JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

FOR

Upper Canada.

VOL. III. TORONTO, NOVEMBER, 1850. No. 11.

BRITISH AND CONTINENTAL LIBRARIES.

The subject of School Libraries in Upper Canada will doubtless receive a good deal of attention during the ensuing year. As a preliminary step to the consideration of the best means of introducing Public Libraries into every part of the country, we have thought that it would prove interesting to the readers of the *Journal* to learn something of the present state of Public Libraries in other countries, and the extent to which they are rendered accessible to the public at large. We therefore present the following condensed article from the English *Eclectic Review*, giving a comprehensive and succinct view of the Library question in England and on the Continent of Europe, and also embodying a variety of valuable historical *miscellanea*, curious and striking. We may remark, however, that measures have recently passed the British Parliament, giving local Municipal bodies in England authority to establish public libraries and museums. It is understood that the great Exposition of 1851 will be rendered tributary to the accomplishment of this latter object:

During the last few months, startling statements, disclosing the dearth of public libraries in the United Kingdom, have appeared in most of our public journals. They do not, however, comprise a tithe of the curious and valuable information embedded in the bulky blue-book from which they were excerpted. This document is a rich mine of suggestive facts and data. It exhibits the most singular national anomalies, and develops phenomena at once humiliating and cheering. Its revelations are alternately streaked with lights and shadows, in strange and fitful contrast. Our object in the present article is to classify and condense, as far as possible, some of the information scattered through the work referred to; information that has been gleaned from the most varied sources—from clergymen, librarians, *literati*, members of Parliament, town-clerks, ex-ministers of Continental governments, popular lecturers, self-educated working men, and city missionaries.

Not many years ago, the attention of Parliament and the public was directed to the formation of free galleries, museums of art, and schools of design, as a means of popular enlightenment, and an incitement to intellectual pursuits. Many persons, at the time, displayed considerable opposition to this proposal, and contended that, however successfully such institutions might be established among foreign nations, they would not be appreciated, and might be abused by our own. The experiment, however, was tried. The British Museum, the magnificent gallery at Hampton Court, the National Gallery, with various other metropolitan and provincial institutions were thrown open gratuitously to the public. It is now universally admitted that no abuse has attended the concession, whilst it is impossible to calculate the large measure of rational enjoyment and healthy mental stimulus that has resulted. Another and a yet more beneficent improvement still remains to be effected. The extensive establishment of public libraries throughout the entire country, and particularly in the large centres of population, is one of the greatest desiderata of the age. Such libraries have long existed on the Continent, and have enjoyed the fosterage of the governments of the various States. It can scarcely be doubted that the influences emanating from such stores of accumulated lore have been fraught with incalculable advantages to the literature and general character of the people among whom they have been amassed. We find Gibbon complaining that, in his time, "the greatest city in the world was destitute of that useful institution, a public library;" and that "the writer who had undertaken to treat any large historical subject, was reduced to the necessity of purchasing for his private use, a numerous and expensive collection of books which must form the basis of his work." Even in a large town like Liverpool there was no public depository of books from which Roscoe could procure the ordinary Italian works requisite for composing his "Historical Biographies," so that he, like Gibbon, was under the costly necessity of purchasing his own materials of literary workmanship. Only within the quarter of a century, Graham, the learned historian of North America, left this land, and established himself at Gottingen, for the sole purpose of availing himself of the rich and freely-accessible collection of books in its university.

With a view of establishing the fact of the immense superiority of foreign libraries over our own—in respect to their numbers, the vastness of the literary wealth they enshrine, their entire accessibility to applicants from among every class of the community, and the extent to which they are allowed to circulate beyond the walls of the institution—we will, in the most compendious form possible, present some comparative statements of the principal Continental and British libraries. From the evidence laid before the Committee, which is said to embody the nearest approximation to truth that can be attained, it appears that France contains 186 public libraries, 109 of which comprehend 10,000 volumes, or upwards, each; Belgium, 14; the Prussian States, 53, or 44 possessing above 10,000 volumes; Austria, with Lombardy and Venice, 49, Saxony, 9; Bavaria, 18; Denmark, 5; Tuscany, 10; Hanover, 5; Naples and Sicily, 8; Papal States, 16; Portugal, 7; Spain, 27, or 17 comprising 10,000 volumes; Switzerland, 13; Russian Empire, 12; whilst Great Britain and Ireland possess only 34 such depositories of learning, the large majority of which, moreover, are accessible only to privileged individuals, or corporations.

Upon further inspection of the tabular statements it is discoverable, that out of a total of 458 libraries in the European states, there are 53 that are distinguished as LENDING libraries; but of this goodly number, thus standing out in bold and honourable relief, *not one is to be found in our own country.* In these 53 libraries alone, in the year 1848, there were more than seven millions of volumes, independent of manuscripts, which are thus rendered eminently serviceable to the inhabitants of the several towns, cities, and neighbourhoods in which they are deposited. In a statistical list, exhibiting 330 towns or cities, throughout Europe, that are enriched by the possession of town, university, cathedral, communal, gymnasium, or public libraries, the keenest scrutiny can detect no more than eleven places lying within the boundaries of these favoured isles of ours; whilst the chief of the literary stores belonging even to these are placed under the most exclusive regulations.

If from countries we descend to particular cities, we find the contrast between our own and foreign lands no less discouraging and humiliating. In the following table are represented the number of libraries in some of the principal capitals and other distinguished places in Europe—the aggregate volumes in each town or city—the population of the same—and the proportian of volumes to every 100 of its inhabitants.