

# **WAR-TIME NERVES**

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War-time nerves by Herbert J. Hall

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**HERBERT J. HALL**

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NERVES**



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BY

HERBERT J. HALL, M.D.



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## NOTE

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## I

## WAR-TIME NERVES

He whom a dream hath possessed knoweth no more of doubting,  
 For mist and the blowing of winds and the mouthing of words he  
 scorns;  
 Not the sinuous speech of schools he hears, but a knightly  
 shouting,  
 And never comes darkness down, yet he greeteth a million  
 morns.

He whom a dream hath possessed knoweth no more of roaming;  
 All roads and the flowing of waves and the speediest flight he  
 knows,  
 But wherever his feet are set, his soul is forever homing,  
 And going, he comes, and coming, he heareth a call and goes.

STANFORD O SHEEL

WHAT is the war doing to the mind and heart;  
 to the nerves of the Nation? I can answer  
 only as one obliged to stay at home and who  
 looks out from an obscure corner upon the  
 great world conflict. It is possible that such a  
 viewpoint may have its own special value and  
 interest.

A boy of nineteen goes into aviation because  
 he likes it and "because it does not matter if  
 a few boys are killed off in practice — that will



leave the older men for their larger work." This is not fatalism, it is not the discouraged cry of a man tired of life, neither is it patriotism in the narrow sense. It is good-will, good sportsmanship, the new nerve of the Nation. It is more still. These boys, many of them sons of rich men, are accustomed to luxury and comfort — too much accustomed. They are deliberately and in great numbers choosing danger, privation, and death as something better than what they were having. Why? Not entirely from love of the game, we may be sure, although that element is strong.

The individual and the war, or in relation to the war, offers a most absorbing study. How do men go into it and why, and what is the reaction upon those who stay at home? This much is sure: those who go and all of us who are affected are simplifying life, not complicating it any more. We shall all know ourselves better, we shall understand better why we do anything, and we are more likely to be direct and effective in every way.

When a man denies himself all he has held valuable and presents himself naked, so to speak, before the great god of war, more than he probably knows has happened. I am not going to idealize and imagine character changes which are not true. Every man will approach his service from a different angle and the personal result will be different in each individual. But with the eyes of the physician I have seen into the lives of a number of men who have enlisted or who have been drafted, who have come back from service or who are waiting to go. I have also studied somewhat the lives of people who stay at home. It is all, or mostly all, good; and the greatest change is in simplification and a new idealism. We no longer need so many things to make us happy. There is in the air a sense of relief even in the face of dread and danger. But simplification in itself would not be so valuable if it did not leave room for and make possible certain great positive virtues.

War, even to those at home, is such an all-

pervading, penetrating matter. It gets into the most sluggish blood, it activates the most torpid brain, it makes men alive, it makes them think. They think not in petty detail any more, but in large directness. They think of war, yes, and how to win it; but they think also of life. When life is so cheap it somehow becomes more interesting, demands explanations and understandings which we have been too indolent or too confused to make.

I am not forgetting my medical viewpoint, but medicine is enlarging its borders. Medical men are permitted to think of vital things nowadays, for it has become evident that matters of philosophy and of religion have their direct influence upon the body. It has also become evident that there is a hygiene of the spirit quite as important as that of the body.

We do not talk about it much at home, the men who are going into service do not talk about it; but out of this great simplification is coming a new strength and directness of religious belief — a new vision. The boy who