

## MENTAL STRAIN.

BY M. CHARLES RICHTER.—TRANSLATED FROM THE REVUE SCIENTIFIQUE FOR THE  
POPULAR SCIENCE MONTHLY FOR AUGUST.

A BOOK on mental over-pressure has been written by Madam Manacéine for the protection of the men who are to follow us. A continuance of the kind of life that is now led in the great centres of civilization will involve the risk of compromising the lot of future generations. We are going blindly, groping, towards a new humanity, to issue from us, of which we can not predict the character. This humanity is in danger of being a poor affair indeed, from whatever point of view we may regard the case, unless we conduct ourselves better. Madame Manacéine has undertaken to analyze the present conditions of existence, physiological and psychological; to exhibit us to ourselves as we are; to draw a balance-sheet of our mistakes in habits and education, for the avoidance of a threatened decay. We owe her thanks for her generous and patient attempt.

We have no right to be unconcerned about the future of man-kind. We have an account to settle with the men of coming ages. We must be careful for them. They are worthy of our interest and forethought, and we should be very culpable if we did not have some care for the fate of our great-great-grandchildren.

The prominent characteristic of living beings, of whatever kind, is the tendency to resemble their parents. It is fatally irresistible, and dominant in all biological laws. By heredity we acquire this or that trait of our fathers, whether it be natural or acquired in them. The consequence of this fact is momentous, and has been admirably set forth by M. Marion in his book on Moral Solidarity. It is, that our children will be the same as we have been. They are our image and the faithful portrait of ourselves. A vice acquired by us will become natural with them. An accidental, physical or moral blemish, brought on by our faults, or errors, or carelessness, will become in them a natu-

ral blemish, and they will transmit it to their descendants.

Unless we are now able to preserve our mental and bodily forces intact, our grandchildren will be victims to our faults. They would even have the right, to a certain extent, to call us to account for our careless conduct. "What did you do with that vigorous body and healthy and sturdy mind that were given you by your parents? for it is by your fault that we are miserable and sickly." The importance of the question is thus well established. Since the future depends on the present, it is no less than a question of the future of men. This being fixed, the query arises, Is there mental overstrain? A careful examination of the facts gives us occasion to answer affirmatively. In consequence of the prodigiously artificial conditions of existence which our advanced civilization has imposed upon us, we have greatly modified the habitual and physiological life of our organism. A close study of the habits of contemporary men, such as the author of this book has made, will show that nothing is less in agreement with a healthy vitality than the mode of living of to-day.

From very early years children are shut up in work-rooms for many hours with tiresome books. They have no sufficient distraction from these books, no better prospect of good to be derived from them than the hope of some time passing an examination, complicated, hard, and encyclopedic, of a compass surpassing that of the knowledge of the wisest man that can be imagined. Then, in youth there are still examinations, still hours of study, still books, with only the scantiest provisions for diversion and recreation, except by resorting to fatiguing dissipations. Too much civilization, too much mental culture, with too little care for the physical part. Do we forget that the material structure is the organ of the mind, and