

THE FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY, ITS USES AND VALUE.

Paper Read by MISS E. BOLTON at the Public Meeting, February 2nd, 1895.

YOUR EXCELLENCY,
MADAM PRESIDENT, LADIES :

At your request, I have attempted the preparation of a paper on the subject of Free Public Libraries, with what success I must leave to your judgment ; had I fully understood the importance and extent of the subject, I should most certainly have left it to some one more competent to deal with it and having more leisure to study the matter in detail. From my point of view, there can only be one answer to the question, Shall we have a Free Public Library in the City of Ottawa ? judging from the experience of cities in the Old World, in the United States and in Canada. One is led to conclude that no city can hope to keep pace in the onward march of enlightenment without a good Public Library. It seems to be very generally conceded that the Free Public Library is supplementary to the Public School. The Public School of to-day cannot do much more than lay a foundation, teach how to read and suggest what to read. The majority of children leave school on or before the close of the Public School course ; every one must admit that they have not sufficient information and mental training to develop their powers and fit them for the best work of which they are capable.

The final end of education is, I think, to give the individual such training as will enable him to make the most of himself, or as Herbert Spencer has it, "to prepare us for complete living." There can be no doubt that the ideal state of society can be reached only in this way, and we, as citizens of Ottawa, should welcome all agencies that aid and guide us towards this end.

Reason and experience have combined to convince all thoughtful educators that the highest office of the Public School is to teach a child to read, and implant in him a desire for knowledge. Sir John Lubbock says : "The important thing is not so much that every child should be taught, as that every child should wish to learn." Just here the Public Library steps in and gives opportunity for self-development by supplying material in the form of good literature. Quoting again from Sir John Lubbock : "A boy who leaves school knowing much but hating his lessons will soon have forgotten all he ever learned; while another who has acquired the thirst for knowledge, even if he has learned little, would soon teach himself more than the first ever knew." Dr. Harris, Commissioner of Education in the United States, says : "The school is set at the task of teaching the pupil how to use the library in the best manner."

In places where the experiment has been fully tried there is no