the neurotic soldier is orientated. At the same time the older view just mentioned does embody an observation which, when properly interpreted, is certainly of great significance. This is the observation that the neurotic soldier characteristically displays a remarkable absence of guilt over his evasion of military duties. Such an absence of guilt is not invariable; for, when the clinical picture is dominated by depressive and obsessional features, there is often a definite tendency on the part of the soldier to worry over letting his country or his unit down. This feature is particularly liable to be present in the case of senior non-commissioned ranks of the Regular Army—men who characteristically have a reputation for conscientiousness, and into whom a high sense of discipline has been instilled throughout long years of service. Even in such

### *Miscellaneous Papers*

instances, however, one usually gains the impression that, by the time such men reach hospital, they have given up all real effort, and that their apparent scruples amount to little more than lip-service to abandoned standards of the past. Further, in so far as their self-reproach is genuine, it is only in the prodromal stage of the war neurosis that it assumes an acute form, i.e. in the stage at which there is real conflict between the desire to return home and the sense of duty. In such cases this is usually before the individual reports sick; for by the time such individuals report sick (which they only do after a prolonged struggle) the issue of the conflict is already almost invariably decided. With the exception of these cases, however, neurotic soldiers display a remarkable absence of self-reproach over the failure in military duty involved in their neuroses. This holds true not only of conscripts who have perhaps entered military service with reluctance, but also of volunteers who have joined the Army out of patriotic motives. It is evident, accordingly, that the war neuroses are characterized not only by separation-anxiety, but also by a definite deterioration of the sense of duty, i.e. by a definite disintegration of the mental structure of conscience (a collapse of the authority of the super-ego). An unmistakable disturbance of the personality is thus seen to be involved in the development of a war neurosis. This disturbance is part and parcel of the regression involved in that revival of a hidden state of infantile dependence, to which, as we have seen, a war neurosis is to be ultimately ascribed. What happens is that the war neurotic regresses, in greater or lesser degree, to an infantile level corresponding to a stage of development at which the structure of conscience (or super-ego) has not yet been organized upon a stable basis. The neurotic soldier is thus more or less reduced to the emotional state of a child who has not yet reached the stage of accepting his parents as authoritative conscience-figures. At this stage the child is not so much concerned whether his own behaviour is good or bad (morally) in the eyes of his parents as whether his parents appear to love him or not, i.e. whether, from his point of view, they present themselves to him as good (in the sense of 'nice') or bad (in the sense of 'nasty') figures. What happens, therefore, when a soldier develops a war neurosis is that, regressing to an infantile emotional level, he ceases to regard his superiors in rank and the military organization in general as representing authoritative parental figures to whom he is bound by a deep sense of moral obligation, and begins to regard them as 'bad' parental figures who have no love or consideration for him. At the same

## *The War Neuroses—Their Nature and Significance*

time he regards those at home as 'good' parental figures who love him, and who will look after him if only he can get back to them (distance often lending no little enchantment to the view). He thus becomes consumed by an overwhelming desire to escape from the insecurity which he experiences at the hands of the 'bad' figures, into whose clutches he feels that military obligations have delivered him, to the security which the 'good' figures at home seem, by contrast, to offer him. That this is a correct interpretation of the situation which develops is confirmed in an interesting manner by two of the stock complaints voiced by hospitalized neurotic soldiers in proof of their inability to 'go back' to the Army. These are (in all cases almost identically phrased), 'I can't stand being shouted at', and 'I can't eat Army food'—the latter complaint being almost invariably followed, in the case of married men, by the remark, 'But I can eat anything my wife cooks for me'. The inner meaning of these complaints is, of course, that every word of command has become the shout of an angry father, and that every 'greasy' (always 'greasy') meal from the cook-house has become additional evidence of the indifference of a heartless mother. Further evidence that the neurotic soldier feels himself to be in the power of evil figures is provided by the frequency of such symptoms as a sense of being watched, as well as by the frequency of nightmares about being chased or shouted at (not to mention somewhat less common nightmares about being crushed, strangled or visited by ghosts). Such being the situation, it is not difficult to understand why it is that the war neuroses should prove so resistant to psychotherapy—and indeed to any form of remedial treatment in the medical armamentarium. Perhaps it is small wonder too that, after acquiring some disillusioning experience of neurotic servicemen *en masse*, I was driven to remark, 'What these people really need is not a psychotherapist, but an evangelist'. In the light of further experience, I see no reason to think that this remark was greatly in error; for I remain convinced that, from the national standpoint and from the standpoint of military efficiency, the problem presented by the war neuroses is not primarily one of psychotherapy, but one of morale.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

If my conclusions meet with general acceptance, a number of important questions of policy are bound to arise. I do not propose to deal with these



### *Miscellaneous Papers*

questions here; but I cannot refrain from drawing attention to one of them—the question of awarding pensions to individuals who have been discharged from the services on account of a war neurosis. It is not open to question that, from a strictly medical point of view, such an individual must be regarded essentially as a patient. He is suffering from *bona fide* symptoms; and, in so far as his condition is amenable to treatment, he should receive the treatment which he requires. At the same time his social rehabilitation is obviously a matter for national concern; and, in so far as his capacity as a wage-earner is affected, he and his family will require some adequate form of economic assistance from the State. It merits consideration, however, whether, from the point of view of morale, a specifically *war* pension, possibly accompanied by a badge ‘for service rendered’, is an appropriate award in respect of the special form of disability represented by a war neurosis. The question of pensions for the war neuroses is, of course, one which lends itself all too readily to the influence of backdoor political pressure; but, in view of the intimate association of the problems of war neurosis and morale, it is clearly in the national interest not only that such pressure should be resisted, but that the whole question should be reviewed afresh.