

PUBLIC OPINION.

NERVOUSNESS: THE NATIONAL DISEASE OF AMERICA.—Dr. S. Weir Mitchell considers it proved beyond any dispute that nervousness is the characteristic malady of the American nation, growing upon them in a frightfully accelerated ratio every year, and threatening them with disasters at no distant date which the mind shrinks from contemplating. The number of deaths from this cause is already appalling, and is steadily and rapidly increasing. In some of the busy-centers the tables of mortality show that the proportion of nerve deaths has multiplied more than twenty times in the last forty years, and that now the nerve deaths number more than one-fourth of all the deaths recorded. What is most shocking in these returns, this fearful loss of life occurs mainly among young people of both sexes.

What is the cause of this? Dr. Mitchell is clearly of opinion that the first and most potent cause is the climate. Dr. Mitchell says the operation of climatic conditions in relation to health in this country is utterly mysterious. White races are affected more than colored. The Anglo Saxon Americans are the greatest sufferers from the national disease, and especially those in the higher walks of life. Females are more under the influence of this terrible scourge than males, and town dwellers than country folk. The prevalence of the more serious nervous diseases is shown to be in almost exact proportion to the congestion of population.

Americans are not responsible for the climate. But they are responsible, almost criminally responsible, for aggravations of the effects of the climate by their habits of life, which multiply the number of victims tenfold, and must, in the long run, degrade

and attenuate the race. The two most formidable enemies of the national health are the Dollar Devil and the School Fiend. The former attacks particularly males, the latter females; but both sexes are more or less exposed to the malign influence of both evils. There is a popular goody-goody notion that late hours, fashionable styles of dress, prolonged dancing, and all the other follies of gay society, are the main cause of nervous wreck among women. But the truth is, that the leisure, pleasure-seeking class are comparatively free from nervous disease. The flower of American womanhood is wilted by over culture before it comes fully into bloom. The long hours, the multiplicity of studies, the number of teachers—each striving to get the utmost out of the pupils—the craving rivalry to be well-graded, the all-devouring ambition to command a means of living, the hurried or neglected meals, the want of exercise and the fatal irregularity that it entails, the gnawing worry that murders sleep—it is these, and these alone, that condemn tens of thousands of American women to a life of misery and uselessness, before they have ceased to be children. It is a tremendous saying, from one speaking with authority, that as much domestic unhappiness is caused in America by nervousness among women as by dram-drinking among men. Yet such is Dr. Weir Mitchell's verdict. He holds that every girl ought to be examined as to her nervous temperament when about to go to school, and at frequent intervals afterward; that leisure, exercise and wholesome meals ought to be insisted upon; and that studies ought to be compulsorily diminished, or discontinued altogether, the moment the