

the Debating Club, must I forget the illustrious Lord Mansfield, and the poets Kirke White, Hogg and Allan Ramsay. Mr. Lockhart, in his *Life of Burns*, gives the following account of Burns' attendance at the Debating Society at Tarbolton, which may not be uninteresting to you: "Shortly before he went to Irvine, he, his brother Gilbert, and some seven or eight young men besides, all of the parish of Tarbolton, had formed themselves into a Society, which they called a Bachelors' Club, and which met one evening in every month, for the purpose of mutual entertainment, and improvement. That their cups were but moderately filled is evident, for the rules of the Club did not permit any Member to spend more than threepence at a sitting. A question was announced for discussion at the close of each meeting, and at the next, they came prepared to deliver their sentiments upon the subject matter thus proposed. There can be no doubt," continues Mr. Lockhart, "that Burns would not have patronised this sober Institution so long, unless he had experienced at its assemblies the pleasures of a stimulated mind, and as little, that to the habit of arranging his thoughts, and expressing them in somewhat of a formal style, thus early cultivated, we ought to attribute much of that conversational skill, which, when he first mingled with the upper world, was considered the most remarkable of all his personal accomplishments." At Mauchline, some time subsequently, Burns, with some others, formed a similar Society, and in one of his published letters, he speaks very affectionately of the many pleasant and profitable evenings he had passed at each of those Societies. Bulwer, in portraying the character of John Ardworth in his *Lucretia*, says of him—"He obtained a high reputation at that noble Debating Society at Cambridge, which has trained some of the most eminent of literary men." In a note upon this extract, he adds: "Among those whom the Union, (the name of this Debating Club,) almost extemporaneously trained for public life, and whose distinction has kept the promise of their youth, we may mention the eminent Barristers, Messrs. Austin and Cockburn; and among Statesmen, Lord Grey, Mr. Charles Buller, Mr. Villiers, and Mr. Macaulay. Nor ought we to forget those brilliant competitors for the prizes of the University, Dr. Kennedy, (now head master of Shrewsbury School,) and the late Winthrop M. Praed." And in presenting you with those testimonials in favor of the Debating Club, I would likewise take the liberty of adding a letter which the American Statesman, Henry Clay, wrote a few months since, to a young man at

New York, who was Secretary to a Debating Club there.

NEW ORLEANS, 29th Dec., 1846.

DEAR SIR.—I received your favor, informing me of the organization of the Young Men's Debating Society at New York, and in behalf of the Society, requesting suggestions from me, "as to the proper management, and best subjects for debate."

When I was a youth residing in Richmond, Virginia, a Society of young men, similar to yours, was established in that City, under the name of the Rhetorical Society. It embraced a great number of young men, engaged, or destined to various pursuits in life. Many of them became, afterwards, eminent and distinguished, and I believe they derived much benefit from the debates and proceedings of the Society.

The practice was to propose at one meeting of the Society, a subject for discussion at the next, and members were appointed, or voluntarily undertook to debate it, *pro* and *con*. But other members would sometimes mingle in the discussion, and after the close of it, the Society would pronounce its opinion.

I have not a distinct recollection of any of the subjects debated, but there can be no great difficulty in conceiving what would be profitable and suitable for such occasions. Questions such as these might be introduced: Is the acquisition of the dead languages desirable? Are the benefits or the evils from novel reading greater? What influence upon the custom of war has the invention of gunpowder produced, good or bad? What effect upon the peace of the world will the application of the power of steam have? Is there more or less corruption in the United States, than existed in the best periods in Greece and Rome? Is private or public education best? Which should be most an object of admiration and gratitude, a successful warrior, or a successful Statesman? Does a confederacy admit of an indefinite extension of territory, or are there limits which it may not safely transcend? Is free trade, or a system of protection for domestic industry, best for the United States?

These questions might be multiplied to any extent; but the specimens I have given may suffice.

I need not say that to speak on any of them well, they should be thoroughly examined, and studied. Without full preparation, there can be no effective, or eloquent public speaking.

Societies such as you have formed are, or may be, attended with great advantages, positive and indirect. They create a taste for study and reflection, and they form habits of easy and