

so generally ignored that I wish to draw towards it especial attention. Many persons in the deliberations of associations like ours, see nothing valuable save the communication of hard practical facts. Facts, say they, constitute knowledge. It should, however, be borne in mind, that the human intellect does not fulfil its design by acting merely as a passive receptacle of facts communicated from without. Facts are, in themselves, but crude material; and it depends upon the qualities and preparation of the mind which receives them, whether they shall remain in their primitive, undeveloped, and comparatively valueless condition, or whether they shall be so elaborated and vitalized as to form a part of the living organism of truth. And let us be well assured that the mental processes by which these effects are produced, are not conducted by blind and unerring machinery, such as that employed in factories, by which the most uninstructed and unskilled laborer may, by turning a crank, convert the rudest substances into a polished fabric. The operations of the mind more closely resemble the work of the seal engraver, an artificer who has hitherto found no labor-saving and infallible machine to relieve him of the necessity of bringing to his business a degree of skill, which can be acquired only by long and severe practice. If this view of intellectual operations be correct, it will be perceived how necessary is mental exercise in order to the attainment of the strength and skill required to sift and interpret facts, to arrange them in scientific order, and to arrive at the great principles of which these facts may prove to be the exponents. And in so far as this point is concerned, I claim that our Society, while it is far removed from the character of a mere debating club, properly constitutes a mental gymnasium; and that subjects even of trifling import in themselves introduced into our Society, may in this way become eminently useful. I need hardly point out how much mental training and exercise are needed in the medical profession. Notwithstanding the many great and sublime physiological and pathological principles evolved during the last half century, no inconsiderable portion of our knowledge yet remains in