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Editorial

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EDITORIAL

"MOTH EATEN PERSONALITIES" FROM WAR-WORN "MOTH EATEN" BRAINS

Failure in military life and failure in civil adjustment of course are inevitable in persons who are insane or psychotic, in persons who are psychopathic, and in epileptics and the feebleminded.

Major Perry V. Wagley, Army psychiatrist, pointed out the three criteria for military and civil failure in persons who appear normal: a) Emotional Instability, b) Immaturity or Irresponsibility, and c) Alcoholism.

On the question of what may be expected in a great many ex-soldiers who have none of the above mentioned conditions, there is an eighth group. It is the largest group. Many of them, because of inability after the war to become successfully or adequately socially adjusted, will be problems and community charges especially of probation and parole officers of courts and institutions or of other agencies.

All persons as they grow up acquire characteristics, such as ability to feed themselves, obedience, neatness, promptness, judgment, disposition to protect their own property and the property of others, to safeguard their own rights and the rights of others, sensitivity to the approval of others, and compliance with a moral or ethical or social or religious code. In extreme old age, in senile dementia, these traits are lost in reverse order, e.g., the last acquired traits are first lost, and the earliest acquired traits such as feeding endure the longest.

Now in warriors, many have what the doctors will call "moth eaten" brains, multiple areas of cerebral softenings from various causes like emboli from the rheumatic heart or encephalitis (brain fever) which infarcts cause an autopsied brain to appear "moth eaten." There may be local areas of exhaustion in the brain or nerve ganglia or pathways from too prolonged mental-emotional strain and fatigue or days and nights alert or in terror without sleep or repeated severe emotional shock. Those ex-warriors will have in life what we must regard as "moth eaten" personalities! They may lose any one or several acquired traits, but unlike senile dementia their other acquired personality traits or characteristics will remain intact.

Some will lose capacity for judgment. Others will lose the ability to avoid giving offense. Some will lose honesty. Others will lose diligence or application. Some will trespass. Others will lose caution. Many will lose their sense of delicacy or good taste or courtesy. So it goes. The list of characteristics or traits is a long

one. Losses may be very variable. In their other traits they will be intact, and be their natural selves.

Therefore, social symptoms will appear in the form of delinquency, or dependency. Many will be inadequate even for routines they once performed. Some will make no progress in life but may be able to cope only with accustomed routines and will fail in or avoid new problems; be unpromotable. Some will be overly sensitive to alcoholism or fevers or strain or excitement; some will be restless and a few of them will seek excitement. Others will become solitary, others passive, many will brood, some will be as unresponsive as a run-down battery which can not spark; some will suicide, some will be private and public scolds and advisors but not doers; many will desert and drift from home and job or duty, and many will be functionally frail and be complaining invalids. They will not dement into an insanity because not the whole brain is involved: they will remain "moth eaten" personalities.

A great many will in many ways resemble old, old men, and women prematurely aged; but most of them will be, after a few months, average persons most of the time.

It does not matter to those of us who are not physicians, but who are interested in them or charged with their responsibility, whether this soldier had a blood clot on the brain; this aviator had "fog fatigue"; whether this marine had combat fatigue, or this nurse, tropical fever; whether this officer had been battered, starved, and exhausted before retreat or surrender. There may be organic changes in any case or there may be functional and perhaps local brain areas of brain cell exhaustion.

These persons are not psychotic, nor are they psychopathic. They may have been successes or failures, bright or dull, "good" or "bad"; they may have been closely knit or loosely integrated personalities. Now, they are what they are; each unique. The condition is stationary: it is not reversible, because only scar tissue, not new brain cells, replace moth eaten areas of brain cell loss or total exhaustion.

There is no specific medical treatment for these conditions which is curative; but they need the best of hygienic conditions. There are no psychological or medical tests for such impairment; continued social and domestic and industrial observation will be diagnostic.

If they have become offenders, these "cases" need probation and supervision, i.e. social nursing: commitment and parole are not as good as probation. They will be recidivists: mental or personality cripples; they can not be upright. They may need aid, but they should be kept out of institutions.

There is no hope of exorcising symptoms by discipline!

They do not merit sympathy nor criticism. They deserve non-

emotional evaluation, and they will need supervision according to the complex of society's needs and their needs. Probation and parole officers will be officially concerned with those who will become delinquents.

So for understanding, let us regard them as "Moth Eaten" Personalities, due wholly or largely or in part to the war, not delinquents but unregimentable opportunists, *sui generis*, burdens to themselves and their families and communities and to society.

However, America, even thus burdened, can lead the world because our civilians are not yet impaired by mixtures of grief and terror, insomnia from bombing, starvation, separation, repression and frustration, transplantation and years of no hope, injuries, and exposure.

Management requires and demands thoughtful application of patience and understanding of these non-dementing spotty impairments. Society, in its progress and for common welfare, must be protected; the unfortunates, safeguarded. Such duty rests upon all of us.

HAROLD S. HULBERT.
