CIVILIZATION AND SUICIDE.

BY WILLIAM MATHEWS, LL. D.

THE increasing frequency of suicide is one of the startling signs of the times. Hardly a day passes in any of the chief civilized countries of the world but the press records the death of some person who has shuffled off this mortal coil by the aid of rope, pistol, pond, or poison. A Boston daily paper reported on May 3, 1889, eight suicides in this country. Nine years ago it was estimated that Europeans were killing themselves at an annual average rate of one in 5,000, and that consequently about 60,000 persons, or more than were killed, wounded, and missing in the bloodiest battle of modern times, were destroying themselves every year! Even this statement, alarming as it is, falls short of the actual truth, for there is no reason to doubt that hundreds of suicides are committed yearly in every large country which, as such, are not made public. Family pride falsifies the cause and manner of many a death. But even the number of deaths does not show the strength of the mania, for hundreds of attempts at suicide are thwarted. Of 700 such attempts in London in 1881, more than one-half were arrested by the police.

A remarkable circumstance of the deaths is the regularity with which every civilized country pays its yearly tribute to this fatal plague. Statistics collected and analyzed with great care, and giving the proportion, per million inhabitants, of voluntary deaths which have occurred in all the countries of Europe from 1816 to 1877, show that suicide has steadily increased, and goes on increasing, more rapidly than the geometrical augmentation of the population and the general mortality—a result which can be attributed only to that universal and complex influence which we call *civilization*. In a country so blessed as ours, where food is abundant, labor in demand, and opportunities numerous for mercantile and professional success, one would expect to find the mania less intense than elsewhere; but such is not the fact. To offset our advantages, we have a more changeful climate than Europeans;

our nervous organism is more sensitive ; our habits of living are less healthful ; speculation is rifer and more daring ; and changes of fortune are more frequent and violent than in the old world.

In all the countries of the civilized world men are becoming more and more weary of the burden of life. While the increased knowledge of the laws of health, sanitary regulations, and the marvellous improvements in surgery and medicine have prolonged the average of human life, yet along with all this are manifested a greater impatience of life itself and a stronger desire to throw off its cares and responsibilities. Nor is it the poor, homeless, friendless, or ignorant members of the community alone that manifest this desire. A list of the men of genius, culture, or wealth who in different ages and countries have put an end to their lives—including, as it would, Aristotle, Cleanthes, Demosthenes, Zeno, Themistocles, Petronius Arbiter, Cato, Brutus, Cassius, Terence, Seneca, Aristarchus, Nero, Mithridates, Hannibal, him

> "who, to be deem'd
> A god, leaped fondly into Ætna flames,
> Empedocles ; and him who, to enjoy
> Plato's Elysium, leap'd into the sea,
> Cleombrotus";

Castlereagh, Kleist, the German author ; Chatterton, Dr. Bull, author of England's national anthem ; Romilly, Hugh Miller, Colonel Gurwood, Haydon, the painter ; Colton, author of "Lacon"; Prévost-Paradol, H. B. Wallace—would show that no intellectual endowment, natural or acquired, or abundance of the world's goods, is a guarantee against this disaster. Lord Clive, the founder of the British empire in India, twice in his youth attempted to destroy himself whilst residing at Madras, and twice the pistol which he snapped at his own head failed to go off,—leading him, after he had satisfied himself that the pistol was really well loaded, to exclaim that "surely he was reserved for something great." At the age of forty-nine, after a series of dazzling victories in India, by which he won fame, immense wealth, and a peerage, he tried a third time, in a fit of constitutional gloom aggravated by disease and the accusations of enemies, to shoot himself, and succeeded. It was only the timely pecuniary aid of an old schoolfellow, whom Napoleon met on his way to the Pont-Neuf in Paris, that prevented the man of destiny, in 1794, when he was in great financial distress and had exhausted all his

resources, from drowning himself in the Seine. Bismarck is said to have declared, after the battle of Sadowa, that he would have killed himself if the Prussians had been beaten. Byron declared that, during the time he was composing "Childe Harold," he "should many a day have blown his brains out but for the reflection that it would have given great pleasure to his mother-in-law." No one can read Shakespeare's sonnets without feeling that there was a season in his youth when thoughts of suicide vexed even his great soul.

The love of life is deemed the strongest instinct in man, and yet it yields not only to weighty or vehement considerations, but to the slightest and most trivial motives imaginable. Bacon says truly that "there is no passion in the mind of man so weak but it mates and masters the fear of death." A well-educated Englishman killed himself, some years ago, because he was "tired of buttoning and unbuttoning." Men have been known to put an end to themselves to escape the pain of toothache or a pain in the stomach. Two centuries ago, Vatel, the cook of Condé, ran himself through with his sword, in despair because the fish did not arrive in time for dinner, when that prince entertained Louis XIV.! A married woman at Mellenberge, in Hesse-Cassell, some years ago, drowned herself and child in the Fulda because she had been ordered by the police, under penalty of fine and imprisonment for neglect, to bring the babe, eight months old, to be vaccinated. A farmer in Hampden, Mass., a very penurious man, refused to engage a nurse for his sick wife. When others remonstrated with him he went away and hanged himself. Marie Speiz, of Brünn, drowned herself in the Danube because she was "laughed at on account of her corpulence."

That suicide is not the prerogative of the age of reason and reflection statistics mournfully prove. More than 2,000 boys and girls are its victims in Europe every year, and the number is steadily increasing.

But what is the cause of this fearful act? Is it, in all cases, mental disease? Is the convenient formula of juries, so merciful to relatives and friends,—"temporary insanity,"—always justified by the facts? Esquirol and Dr. Winslow, acute writers on suicide, say that it is. Casuists are ready to prove that, though the madness may have been temporary, yet, during "the height, torrent, and whirlwind" of the victim's despair, his reason was

overpowered and dethroned; he lost all power of self-control, all sense of responsibility, and, for the time, was absolutely insane. All this, however, is but hair-splitting. The same reasoning would prove all men to be at times insane. Who is not, at some time, "beside himself" with rage, fear, or shame? While it is hard to mark the precise line between the normal and the abnormal functions of the brain,—to tell exactly where reason ends and madness begins,—and while it is true that many self-slayers are either unconscious of their acts or perform them under distinct hallucinations, yet it is equally true that the great majority of such persons are perfectly well aware of the nature of the deed they are doing, and do it with the so-far intelligent purpose of escaping misery which seems unendurable, punishment, or disgrace. It is heart-breaking or brain-tearing trouble, some bitter and intolerable grief which has taken root in the deepest recesses of the soul and poisoned all the sources of joy, that makes men long to die or impetuously seek refuge in death, in the hope that it will be an eternal sleep, or, at least, an end of their misery.

Indeed, no act of a man's life can be shown to be more coolly and rationally planned than is generally the act of leaving it. When an Ahithophel hangs himself because Absalom follows not his counsel, but that of Hushai, the Archite; when a Zeno does the same deed because he has stumbled and broken his thumb; when a Hannibal poisons himself with a poison long secreted for such an emergency, to avoid falling into the hands of an enemy whom he has exasperated and humiliated by invariable defeats; when a Themistocles kills himself rather than lead the Persians against his countrymen; when a Cato stabs himself after his defeat by Cæsar, a Brutus falls upon his sword after the fatal field of Philippi, and a Cassius cuts short his life with the very dagger with which he had stabbed "the world's great master"; when an emperor, after entertaining his friends at a splendid supper, stabs himself to the heart, as did Otho after his defeat by Cæcina; when we read of the self-slaying of two public servants who were incriminated for their share in "the South-Sea Bubble," as in the case of Craggs, Postmaster-General of England, and his son, Secretary of State; of the suicide of a physician whose reputation is hopelessly blasted, as in the case of Sir R. Croft, who attended upon the Princess Charlotte, or of the self-suffocation with the fumes of charcoal of two young French authors who have been stung with

rage by the failure of their joint melodrama,—the conviction is forced upon us that these acts are due, not to cerebral disease, but to deliberate determination.

What, then, are the real causes of suicide? Owing to the complexity of moral phenomena, they are often difficult to discover. Often the apparent causes are only the irritants of an already abnormal sensibility; they are but the match applied to combustibles already prepared. First, the propensity to suicide may be hereditary. Voltaire personally knew a case where a father and two sons took their own lives at the same age, and without any discoverable cause. Burrows records a family trait of the same kind exhibited in three generations. The grandfather hanged himself; three of his sons destroyed themselves; two of the grandchildren did the same thing; one made several attempts on his own life; and even the fourth generation showed symptoms of the same propensity. Two cases have occurred, one in Saxony, the other in the Tyrol, in each of which seven brothers hanged themselves one after another.

In the north of Europe alcoholism is said to be the prevailing cause of suicide; in the south, "the pangs of despised love," jealousy, and misery predominate; while in the centre, the chief causes are *tedium vitæ*, shame, and fear of punishment. One-fourth of the suicides in Prussia are attributed to insanity, which in a large proportion of cases is due to alcohol. Not only in the north, but in France also, the great increase of voluntary deaths within the last twenty years is attributed largely to the weakening of the will and the reaction of despondency caused by alcoholism. In Sweden, "the classic ground of alcoholism," the proportion of suicides from that cause was at one time over 65 per cent.

Love, which should be a bond of union, is becoming a dissevering element in civilization. Antony killed himself when he believed that Cleopatra was false to him and had "packed cards with Cæsar"; and she, stung with remorse and grief, put the asp to her breast that it might "with its sharp teeth the knot intrinsicate of life at once untie," and unite her in the grave with her lover. The same causes that made life wearisome to these ancient lovers act yet more powerfully on sensitive modern hearts. A young woman, being disappointed in the character of her lover, hangs herself. A man who fears to lose his mistress, invites her to dinner, and poisons both himself and her. A man and a woman

have long been engaged to marry each other, but on account of his poverty her family oppose the union. Thereupon he refuses to keep his engagement; she ends her life with a dose of strychnine, and he, hearing of it, goes into the woods with a rifle and blows his brains out. It was grief for the loss of beloved ones that prompted the suicides—so different in their moral aspects from the foregoing—of Sir Samuel Romilly, who had often declared that he could not survive the death of his wife, and of Laman Blanchard, whom a similar bereavement befell at a time of extreme nervous exhaustion.

Persons who are fond of saying, with Richter, that many a spiritual giant is buried under a mountain of gold, forget how many more have been buried in the mud-holes and ditches of poverty. Poverty, extolled by the moralist with a well-appointed home and a comfortable balance at his banker's, is shown by statistics to be one of the most intolerable ills under which weary life is called to groan. Nabret attributes 905 out of 6,782 cases of suicide to poverty, and 322 more to reverses of fortune. Of 7,190 cases of self-killing in London during sixty years ending with 1830, 1,416 are attributed to poverty and 605 to "reverse of fortune." Pecuniary difficulties drove 305 Frenchmen in 1884 to voluntary death. The most prolific year of suicides in the United States was 1858, the year after that of the great financial panic, when the proportion was 1 to every 7,682 of the population, and 1 to every 185 deaths.

Acute and incurable disease, which renders existence one continuous suffering, a sense of failure in life, and domestic dissension are causes of suicide. Family troubles are said to have led 219 Prussians in 1880, and 975 out of 7,572 French suicides in 1884, to kill themselves. Physical suffering drove 1,228 Frenchmen in the same year to the same deed. Dread of a painful surgical operation led Colton, the author of "Lacon," to shoot himself at Fontainebleau. "Repentance, shame, and the stings of conscience" are answerable for 378 suicides in Prussia in 1880, one-fourth of whom were females; and incurable diseases for 288. Among the voluntary deaths from the last cause may be classed perhaps that of M. Prévost-Paradol, the brilliant French writer, who, after stultifying himself by accepting from Napoleon III. the appointment of Minister to Washington, was conscience-stricken at his own political apostasy, and died in July, 1870, by

his own hand. Stinging satire has sometimes driven men to self-murder. Lycambes promised his daughter in marriage to Archilochus, the famous poet of Paros; but changed his mind and gave her to a rich suitor. The poet, in revenge, satirized the false Lycambes so cruelly in iambic verse that both father and daughter hanged themselves. Esquirol tells of a young physician, M. Roubeau, who published a medico-philosophic work on melancholy, adverse criticisms of which so disgusted him with life that he went away and strangled himself.

If the suicides of the very wretched surprise us,—those who, in a paroxysm of anguish, close their eyes to the desperate nature of their attempts to escape from suffering,—what shall we say of the same deed when committed by votaries of pleasure, who, having exhausted all the faculties of enjoyment, are sated with life, and would throw it away like a bauble which has ceased to please? *Tedium vitæ* is not the disease of the *canaille;* it is the characteristic suffering of privileged races and classes, the pets of fortune, who fly to suicide as a relief from the monotony of existence, when satiety and ennui have made them "a-weary of the sun." Many a stoic who has combated triumphantly the attacks of external ill, has failed in the struggle with that insidious inner enemy, ennui. Suicide from this cause is the crime of old civilizations, a proof of which we have in its frequency among the Sybarites and the luxurious and *blasé* nobles of Rome under the Empire. It means that all the pleasures of life have been drained to their dregs; or, rather, that the opportunities of enjoyment have outrun, with a certain class, the power to enjoy. It means that wealth, luxury, splendor, which are so keenly coveted by those who do not share them, "only make the sense of profound lassitude more intolerable, when they no longer please; only augment the desire to escape from life, with as little pain as may be, into an existence with new sensations, or, if it might be, into annihilation." The morbid restlessness, discontent, melancholy, and pessimism in Europe at the beginning of this century were fruitful of suicides. "Werther," according to Carlyle, was but the cry of that dim, rooted pain under which all thoughtful men of a certain age were languishing; and while the author laughed at the malady as, in his own case, "a hypochondriac crotchet," many of his readers turned romance into earnest, and ended their sorrows with the razor and the pistol.

Weariness of life was the probable cause of the self-murder in the last century of the accomplished Philip Mordaunt. Intellectual, handsome, popular, and blessed with a charming wife, he yet one day, to the astonishment of all who knew him, ended his life with a pistol. In a letter which he left he said that he had a heartache which nothing but a churchyard sleep could cure. A somewhat similar case was that of the noted and eminently successful New York merchant, Minturn, who deliberately put an end to his life at the age of forty-three. It was life-weariness which drove the master-spirit of antiquity, the great anatomist of the human heart, the philosopher to whose authority the thinkers of Europe bowed for two thousand years in implicit submission,—Aristotle himself,—to self-murder. History records that when asked which is the most transient of human things, he replied, "Gratitude"; and when one spoke of his friends, he exclaimed: "My friends! there are no friends!" When giving lessons in moral science, he could not sit still or stand, but walked to and fro in constant restlessness; and when his wine of life had run to the lees, he could not wait patiently for the hour of release from his weariness, but, in spite of his philosophy and his matchless genius, died as the fool dieth, by his own hand. And yet it was this same world-renowned sage who had written that "courage is the mean between fear and rashness, while suicide is the sum of both."

Antipathy to existence, according to Dr. Henry Morselli, one of the latest and ablest writers on suicide, is a real illness of the brain; it is a morbid mortification of the conscience and the affections, which may often be accompanied by the brightness of a powerful intelligence, but which oftener weakens the character and debilitates the moral sense. Till very recently suicide from satiety has been almost unknown among Americans. But since our late Civil War a sad revolution has taken place in our tastes and habits. Simple pleasures no longer please; life, to be tolerable, must now be spiced with condiments of the most piquant and titillating sort. The demands of the tyrant Fashion, too, are enormous; and to meet them exacts the most exhausting toils, the ceaseless tasking of both body and brain.

A craving for notoriety, always an occasional provocative to suicide, is becoming to-day a more and more powerful one. Rapid communication, the swift diffusion of news by electricity, the

Argus-eyed and ubiquitous press, are turning the world into a theatre in which every whisper is heard and every man is an actor, with a passionate desire in many to attract attention, to create a sensation and win notoriety, even by death, if it cannot be won otherwise.

Still another cause of the increase of voluntary deaths is the growing religious apathy of the age, the practical, as well as theoretical, disbelief in God's providence and in a life after death; a disbelief which in many cases is not the result of investigation and reasoning, but, as Morselli affirms, of a physical inertia and the little hold of the mind obtained by any ideas but such as are directed to material improvement and the gratification of ambition. Popular lecturers and writers on science have harped on "the unchangeability of nature's laws" till the Deity has been virtually banished from the universe. Sane men who kill themselves do not believe in a sin-avenging God. The sceptical philosopher, David Hume, asserted that a man has a right to take his own life. "The life of a man," he declared, "is of no greater importance to the universe than that of an oyster. . . . Where is the harm of turning a few ounces of blood out of its natural channels?" If a man with Hume's genius and acuteness of intellect can speak thus contemptuously of self-killing, who can wonder that weak-minded and wretched men, who "feel the step-dame buffetings of fate," are ready to take the fearful leap?

Thus far we have spoken only of the individual determining motives of suicides. But, besides these, there are certain cosmic, ethnic, social, and biological influences which, because they act upon him unconsciously, elude the notice of the suicide himself. Though we are not fully informed of the relations between moral actions and external phenomena, yet there is abundant proof of the dependence of suicide upon climate and other cosmico-natural influences. Montesquieu, erroneously attributing to England the preëminence in voluntary deaths, ascribed it to the damp, foggy climate of that country,—a theory to which there are two objections, viz., that England is not preëminent in suicide, and that the foggy season is the one in which suicides there are the fewest. So deeply rooted is this notion in the Gallic mind that a French traveller, in describing London, states that he could not take a ride round the Serpentine without seeing a dead body floating on the surface or dangling on a tree! Statistics show

conclusively that the classic ground of suicide is the centre of Europe from the northeast of France to the eastern borders of Germany. There, in a "suicidigenous" area of about 942,000 square kilometres, between 47°–57° of latitude and 20°–40° of longitude, are found the people who more than any other in the civilized world manifest an inclination to this act. As we go north or south from this area the tendency steadily diminishes. Spain and Portugal stand at the bottom of the scale; Saxony and nine departments of the Isle of France, Orleannais, and Champagne are at the top.

Not only does the climate of a country have an influence on suicide, but the disease has a relation to orography and hydrography. It is a curious fact that there is an inverse proportion between mountains and the frequency of voluntary deaths. The mountainous parts of Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Belgium, and Italy are those that make the smallest contributions to suicide. A still more remarkable fact is that throughout Europe the tendency to self-killing increases in the regions of the great rivers and diminishes in marshy countries.

Again, the statistics of all civilized countries show that the frequency of suicide depends upon the seasons of the year. The transition period between spring and summer, especially the month of June, is that when inclination to this act reaches its maximum intensity. The number of voluntary deaths goes on regularly increasing from January to June, and then steadily diminishes from June to December, when it reaches the minimum. The statistics of suicide for nineteen years ending in 1878, published by the city of Boston, Mass., confirm this law; the largest number being in June, the next largest in May and July; the lowest occurring in February, the next lowest in December and January. The same law holds regarding madness, which, it is said, is influenced less by the intense heat of summer than by that of the early spring and summer, which seizes upon the organism not yet acclimatized and still under the influence of the cold season. Till recently an opposite opinion was held by scientists; they believed that self-killing was most frequent in damp, cloudy, dark weather, which tended to make men gloomy and melancholy. Not only the seasons of the year, but the days of the month and of the week, and even the hours of the day, exert an influence on suicide the force and steadiness of which cannot

be mistaken. There are more suicides in the first ten than in the last twenty days of the month. The most fatal days of the week are Tuesday, Thursday, and Monday, the reason being that on those days, and in the early part of the month, comes the reaction from the dissipation that follows "pay-day," when the workman suffers from the satiety of gluttony, the miseries consequent upon drunkenness, the remorse for prodigality, and the intolerance of work which results from his debauchery. For a similar reason, there are more voluntary deaths in the first ten than in the last twenty days of the month.

The influence of race on voluntary death is shown by an overwhelming array of facts gathered from nearly all the countries of Europe. These facts show that the German race has the greatest propensity to self-destruction, and that the Slavic has the least. Between these the other peoples are arranged in almost direct ratio with the ethical distance which separates them from the Germanic. The poorer the Germanic blood, the greater is the inclination to suicide. In France we find the fewest suicides where the Germanic element is smallest, as in Auvergne, Brittany, Gascony, Roussillon, Bearn; and the same is true of Italy. The minimum is found in Calabria, the Basilicata, the Abruzzi, and Sardinia, where the Germanic element either never penetrated or was extremely small; while the maximum is found in northern Italy, which was settled in the middle ages by various German races.

Of the social influences that promote suicide, that of imitation has long been noted. Men think in herds and go mad in herds, while they recover their reason slowly one by one. History teems with accounts of suicidal epidemics which have seized upon men at times, just as at other times there have been epidemics of witchcraft, poisoning, house-anointing, self-mutilation, barn-burning, and other crimes. A mania of suicide prevailed in ancient times among the women of Miletus; and centuries afterward a similar one raged among the women of Marseilles and of Lyons, in France. The same thing occurred at Rouen in 1806, in the Valois in 1813, and at Stuttgart in 1811. In the year 1772 a lottery mania raged in England, which was followed by an epidemic of self-killing that raged with almost incredible virulence. The streets of London swarmed with wretches raving mad with the agony of blasted hope. The mania for hanging themselves on a cross-bar, which broke out among the inmates of

the Hôtel des Invalides at Paris, is well known. Let a man destroy himself by jumping headlong from a monument or tower, and straightway a dozen or more others follow his example, and this mode of death is discarded only when some one shoots or drowns himself, or suffocates himself with the fumes of charcoal. In 1882 so many Parisians sought death by throwing themselves from the Vendôme Column that the ascent was interdicted to the public. After Castlereagh killed himself with a penknife in 1822, many more Englishmen killed themselves in the same way. After the leap of Odlum from the Brooklyn Bridge, two men were arrested in the act of making the leap.

Besides imitation there are other social influences which lead to suicide ; but the most powerful is that which we denote by the general term *civilization*. Self-killing is emphatically the crime of intellectual peoples. Almost unknown to savages, rare among Mohammedans, it rages among the nations most advanced in culture and refinement with a fierceness exactly proportional to their mental development. It is said that Rome knew nothing of this curse till after the establishment of the empire. It was when the Roman legions had carried their eagles triumphantly through the world, and brought back the means of luxury in the spoils of Europe, Asia, and Africa, that life in the Eternal City began to be "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable." To-day the Germans, who are the profoundest thinkers and the most cultivated people, are also the most suicidal race, in Europe. France comes next, England third, Italy and Hungary fourth ; while, on the other hand, Spain, the most backward of European nations in culture, Ireland, Portugal, Corsica, and Dalmatia rank the lowest in the suicidal scale. Of the different regions of the same country, the north and northeast of France outrank in culture and in suicide the centre and the southwest ; the north and centre of Italy outrank the south and the islands ; and Saxony, which in its schools and general culture surpasses the rest of Germany, surpasses it also in the number of its suicides. In short, so universally does the rule hold that the strength of the tendency to self-killing may almost be regarded as an index to a people's civilization.

One of the inevitable effects of cultivation is to make men dissatisfied with poverty and deprivation ; to stimulate the demands for the comforts of life which the mass of toilers cannot attain. As society advances new wants

arise; the luxury of to-day becomes a necessary of life to-morrow; and every want, though essential to man's improvement and perfection, involves new victims to madness and suicide. In the effort to grasp the conveniences and luxuries of our complex modern life, he cannot move without collision, without meeting stubborn obstacles and limits. The interests of other men enclose and press round him like a circle of iron; and if he is weak-bodied or weak-minded, if he is handicapped by bad habits, and cannot adapt himself to new ideas, he will succumb, and perhaps perish in the struggle. To those who recognize the fact that all the phenomena of social life, all the progressive phases of civilization, originate in the constant struggle of man with nature, with other men, and with himself, suicide will appear what it actually is,—not an enigma, an inexplicable social phenomenon, but one inevitable in the process of civilization. Only, as it has been said, "in an ideal condition of the future, where man's sphere of action shall have made itself independent of nature, and where all his forces shall have attained the summit of perfection, will the struggle cease to have victims; but until that supreme end has been attained the weary and perhaps everlasting path will still be inundated with the tears and the blood of mankind."

One of the most distinctive characteristics of our civilization, and at the same time one of the most fruitful causes of voluntary death, is the fast living, the hurry, excitement, and competition, of our nineteenth-century life. We live in an age of intense activity; the click of the electric telegraph, the whistle of the locomotive, and the whir of machinery are ever in our ears. The rapid development of our country, its vast industrial organizations, our fiery ambition and emotional temperament, our dry electric atmosphere, all impel us to overwork. Travelling by steam at thirty miles an hour is but faintly typical of the headlong hurry, the hot, panting haste, with which we pursue both business and pleasure. In the fierce competitions of professional and business life—the strife for wealth, office, and honors—the wear and tear of brain are enormous. It is well known to machinists that no evolution of force can take place with excessive rapidity without damaging the machine in which it occurs. Express-railway stock wears out far more rapidly than that used for slower traffic; and man's nervous system is subject to the same

law—that duration of action is inversely proportional to its intensity.

The struggle between civilized men for the world's goods is becoming more and more a struggle of intellectual strength, ingenuity, and skill; and as the brain is the weapon with which the fight is made, it breaks down under the strain to which its forces are unequal. Nature protects the strong, the skilful, the subtle; but she leaves the ill-formed, the anomalous, the poor in force and skill, to be crushed in the contest; and thus a continual elimination takes place of inferior organisms from human society. But even the conquerors, the men of iron frames and lignum-vitæ nerves, often emerge sadly crippled from the struggle which has consumed so much of their physical and psychical force, and suffer from infirmities and an overpowering sense of ennui and life-weariness which hurry them into a suicide's grave. A recent melancholy example of this is the fate of the late Franklin B. Gowen, the eminent Philadelphia lawyer, who died by his own hand, a victim of the same overwork and "carking care" which laid in the grave the composer Weber, who had so often vainly sighed, "Would that I were a tailor, for then I should have had a Sunday's holiday!"—drove Hugh Miller to kill himself, crying, "My brain is burning; I can bear life no longer!"—cut short the lives of John Leyden, and Alexander Nicolly at thirty-six, struck down Sir William Hamilton with paralysis in the meridian of his powers, sent a vice-president of the United States reeling from the Senate chamber, and ended the career of that brilliant journalist, Henry J. Raymond, in a cerebral crash at forty-nine.

Again, the modern means of transit and of conveying intelligence,—the railway, the steamship, the electric telegraph, and the telephone,—enabling us, as they do, to utilize every moment of our lives, are crowding our days with activities, excitements, and anxieties which till recently were unknown. Our life to-day is the life, not of our own city or country only, but of the whole world. Events a thousand miles away startle and thrill us like those at our very doors. Every man actively engaged in the world's business to-day is a microcosm. The world's pulse beats within him, and he is sensitive to its throbbings; he burns with its feverishness, and faints with its languor. It is this which constitutes the stress of modern existence, exhausting so rapidly

human life, wearing it out with the pains and penalties of a civilization which is as heedless of mortal weakness as the machine that catches its inventor in iron tails and crushes him to atoms.

We pride ourselves on our superiority to our fathers ; but while we enjoy more, we also suffer more, from a thousand artificial anxieties and cares. They fatigued only the muscles ; we exhaust the finer strength of the nerves ; and the result is that loss of stamina, of hopefulness, and of zest for the simple pleasures of life which leads to disgust, life-weariness, and finally to self-destruction. To all this may be added the weakmindedness which springs from forced, hothouse education, begun too early and goaded on too fast ; and, again, from premature responsibility and the engagement of untrained minds in the toils of life. Boys and girls to-day are often men and women in the experience of life and its excitements, and *ennuyés* or *blasés* at an age when their grandparents were flying kites and dressing dolls. The young man, scorning the old slow roads to success, and determined to dazzle the world and conquer its honors by a *coup de main*, "consumes in an hour the oil of the lamp which should burn throughout the night," and, ere he reaches the meridian of life, exhibits the haggard face, the sunken eye, and the feeble gait which belong to "weird eld." Who can wonder that under such circumstances life becomes "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable," and that the poor, worn-out victim of ambition and overwork, who has never once rested his brain or "possessed his soul" during his hot pursuit of wealth and fame, should seek to end his days, and with them

> **"The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks**
> **That flesh is heir to"?**

WILLIAM MATHEWS.