

A Straightforward Guide
to Nervous Illnesses

NERVES EXPLAINED

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Nerves Explained

A STRAIGHTFORWARD GUIDE
TO NERVOUS ILLNESSES



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Part One

EXPLANATION

I

Introduction

If people want to learn about nerves they will manage it somehow. If they are not provided with books to tell them the truth they may read books which provide them with falsehoods; if I do not write this book, someone else will.

One reason for writing it is to show that quite a lot of modern notions about nerves are straightforward common-sense ideas and that the whole subject of nervous illnesses is not a matter of peculiar ideas with obscure and far-fetched explanations for any nervous disorder. Psychiatry today is often wrongly ridiculed and psychiatrists jestingly labelled as 'trick cyclists' who advocate unbridled sexual licence and disapprove of all kinds of punishment. I write as a general physician interested in both bodily and mental illness and I do not believe there should be any clear division between physician and psychiatrist. *Homo sum, nil a me humani alienum puto* was the motto from Terence over the doors of my old hospital—'As a man I am concerned with everything to do with mankind'.

I started this book with high ideals, intending to provide you, the reader, with just what is good for you, neither more nor less. I soon realized this would mean an impossibly dull book which would make you feel patronized and irritated. When the book came to be written I found it was a mixture of things that specially interest me, things I think will be interesting to you and things which I believe you ought to

INTRODUCTION

know. It is neither complete nor balanced. It is neither authoritative nor uplifting. I have enjoyed writing it because it has helped me to clarify and arrange my ideas so as to explain them. It is not aimed at any special type of reader. It is for those who need it, those who like it, or those who are helped by it. It has been difficult to know how much to define and explain, and I may have made things too simple and explained things which most of you know already, but it is better to be too simple than too complicated. The book is designed to be read in order; the later chapters are easier to understand if you have read the earlier chapters first, all the same you will probably dodge here and there according to your interests. Much of it is written in the first person; this is done deliberately to show that the opinions are given not as incontrovertible facts but as personal views and ideas. Also I believe that books written in the third person have a certain remoteness and in a book about nerves a close relationship between author and reader is needed, similar to that between doctor and patient. This is a book about what I believe to be true not about what I am completely certain is clear cut fact. One cannot write on 'nerves' as one can write on arithmetic or cookery, the study of 'nerves' is at a far more elementary stage than these subjects. Abstract subjects such as emotions, experiences and desires do not lend themselves readily to scientific investigation and measurement and the serious investigation of nervous illness has only been pursued at all thoroughly in the last fifty years. Much remains unknown, much cannot be proved or disproved, many ideas are held more from reverence of their originator than for any good reason, and so you must forgive me if this book does not answer all your problems or explain everything you do not understand.