

## Free Books, Free Schools and a Free People.

My visits to the Cincinnati Free Library, in which I frequently spend an interesting hour in observing those who come to draw from the well of knowledge, have moved me to say a word or two in its favor.

The circulation of books during the month of May, was 6,304 volumes, classified as follows, viz: 697 volumes, Lives 604, Poetry 698, Scientific 530, Novels and Tales 1,687, Miscellaneous 1,550, Travels 543. The number of subscribers to the Library is 4,237. Increase since November, 1,348.

But the most hopeful feature of all is the character of the readers. The Free Library has drawn to itself some thousands of readers whom our other very excellent institution, the Young Men's Mercantile, has failed to reach. Though these embrace portions of all classes of our citizens, yet I judge the greater part to be labourers; and most of them are young men, and lads. On this ground we claim the Free Library to be a great moral institution. It is not to be conceived that the young men who drudge through the long weary day, will not at night seek relaxation and some kind of excitement, to vary the dull routine of their usual avocations. Satan, taking advantage of this, spreads his lures to destruction, in the shape of drinking saloons, gambling and other kindred places of resort, in every thoroughfare and lane of our city. Total abstinence pledges may be paraded and numerous signed; yet, until we provide some innocent food to satisfy this natural craving of the mind for excitement, just so long the young and susceptible will be drawn into the vortex of destruction. We believe Free Libraries will furnish this food. The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. For while timid moralists, theoretically overflowing with plans for the bettering of the condition of their fellows, stand debating and hesitating whether they shall vote a trifling sum to establish a library, Satan, who is not often troubled with scruples, by a grand *coup d'état*, in the shape of some extra

fascination, added to his public institutions, carries the day, and our moralists who have to foot the bill in the shape of expenses for a police force, courts, jails, and poor houses, with a refreshing innocence, wonder what the world is coming to!

Lads and young men, who have heretofore spent their evenings at the atres, and were rapidly acquiring a taste for places of worse resort, and who have read nothing, or only that vile trash procured from a portion of the periodical press, which is worse than nothing, may now be seen every day carrying away from our library books of solid worth, to be read in the evening, at the hearth-stone of home.

I may be enthusiastic, but I cannot but look upon this movement among our youth, as giving promise of an abundant harvest of noble fruit. We do not sufficiently estimate the importance of reading as an element of education. I think we should not be very extravagant, if we were to assert that newspapers do more to educate our people than our schools. And whatever we may think of the healthfulness of their influence, we cannot deny its power. Newspapers go into every household throughout the length and breadth of the land. They not only direct public sentiment, but they create it. Not this alone: they build up our literary tastes, telling us what we shall read and what we shall not read.

It has been well said, that what you wish to appear in a nation's life, you must put into its schools. Not only this, but you must put it into the nation's books. "Let me write the ballads of a people, and I care not who makes its laws," may have been a very sagacious observation, when old Norse pirates roared forth songs of war, and Troubadours piped their strains of love. Substitute books for ballads, and the sentiment will still hold good.

It is, comparatively, of little importance whether our young men and young women leave our schools with