

BREAKING DOWN.

We are frequently startled in these days of hurried living and prevalent mental disease, by hearing that some friend, apparently up to this time well in mind and robust in body, has suddenly broken down, falling, it may be, into hopeless invalidism, or dying after a sudden and short illness. And the question very naturally is, "What is the cause of this sudden failure of all the powers?" or, "Why did not some physical warning of such failure give him an opportunity to save himself before it was too late?" These questions seem insoluble riddles, "inscrutable mysteries," and the pious leave them with Providence for reply, while the impious use them as a foundation for hopeless pessimism. But the rational person, who neither ignores nature nor quarrels with Providence for making nature, knows that those questions both have natural answers—that there is a cause, easily traced, for this sudden failure of strength, and that premonitory symptoms of its approach were no doubt given again and again, but were utterly unheeded. It often happens that the strain which causes the final collapse is not nearly so great as some that have been previously borne without apparent injury. So a rope may be worn to the last strand by lifting pound weights, and that last strand be broken by lifting a single pound. A long-continued exhaustion of the natural powers has preceded the final and fatal effort. Over-work of mind and body, loss of sleep, mental anxiety, have depleted the strength and nullified the resisting power. Warnings that the account of vigour, physical and mental, was being overdrawn, have repeatedly come, but all to no purpose. There has been attendant pain, physical lassitude, and unnatural craving for food, with that sense of mental weariness which is always a precursor of flagging power. But these

kindly warnings of nature were either wholly disregarded or rebuffed by a use of drugs or stimulants. Even a mighty effort of the will will often neutralize these important warning symptoms. But though the indications are thus stifled, the consuming of the vital energy goes on just the same, though now unheeded. The penalty for broken laws will be exacted, though it may be deferred, and when the time of settlement comes no compromises will be possible, but the uttermost farthing will be demanded and collected.

Physicians and others who have had much opportunity to observe men, have often remarked upon the fact that persons of great natural vigour will often give way long before those of feeble natural powers. Here is a case where the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. The cause of this is very plain. The weak man cannot abuse his strength without feeling his folly so keenly that he perforce forbears.

But the strong man works all day, and studies, or, far worse, dissipates all night, and declares that he feels perfectly well meanwhile. It is very difficult to make such a man understand that he is drawing bills on health which, after thirty-five, or even sooner, he must pay at one hundred per cent. interest. Thirty-seven is called by physicians the fatal year for all who have been "fast young men." It is very seldom that a man who has drawn heavily on his physical and mental powers between the ages of twenty and thirty, passes the critical year mentioned without some serious indication of physical or mental disease. This fact explains some cases that often seem very strange to us. When a man is a hard worker, the fact of over-strained endurance is a less surprising one. It is very noticeable how many able business men are cut down in the prime of their life and