part unknown, except to the members and those in the immediate locality of their operation; and whatever good they do, passes silently into the general stream of social improvement. A few of them, however, have attracted notice, in connection with the lives of celebrated members. Who needs to be informed that it was in one of these that Robert Burns trained himself to that vigour of expression for which he afterwards acquired so much distinction? In the Tarbolton Club the young poet found vent for his overflowing thoughts, and acquired a readiness of speech that astonished not merely country lads of his "own degree," but the learned professors and fashionable ladies of the capital. If, according to the classical *saw*, Burns "was born a poet," we have no reason to suppose that he was born with the gift of conversation and ready effective utterance. It is surely more reasonable to conclude that he owed it, partly to his excellent instructor, who seems to have followed the *intellectual system* of education, as it is now called, and partly to the practice in debate, that he had for several years in the club that he himself established, and of which he was the leading star? Nor must it be inferred, that because only one of the young farmer lads acquired distinction, this was all the good the club did. Every member, doubtless, profited by the discussions there carried on; and, not to speak of the pleasant hours spent in agreeable companionship, became a more intelligent man. They might not, by discussion, become more skilful agriculturists, though this admits of dispute, but they would certainly increase their general power of mind; and if in this way a superior grace were cast over private life, the club cannot be said to have existed in vain.

But it has not merely been among the class to which Burns belonged that practice in debate has been had recourse to. From various recent publications, we find that at almost all our colleges such societies have long existed; and there is no reason to doubt that they have, on the whole, been beneficial. They have served in some measure to counteract the monkish tendencies of such institutions, by directing the attention of the "ingenious youth" to questions of present importance, instead of keeping them for ever gnawing at the dry bones of antiquity. Moreover, by developing the power of speech, and accustoming the youth to the ready use of their mother tongue, they have gone as far to cultivate the practical reason as any course of logic or mathematics to which they could be subjected. It was in one of these societies that the Rev. Robert Hall and Sir James Mackintosh trained themselves to that faculty of speech for which both were subsequently so much distinguished. We are far from thinking that the careful study of the great writers of antiquity went for nothing; still less are we disposed to value lightly the reading of our own native writers; but we consider it not unfair to assume that the habit of conversing on the common subjects of their study, and the practice in debating before their fellow-students, had some influence in training them for their future career. Had they done nothing but debate, we should in all probability have never heard of them; but both were great readers, and both assiduously practised the art of English composition. This threefold exercise has been commended by the illustrious Bacon, and, in connection with debating societies, his words ought not to be lost sight of—"Reading maketh a full man, *conference a ready man*, and writing an exact man." Readiness is a most valuable quality, but if it has not a solid foundation to rest on, it becomes a sorry affair.

But the general increase of intelligence and promptness in reply, are not the only advantages gained by taking a part in such debates as are carried on in these societies. An important, though incidental advantage, which they are fitted to confer, and which, in point of fact, they have often conferred, deserves to be taken notice of. We allude to the opportunity which they afford of getting an insight into human nature—a knowledge of which is more necessary in the conduct of life than Greek or Latin lore. It is said that Dr. Robertson made a better historian from his being a leader in the church courts—his own experience in party tactics enabling him to interpret many of the acts of party men, which he otherwise could neither have understood himself, nor have rendered intelligible to others. As the church courts proved, in Dr. Robertson's case, a good preparatory school to the understanding "of the plots and marshalling of affairs," so, generally, do debating societies. Nor is it difficult to discern the reason. The boy is "father to the man;" it is the same human nature that beats in all bosoms; and he who has watched attentively the tricks and artifices had recourse to in the debating club, will not have much to learn should he be advanced to the imperial parliament, or gain a seat in the privy council. The *tact* and presence of mind acquired in the one field, will stand him good in the other.

Not the least important result of debating societies is the emulation and ardour they produce in the acquisition of knowledge. The youth who has espoused the cause of Queen Mary, for instance, against Elizabeth, or that of Charles I. against Oliver Cromwell, and is bound by a certain day to speak in presence of his companions, whose good opinion is to him a high object of ambition, to the merits of the case, is far more likely to ransack history, and seek out for authorities, than he would be if merely prompted in his search by curiosity, or the love of abstract truth. The desire of knowledge is apt to become weak, unless we have it in our power to impart our information to others; insomuch, that learned philosophers have been led to doubt whether any man's curiosity would be sufficient to engage him in a course of persevering study, if he were entirely cut off from the prospect of social intercourse. The sincere love of truth is, no doubt, a higher motive than the love of approbation; but so long as the latter works in subordination to the former, no injury can arise. At any rate, without sympathy and companionship, it would appear all but impossible to keep alive the desire of knowledge. We have a famous instance of the truth of this opinion in the case of Pascal, who tells us of himself, that he was obliged to abandon mathematics, after having carried the study farther than any of his contemporaries, because he found there were so few with whom he could converse on such a subject, and that, therefore, all satisfaction in the study was lost in its isolation. If the sage depends so much on sympathy, how much more the young inquirer!

We have already spoken of the advantage that debating societies afford, in being a kind of preparatory school for the practice of public speaking. But it is not solely with a view to public good that the power of effective utterance should be assiduously cultivated. To the solitary student this same power is highly valuable. Goethe never spoke a truer word than when he said, that "What we do not speak of, we seldom accurately think of." Whether it is, that the active effort of speaking excites the dormant faculties of the mind, or that new thoughts are reflected to us from the countenances of those we address, certain it is that the very act of speaking both serves to clear our own thoughts, and helps to enlighten the minds of others. Dr. Channing, in his well known tract on "Self-Culture," takes notice of both facts. "There is a power," says he, "which each man should cultivate according to his ability, but which is very much neglected in the mass of the people—and that is, the power of utterance. A man was not made to shut up his mind in itself, but to give it voice, and to exchange it for other minds. Speech is one of our grand distinctions from the brute. Our power over others lies not so much in the amount of thought within us, as in the power of bringing it out. A man of more than ordinary intellectual vigour may, for want of expression, be a cipher, without significance in society. And not only does a man influence others, but he greatly aids his own intellect, by giving distinct and forcible utterance to his thoughts. We understand ourselves better, our conceptions grow clearer, by the very effort to make them clear to another. . . . The power of utterance should be included by all in their plans of self-culture."

To secure the full benefit derivable from attendance on, and an active interest in, discussion classes, it is necessary that the members, while they are, as nearly as may be, at the same stage of mental development, be yet of different ways of thinking; for if they are all of one sect or party, be it what it may, they are sure to become self-conceited scholiasts. Being agreed on important points, to make a debate at all, they are obliged to dispute about trifles, and so acquire the habit of trifling, and in the end can scarcely fail to make themselves, not good practical reasoners, but what Locke pronounces to be the direct opposite—"logical chicaners." As they will generally consult the same authors, they can bring no new information to each other; and instead of leading each other to the knowledge of new truths, they will only confirm one another in old prejudices. Their reading is sure to become one-sided; they will fall into the grievous error "of conversing with one sort of men, reading but one sort of books, and not coming in the hearing of but one sort of notions;" and in this way they will get and give views not only narrow and perverted, but absolutely false.

The members, too, of these societies should be sufficiently numerous to excite interest without causing excitement; the