

18 THE NERVOUS HOUSEWIFE

baby sister with a heated spoon called "nervous." A "nervous breakdown" is a familiar verbal disguise for one or other of the sinister faces of insanity itself.

It should be made clear that what we are dealing with in the nervous housewife is not a special form of nervous disorder. It conforms to the general types found in single women and also in men. It differs in the intensity of symptoms, in the way they group themselves, and in the causes.

Physicians use the term psychoneuroses to include a group of nervous disorders of so-called functional nature. That is to say, there is no alteration that can be found in the brain, the spinal cord, or any part of the nervous system. In this, these conditions differ from such diseases as locomotor ataxia, tumor of the brain, cerebral hemorrhage, etc., because there are marked changes in the structure in the latter troubles. One might compare the psychoneuroses to a watch which needed oiling or cleaning, or merely a winding up, — as against one in which a vital part was broken.

The most important of the psychoneuroses, in so far as the housewife is concerned, is the