

when Henry Hethrington, the proprietor of the *Poor Man's Guardian*, was put upon his trial and triumphantly acquitted. Meanwhile the reform bill having passed, the battle of the stamps having been fought and won, and the public having no new facts of preponderating importance to occupy its attention, fiction became popular. The cheap market was now flooded with stories of horror, mystery, and crime, such, for instance, as are to be found in the various publications of Reynolds—the several series of “The Mysteries of London,” “The Mysteries of the Court, &c.,—the difference being that these disreputable publications had now to struggle with an ever-increasing number of others of the highest repute, and bit by bit to give way to them.

Of the state of literature in 1860 we have every ample statistics. Of monthly magazines more or less devoted to fiction there were 2,210,000 circulated annually; of journals published weekly, the chief features being novels, 700,000; of single romances issued weekly at a penny, 5,000; of immoral publications, 52,500; and of magazines at two-pence, 374,000. This is exclusive of sectarian literature, religious, temperance, educational, &c., and applies only to fiction. Total, in round numbers, 3,349,000. Comparing this with 1831, before the stamp tax or advertisement duty had been repealed, we already see the vast progress made; against the 125,000 of monthly magazines circulated then, we have over 2,000,000 now; and whereas there existed no cheap fiction there which was of a really wholesome kind, we have here a circulation of considerably over a million of journals at a penny and two-pence, containing stories not classed as immoral, against only 52,500 of a notoriously immoral kind. But the great impetus to the spread of cheap fiction and cheap literature of all kinds was to be given by the repeal of the paper duties in 1861. The results obtained by this great measure are positively startling. We learn by an article in the *Bookseller*, of May, 31st, 1861, the materials for which were supplied by Mr. Francis, the following facts concerning fiction:—There were then—three years after the repeal of the excise duty—in existence of journals containing novels, sketches, &c., thirteen publications at a penny and a half-penny, with an aggregate weekly issue of 1,053,000; of romantic tales published separately, eight publications, aggregate issue, 195,000; of immoral publications, 9,000; of higher class magazines, published monthly, 244,850. This is not including religious and other literature where fiction was a secondary object or written for a purpose. Thus we have a weekly and monthly issue of respectable publications almost equal to the entire annual issue of a few years previously, and of immoral publications we have 9,000 against 52,500 there! As regards sedition and irreligion, fiction was never the vehicle made use of in this country for preaching these. In 1864 the circulation of free-thinking literature was not more than 5,000 weekly. Compare with this the appalling number of weekly and monthly religious magazines, and he thought we might almost place irreligious liberty in the same category with immoral.

These are some of the results of cheap fiction, and their connection with education is manifest. It was the mistake of many good men of a former generation to seek to instruct the people without interesting them—to induce them to regard education as a duty rather than a privilege. This was the error of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. Our modern educators, among whom stand pre-eminent the great publishing houses, have adopted a wiser course. It is indeed evident that the former was necessarily unsuitable. A man whose imagination has never been aroused knows nothing, nor can know anything, of the delights of knowledge. This must first be awakened before even the object of the other can be understood. “Of what use is knowledge?” says the wholly uneducated man; “Will it feed me when I am hungry, or clothe me when I am cold?” But give that man reading; let his imagination be aroused; let him find that he has another being besides a stomach and a body that requires sustenance and light, and soon even may he learn to find in the nourishment of the one a relief from the wants that prey upon the other. As a healthy literature spreads so also does education; as education spreads so does literature purify. Look at the ever increasing number of educational periodicals which find eager purchasers among the masses. Nor must we quite forget the refining and soothing influence which it has upon a man engaged for ever and ever in the hard and unrewarding toil which fall to, alas! so many—to escape awhile from these hard facts into the worlds of fiction and fact, and to live, at all events in imagination, a life less irksome and less thankless than his own.

22. FREE PUBLIC LIBRARIES.

From a lecture by Mr. F. D. Torrance, of Montreal, on Free Public Libraries, we make the following selections:—

The desire of knowledge is one of the master passions of human nature. We desire to know whatever takes place in that busy world of which we form a part. And the thirst for the acquisition

of knowledge is increased by the pleasure of communicating to others what we have acquired ourselves. Nor does the knowledge of our contemporaries satisfy us. We seek the records of the past, and acquaint ourselves with them, in order that we may, through these records, shape our present. In considering our desire of knowledge, we must also not forget the pleasures of imagination.

To the poets are attributed in a peculiar degree the gifts of imagination, “the vision and the faculty divine.”

“The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven.”

But we must not forget that the faculty of imagination is in a greater or less degree the common inheritance of the whole human family, and the exercise of that faculty wonderfully stimulates the passion for knowledge of which I speak.

In naming the records of human knowledge, one is naturally led to speak of those great collections of books which the governments of civilized nations have always cherished—public or national libraries.

At the revival of letters in the 15th century—we see literature going hand in hand with commerce, when Cosmo de Medici, the merchant and prince of Florence lived, and employed his commercial correspondence in different parts of the civilized world, to collect at Florence the precious manuscripts of ancient literature, and so founded the still famous Laurentian Library of Florence.

MODERN LIBRARIES.

When the invention of printing took place, an immense impetus was given to the multiplication of books; and it is remarkable that the typographical execution of the first printed books is little inferior to that of modern books. From that time the collecting of books in libraries by governments and individuals has gone on increasing. At first books were not circulated. If the public had access to them, it was only in the depositories where they were kept. The first circulating library, I am informed, was suggested, as might naturally have been anticipated, by the personal interest of a sagacious individual, Allan Ramsey, who, after being bred a wig-maker, had become a poet of the people, and set up a small bookseller's shop, was led to eke out an income, too inconsiderable for the wants of his family, by lending his books on hire to those who were not able or not willing to buy them of him. This is the oldest of all the numberless “circulating libraries;” and it sprang up naturally in Edinburgh, where, in proportion to its population, it is believed there were then more readers than in any other city in the world. This was in 1725. This example was speedily followed, and circulating libraries now abound in the large cities of Europe, and especially in Great Britain and Germany.

The corporations of the Bar in the large cities have had for many years their consulting law libraries; and other professions, it is believed, had also collected libraries for their own special purposes. The Medical Faculty of McGill College have at least 3,500 volumes of their library. The Advocates' Library here contains over 5,500 volumes; and the “Institut Canadien” over 6,500 volumes.

OUR WANT OF LIBRARIES.

Our School Laws are intended to bring within the reach of almost all, the blessing of a knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic; and in Upper Canada it provides for popular school libraries. The school, and even the College and University, are, as all thoughtful persons are well aware, but the first stages in education. We are learners, or ought to be, so long as we live. “Education,” said Sir E. Bulwer Lytton, “rightly considered, is the work of a life, and libraries are the school-rooms of growing up men. If the school awakens a taste for reading, it should furnish to the public something to read. If it conducts our young men and young women to that point where they are qualified to acquire from books the varied knowledge in the arts and sciences which books contain; its managing should do something to put these within their reach.

There can be no doubt that such reading ought to be furnished to all, as a matter of public policy and duty, on the same principle on which we furnish cheap education, and in fact as a part, and a most important part, of the education of all.

We want these public libraries to be generally established, and the want is more imperative in a country like Canada, with its long winters. I am reminded here of a very seasonable letter addressed last Hallowe'en, by the Hon. Mr. McGee, to one of our national societies, in which letter he ably puts and answers the question, “What are we to do with our Winter evenings?” “We have,” writes Mr. McGee, “in our climate say five months of Winter evenings, averaging three hours unoccupied time, or 150 days, or in round numbers about twenty clear days, of 24 hours each. A busy man who gets three weeks recreation in Summer considers himself fortunate; but here is a three weeks winter vacation, concerning which the question is, “What are we to do with it?” He