

On the same day he was removed to a dressing station and thence to a casualty clearing station; in the evening of that day he died. The medical officer there stated that the patient was absolutely unconscious, and could not be roused. His breathing was stertorous and slow; the pupils were equal and reacted to light; knee-jerks were difficult to obtain. He died shortly afterwards.

OPINIONS OF FRENCH AND GERMAN AUTHORS REGARDING "SHELL SHOCK" BY WINDAGE.

Dr. Mott says that many discussions have taken place by French and German neurologists regarding the question of organic changes occurring in the central nervous system as a result of *vent du projectile*, or windage. According to Léri, a true commotion appears only to be produced at a proximal distance of some ten metres from great projectiles. The finding of groups of men dead in the last attitude of life, in closed spaces, such as the German "pill boxes" and concrete dug-outs, and the proven fact that enormous forces of compression and decompression are generated by the detonation of high explosives in great shells, aerial torpedoes, and mines, has lent support to the view that mere proximity to the explosion is sufficient to cause organic changes in the brain and spinal cord by the compression and decompression of gases the result of the detonation of the explosive and of the atmospheric air; altogether apart from actual concussion caused by violent contact with solid materials, such as sandbags or the earth forming the walls of a dug-out, which may at the same time cause burial or partial burial, unattended by visible evidence of injury of the body sufficient to account for symptoms of cerebral or spinal concussion. The patient is rendered unconscious and his mind is a blank concerning what happened, in a true case of *commotio cerebri*; consequently he is unable to say whether he had or had not been concussed by the sand or earth. In the two cases under consideration there was no history of burial.

Undoubtedly the vast majority of non-fatal cases of shell shock are more emotional in origin than commotional, and occur especially in subjects of an inborn neurotic or neuropathic temperament; but the two conditions may be associated. Both Léri and Meige emphasize the fact that commotional symptoms are not influenced by psychotherapy. They also point to the fact that in cases where organic changes have occurred the cerebro-spinal fluid withdrawn by lumbar puncture exhibits macroscopic or microscopic evidence of blood, indicating that hæmorrhage had occurred.

HYPOTHESES REGARDING THE LESIONS OF "COMMOTION."

Two hypotheses have been put forward to explain organic lesions by "commotion":—

1. Compression of the gas and atmosphere, so that the cranium and spine is struck, as it were, by a solid body, and the vibration is transmitted through the bony structures to the cerebro-spinal fluid and thence to the brain and spinal cord, causing a molecular disturbance of the delicate colloidal structures of the neurones, particularly those of the nuclei in the floor of the fourth ventricle, where the fluid is most abundant, and where it acts as a water cushion upon which the vital cardio-respiratory centres rest.

2. Compression is followed by a corresponding decompression, causing the liberation of bubbles of gas in the blood and tissues leading to embolism.

Probably both the forces of compression and decompression act in producing vascular disturbances in the central nervous system, causing arterio-capillary anæmia and venous congestion.

UNDAUNTED SPIRIT.

Mr. F. Seton Delmer writes from Berne to the *Daily Mail*:—

"Sister Hilda Hawley, late of the British Red Cross and St. John Ambulance, and a member of the American mission for the Balkans, has just come through from Sofia by way of Vienna on her way home to England after spending two years as a prisoner in Bulgaria. She has been detained during the last two months in the little mountain village of Silz, on the Tyrol frontier.

"Her devoted work as a nurse in Monastir and Sofia justly won her the respect of all. She owes her repatriation to the Queen of Bulgaria, who died in September, and who was deeply touched by the work this unconquerable and unselfish little Englishwoman did for all the sick and wounded, irrespective of nationality. All the time she was in Bulgaria she insisted on wearing her little British flag, and the Bulgarians have given her their Distinguished Service Medal to wear beside it, so much did her spirit impress them."

A party of British nurses who were in the Italian retreat have arrived safely in London. They lost all their belongings, but brought with them their mascot, a black-and-white cat.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)