

mach enfeebled by exhaustion, they then lay the load of a full meal, which perfect leisure would hardly enable them to digest. But far from waiting to digest it, they have no sooner laid down knife and fork, than away they must once more rush to business—not perhaps willingly, for nature tells them that it would be agreeable to rest; but then—but then business *must* be attended to. If nature were to punish the daily transgression by the nightly suffering, we should find few who, for the sake of pecuniary gain, would thus expose themselves to misery. But unfortunately she runs long accounts with her children, and, like a cheating attorney, seldom renders her bill till the whole subject of litigation has been eaten up. Paralysis at fifty comes like the mesne process upon the victim of commercial enthusiasm,* and either hurries him off to that prison from which there is no liberation, or leaves him for a few years organically alive to enjoy the fruits of his labours. A life thus spent is a mere fragment of what it ought to be. The means of obtaining pleasure have swallowed up the end. The glorious face of nature, with all its sublime and beautiful alterations; the delights of social life; the pleasures arising from the exercise of the finer feelings and the cultivation of the intellect; all that higher class of gratifications which Nature has designed a moderate degree of labour to place within the reach of *all* her creatures, have been lost to such a man.

The absurdity of an ignorance or weakness of this kind is perhaps still more striking when it occurs in individuals who make the acquisition of knowledge the chief aim of life. As the world is at present situated, it is possible to acquire learning upon almost every subject, and an infinite amount of knowledge, useful and otherwise, without even by chance lighting upon a knowledge of the most indispensable observances necessary for the preservation of a sound mind in a sound body. Half of the multiform languages of Asia may be mastered, while the prodigy who boasts so much learning knows not that to sit a whole day within doors at close study is detrimental to health; or, if he knows so much, deliberately prefers the course which leads to ruin. Leyden, an enthusiast of this order, was ill with a fever and liver complaint at Mysore, and yet continued to study ten hours a day. He eventually sank, in his thirty-sixth year, under the consequences of spending some time in an ill-ventilated library, which a slight acquaintance with one of the most familiar of the sciences would have warned him against entering. Alexander Nicoll, a recent professor of Hebrew at Oxford, of whom it was said that he might have walked to the wall of China without the aid of an interpreter, died at the same age, partly through the effects of that intense study which so effectually, but so uselessly, had gained him distinction. Dr. Alexander Murray, a similar prodigy, died in his thirty-eighth year of over-severe study; making the third of a set of men remarkable for the same wonderful attainments, and natives of the same country, who, within a space of twenty years, fell victims to their ignorance of the laws of mental exercise. In 1807, Sir Humphrey Davy prosecuted his inquiry into the alkaline metals with such inordinate eagerness, that, through excitement and fatigue, he contracted a dangerous fever, which he, in ignorance of the human

physiology, ascribed to contagion caught in experimenting on the fumigation of hospitals. His physician was at no loss to trace it to his habits of study, which were such as would have soon worn out a frame much more robust. Davy at this time spent all the earlier part of the day in his laboratory, surrounded by persons of every rank, whose admiration of his experiments added to his excitement. 'Individuals of the highest distinction,' says Paris in his biographical sketch of Sir Humphrey, 'contended for the honour of his company to dinner, and he did not possess sufficient resolution to resist the gratification thus afforded, though it generally happened that his pursuits in the laboratory were not suspended until the appointed dinner hour had passed. On his return in the evening, he resumed his chemical labours, and commonly continued them till three or four in the morning, and yet the servants of the establishment not unfrequently found that he had risen before them.' Overtasked nature at length yielded under his exertions, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he was restored to health. Excessive application is known to have in like manner thrown Boorhaave into a species of delirium for six weeks, and to have on one occasion given a severe shock to the health of Newton. It unquestionably cut short the days of Sir Walter Scott, and also of the celebrated Weber, whose mournful exclamation in the midst of his numerous engagements can never be forgotten—'Would that I were a tailor, for then I should have a Sunday's holiday!'

The premature extinction of early prodigies of genius is generally traceable to the same cause. We read that, while all other children played, they remained at home to study; and then we learn that they perished in the bud, and balked the hopes of all their admiring friends. The ignorant wonder is of course always the greater when life is broken short in the midst of honourable undertakings. We wonder at the inscrutable decrees which permit the idle and dissolute to live, and remove the ardent benefactor of his kind, the hope of parents, the virtuous, and the self-devoted; never reflecting that the highest moral and intellectual qualities avail nothing in repairing or warding off a decided injury to the physical system, which is regulated by laws of a different, but of as imperative a nature. The conduct of the Portuguese sailors in a storm, when, instead of working the vessel properly, they employ themselves in paying vows to their saints, is just as rational as most of the notions which prevail on this subject in the most enlightened circles of British society.

It ought to be universally known that the uses of our intellectual nature are not to be properly realised without a just regard to the laws of that perishable frame with which it is connected; that, in cultivating the mind, we must neither overtask nor undertask the body, neither push it to too great a speed, nor leave it neglected; and that notwithstanding this intimate connection and mutual dependence, the highest merits on the part of the mind will not compensate for muscles mistreated, or soothe a nervous system which severe study has tortured into insanity. To come to detail—it ought to be impressed on all, that to spend more than a moderate number of hours in mental exercise, diminishes insensibly the powers of future application, and tends to abbreviate life; that no mental exercise should be attempted immediately after meals, as the processes of thought and of digestion cannot be safely prosecuted together; and that without a due share of exercise to the whole of the mental faculties, there can be no sound-

* Of the frequent occurrence of premature paralysis, in consequence of the mode of life above described, we are assured by a metropolitan physician of the greatest eminence.