

PORTION OF

AN ADDRESS UPON THE DEBATING CLUB,

DELIVERED AT THE DEBATING CLUB IN CONNECTION WITH THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTE.

BY P.

KNOWLEDGE in a general sense, is the great physical, and moral, and intellectual regenerator of mankind. It is knowledge which has gradually drawn out our race from barbarism and ignorance, up to our present state of civilization and refinement. It is knowledge which not only adds to our influence, our comfort and to our health, but it is also a constant source of pleasure while at home or abroad; for to her votaries nothing is void of interest, and they find equal food for contemplation in the dropping of a pebble, as in the fall of the thunderbolt; and the little ant is connected to them by as many intellectual ties, as is the mightiest beast of the forest. "Knowledge," in Mr. Mills' words, "is the distinguishing trait betwixt an European, and a savage; betwixt an Englishman, and the wildest Hottentot."

Knowledge holding then such an extended and powerful sway over the destinies of man, possessing as she does the great source from whence flow the principal causes of his health, comfort, and superiority, thus becomes one of the great objects of man's existence; I might almost venture to say that it should be man's greatest object, for in proportion as he acquaints himself with the laws by which our Creator has regulated mind and matter, so does he increase his capacity to praise and adore his Creator for that supreme wisdom and goodness which distinguishes him in his works. And man has little or no excuse, even in the most ignorant periods, for the non-performance of so important a duty, for our Creator has wisely and benevolently implanted more or less in the mind of every man, an intellect, by the exercise of which he is enabled to penetrate into the secret workings and properties of his own mind, and of external nature. If then, in past periods, little excuse could be offered for neglecting to improve the mind, how much less the excuse, how much more serious and reprehensible is that neglect at the present day, when the attainment made in the various branches of the arts and sciences are so widely diffused abroad for the benefit of the

people, and explained in a manner capable of being understood by the weakest capacity. An ignorance of the general branches of the arts and sciences, by the young tradesman or mechanic, now becomes a fit subject for opprobrium and disgrace. This age is the opening of a new era, when the working man shall fill his proper position in society, and when the importance and the nobleness of his calling shall be recognised and appreciated; that opening was effected from the progress which he has begun to make, and the recognition of his rights will be made by the world, in proportion as he carries on that progressive development by the exercise of his rational faculties. With this object in view, it behoves him to look carefully and earnestly around, and embrace every means that will assist him in the prosecution of so noble an object. It is my aim to show, that this object may be best attained through the medium of the Debating Club.

But, before I proceed further into my discourse, I would take the liberty to impress on your minds this fact, that knowledge is valuable only in so far as it is useful to us, and that to make it useful we must first make it practical; or in other words, that we can never obtain greatness in any branch of the arts or sciences, unless that greatness is created by self-reflecting or self-practical knowledge. This is perhaps trite, but it is very true, and moreover very important. But there is a class of persons, and I fear a large class, who are under the erroneous belief that knowledge is created by the mere perusal of books; they are satisfied with merely reading them, and they fancy there remains no more for them to do after having read them. To ponder upon the probability, or the improbability of what they have read; to scrutinize the extent of its value or usefulness, are matters with which they appear to have no concern. This neglect of the exercise of the judgment is attended with many serious consequences, for we thus, I may say, bastardize, and deprive ourselves of one of the greatest gifts of