

Kant has written a treatise on _The Vital Powers_; but I should like to write a dirge on them, since their lavish use in the form of knocking, hammering, and tumbling things about has made the whole of my life a daily torment. Certainly there are people, nay, very many, who will smile at this, because they are not sensitive to noise; it is precisely these people, however, who are not sensitive to argument, thought, poetry or art, in short, to any kind of intellectual impression: a fact to be assigned to the coarse quality and strong texture of their brain tissues. On the other hand, in the biographies or in other records of the personal utterances of almost all great writers, I find complaints of the pain that noise has occasioned to intellectual men. For example, in the case of Kant, Goethe, Lichtenberg, Jean Paul; and indeed when no mention is made of the matter it is merely because the context did not lead up to it. I should explain the subject we are treating in this way: If a big diamond is cut up into pieces, it immediately loses its value as a whole; or if an army is scattered or divided into small bodies, it loses all its power; and in the same way a great intellect has no more power than an ordinary one as soon as it is interrupted, disturbed, distracted, or diverted; for its superiority entails that it concentrates all its strength on one point and object, just as a concave mirror concentrates all the rays of light thrown upon it. Noisy interruption prevents this concentration. This is why the most eminent intellects have always been strongly averse to any kind of disturbance, interruption and distraction, and above everything to that violent interruption which is caused by noise; other people do not take any particular notice of this sort of thing. The most intelligent of all the

European nations has called "Never interrupt" the eleventh commandment.

But noise is the most impertinent of all interruptions, for it not only interrupts our own thoughts but disperses them. Where, however, there is nothing to interrupt, noise naturally will not be felt particularly.

Sometimes a trifling but incessant noise torments and disturbs me for a time, and before I become distinctly conscious of it I feel it merely as the effort of thinking becomes more difficult, just as I should feel a weight on my foot; then I realise what it is.