

EDITORIAL NOTES.

MECHANICS' INSTITUTE LIBRARIES.

THE Minister of Education, having recently taken under his care the Mechanics' Institutes of Ontario, has issued a Special Report upon their condition and management which we trust will arouse renewed interest in these valuable auxiliaries of the Public Schools of the Province. The establishment of Mechanics' Institutes in Upper Canada, we believe, dates back to the year 1835, and in many centres of the Province they have furnished almost the sole intellectual nutriment, within the means of a large section of the reading public, from that period to the present. For many years the Institutes were under the control of the Board of Arts and Manufactures of the Province; but, in 1868, they came under the direction of the Mechanics' Institutes Association of Ontario, Mr. Wm. Edwards, of the Public Works Department, Toronto, being the indefatigable Secretary; and now they have passed within the jurisdiction of the Minister of Education. Mr. Crooks, in assuming responsibility for the proper management of these Institutions, has done well first to look into their affairs. For a number of years, about sixty of them have been in receipt of an aggregate annual sum of \$18,000, or, on an average, \$300 each. In 1879, the number of Institutes having increased to seventy-four, they received a total Legislative grant of close upon \$23,000—over forty of them obtaining the maximum sum allowed by the Government, viz., \$400 each. This large amount of aid from the Provincial purse, we regret to say, has not hitherto been very carefully disbursed. Like a good deal that is voted by the Legislature for, no doubt, beneficent purposes, the appropriation in this case has not always

gone into the hands of those legally entitled to it, nor has it been put religiously to the uses intended by the Act. This is a state of things we have long thought would one day be disclosed, and the Report before us attests that what we apprehended is a fact. The conditions of the grant, it should be stated, are that the Legislature will appropriate to each Institute two dollars for each one locally raised, up to the sum of \$400—the amount to be expended on a Library and Reading Room, or on a Library and in Evening Class instruction in technical education. The evasion or disregard of these conditions, on the part of the authorities of the Institutes, is a curious commentary on the dealings of Government with associate bodies who look to it for aid on the paternal system. This would not be so serious a matter, in view, at least, of the ambiguity of the Act setting forth the conditions on which the grant is made, were all the Institutes in a flourishing state, and maintained their organizations in a fairly healthy and efficient condition. This, unfortunately, is far from being the case, as a reference to the Report before us shews. Though the Government has expended on these Institutes \$150,000 in the past ten years, subsidizing about 125 institutions, less than 60 per cent. of them are now in existence, with assets, in the main, greatly disproportionate to even the amounts received from Government, and a membership alarmingly diminished and fast diminishing. The following Institutes, for instance, have become utterly demoralized, and most of them have closed their doors, though they have all been aided by liberal grants from the public purse: Aurora, Brampton, Kincardine, Merrickville, Oshawa, Owen Sound, St. Thomas, Paisley, and Pembroke. The latter, we find, though it received \$400 in 1877, and a like sum