

## 19<sup>th</sup> Century literary non-fiction

### Source B

This is an extract from an article published in an 1869 issue of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, a publication which featured articles on a variety of topics. Here the writer tries to imagine what it's like to live with a nervous condition, or what we might think of as chronic anxiety.

### Anxiety

There are few persons, probably, who do not know what it is to awake in the early hours of the morning, when vitality is said to be at its lowest, with a load on mind and spirits, a sense of things going all wrong with us, a worry of other people's misdoings, a panic of self-mistrust, a horror of impending evil. One sting after another starts us broad awake. The real  
5 anxieties of the past day grow into the dimensions of despair, molehills swell into mountains, a feverish activity in self-tormenting raises a host of goblins out of our most trifling blunders. Memory recalls long-past mistakes, and sets them up in hideous enlargement: cheek-by-jowl with these bristle the words and deeds of yesterday, charged with a baleful\* significance, and pregnant with evil issues, which nothing but a prompt reversal can avert. Something  
10 must be done, and that instantly. If the post went out at four o'clock in the morning, if the household and the outer world were astir to act out the programme of undoing with which our disturbed fancy is so busily prolific, there is no knowing what spectacle we might not present, or how low our credit for discretion\* might sink, leaving the world with a different opinion of our discretion from what we trust to be its present estimate. But with this painful  
15 experience comes also the calming recollection that this morbid conscience has but a shortlived reign, and leaves little trace upon our actions. We settle it, perhaps, that something has disagreed with us, or we were over-tasked the day before, and the nervous system deranged. We lay aside the hours of fidgets as we do our dreams – nobody need be the wiser. We relapse into hope and complacency. There is no more question of undoing the  
20 past; we live in the present and work for the future as before.

It is well, however, to recall these restless, agitated, unreasonable moments (for we are not concerned here with the workings of true compunction\*), if we have ever experienced them, as they should teach us tenderness and forbearance towards a very trying class. For an  
25 *hour* our nerves had been painfully excited:—there are people whose whole lives, or long periods of them, are passed in precisely the condition of thought and feeling we have described. We can laugh at ourselves when we emerge from this fantastical purgatory, but there are some who never emerge. As with the lotos-eaters\* it was always afternoon; as some men for the whole of the twenty-four hours take an easy after-dinner view of life; as some sanguine busy natures live always in “glad, confident morning,”—so are there some  
30 with whom it is always two or three or four hours after midnight, when the sky is at its darkest, and no ray of the dawning has yet showed itself. And these are the victims of their nerves—the unhappy people who cannot throw off the bugbears of the night by inhaling one draught of spring's delicious air, or by throwing themselves into their appointed work, or by seeking the invigorating society of their fellows—people who have for their daylight  
35 prompters the uneasy suggestions and misgivings which only visited our couch once and away, swarming and buzzing round our pillow through some special conjuration—prompters

40 malignantly bent on their exposure, which can by no means be thrust aside by one gallant spring in the cheerful world of life and fact, but are perpetually betraying them into exhibitions of caprice, wilfulness, irresolution, fears, tremors, and what not, disturbing the general serenity; but which, if they annoy and exasperate others, are in truth infinitely more annoying and exasperating to themselves.

## Glossary

- \* baleful – threatening harm, menacing
- \* discretion – the quality of behaving in such a way as to avoid causing offence/revealing confidential information
- \* compunction – a feeling of guilt that follows or prevents the doing of something bad
- \* lotos-eaters – a reference to Greek mythology and Tennyson’s 1832 poem; the lotos plant was a narcotic making eaters sleepy or dazed

This extract is from ‘Vapours, Fears, and Tremors’ by Anne Mozley and the full text can be found online at <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044092714344?urlappend=%3Bseq=246>

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