

# SINGLAIN'S JOURNAL

## Of British North America.

VOL. 1.

QUEBEC, 18TH, AUGUST, 1849.

No. 13.

### CONTENTS.

*Preservation of Health.*  
*Reminiscences of a Tour to England—By the Revd. George Gilfillan.*  
*Notice of Report on Common Schools.*  
*Poetry.*  
*Life Assurance.*  
*David Copperfield—by Charles Dickens.*  
*Advertisements.*

### PRESERVATION OF HEALTH.

#### SIXTH ARTICLE.

#### MENTAL EXERCISE.

Having thus explained the laws and regulations by which exercise may be serviceable to the physical system, we shall proceed to show that the same rules hold good respecting the mental faculties. These, as is generally allowed, however immaterial in one sense, are connected organically with the brain—a portion of the animal system nourished by the same blood, and regulated by the same vital laws, as the muscles, bones, and nerves. As, by disuse, muscle becomes emaciated, bone softens, blood-vessels are obliterated, and nerves lose their natural structure, so by disuse does the brain fall out of its proper state, and create misery to its possessor; and as, by over-exertion, the waste of the animal system exceeds the supply, and debility and unsoundness are produced, so by over-exertion are the functions of the brain liable to be deranged and destroyed. The processes are physiologically the same, and the effects bear an exact relation to each other. As with the bodily powers, the mental are to be increased in magnitude and energy by a degree of exercise measured with a just regard to their ordinary health and native or habitual energies. Corresponding, moreover, to the influence which the mind has in giving the nervous stimulus so useful in bodily exercise, is the dependence of the mind upon the body for supplies of healthy nutriment. And, in like manner with the bodily functions, each mental faculty is only to be strengthened by the exercise of itself in particular. Every part of our intellectual and moral nature stands, in this respect, exactly in the same situation, with the blacksmith's right arm and the lower limbs of the inhabitants of Paris: each must be exercised for its own sake.

The fatal effects of the disuse of the mental faculties are strikingly observable in persons who have the misfortune to be solitarily confined, many of whom become insane, or at least weak in their intellects. It is also observable in the deaf and blind, among whom, from

the non-employment of a number of the faculties, weakness of mind and idiocy are more prevalent than among other people. This is indeed a frequent predisposing cause of every form of nervous disease.

The loss of power and health of mind from imperfect or partial exercise of the faculties, is frequently observable in the country clergy, in retired merchants, in annuitants, in the clerks of public offices, and in tradesmen whose professions comprehend a very limited range of objects. There is no class, however, in whom the evil is more widely observable than in those females who, either from ignorance of the laws of exercise, or from inveterate habit, spend their lives in unbroken seclusion, and in the performance of a limited range of duties. All motive is there wanting. No immediate object of solicitude ever presents itself. Fixing their thoughts entirely on themselves, and constantly brooding over a few narrow and trivial ideas, they at length approach a state little removed from insanity, or are only saved from that, perhaps, by the false and deluding relief afforded by stimulating liquors. In general, the education of such persons has given them only a few accomplishments, calculated to afford employment to one or two of the minor powers of the mind, while all that could have engaged the reflecting powers has been omitted. Education, if properly conducted, would go far to prevent these evils.

On the other hand, excessive exercise of the brain, by propelling too much blood to it, and unduly distending the vessels, is equally injurious with its disuse. And not only are fatal effects to be apprehended from undue mental task-work, but also from that constant stretch of the mind which attends an unduly anxious and watchful disposition. The ancients had some notion of the impropriety of an incessant exertion of the mind, and rebuked it by their well-known proverb—*Apollo does not keep his bow always bent*. But they had comparatively little experience of the oppressive mental labours endured by large portions of modern society. Irrational, and in some respects dangerous, as many of the habits of our ancestors were, it is questionable if they suffered so much from these causes as their successors do from virtuous but overtaking exertion. To maintain what each man conceives to be a creditable place in society, now requires such close and vigorous exertions, that more, we verily believe, perish in the performance of duties in themselves laudable, than formerly sank under fox-hunting, toast-drinking, and the gout.

It is in large cities that this unintentional kind of self-destruction is most conspicuously exemplified. And it is in London, above all other places, that the frenzy is to be observed in its most glaring forms. To spend nine hours at a time in business, without food or relaxation, is not only not uncommon, but an almost universal practice, among the citizens of London: from a breakfast at eight to a chop at five, they are never, to use an expressive phrase, *off the stretch*. Upon a sto-