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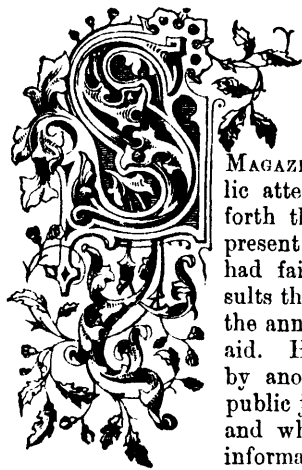
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ARE MECHANICS' INSTITUTES IN ONTARIO A FAILURE?

THE NECESSITY OF A GOVERNMENT ENQUIRY TO ASCERTAIN IF SUCH IS THE CASE, AND HOW THE FUNDS, WHICH ARE VOTED ANNUALLY FOR THESE INSTITUTIONS, ARE DISPOSED OF.



SOME few months since the writer, in an article published in the SCIENTIFIC CANADIAN AND MECHANICS' MAGAZINE, endeavored to draw public attention to this matter, setting forth that these institutions, as at present constituted and governed, had failed to realize the good results that were expected to follow the annual provincial grant in their aid. His article was followed up by another, which appeared in a public journal, signed "Economy," and which supplied the following information.

In referring to the Government report on these Institutes, for 1879, the writer stated:

"I was surprised to find that 58 institutions, with a membership of 8,627, whose subscriptions amount to \$11,073.38, have received grants from Government to the amount of \$17,988.92, or over \$2 for each member. Some of our larger Institutes, such as Toronto with 1,152, and Hamilton with 1,047 members, received a grant of \$400, whereas Berlin with 80 members, Brantford 99, Collingwood 76, Dundas 93, Kingston 53, and others averaging from 53 to 400 members received the same grant."

We wish the writer could have given further information and said how many of these members were actually working mechanics. We venture to assert that for the actual number of mechanics for whose instruction \$17,988.92 is annually donated, does not exceed 2,000 members, which, if correct, would be something over \$9.98 for each member who is a working mechanic; that the whole amount granted is producing no good results whatever, nor promotes the

special purpose for which it is voted. In fact the greater portion of the mechanics who are members of these Institutes are a well-to-do, and a better-educated class, and they subscribe more for the general reading the libraries afford for their families than for self-culture.

That Mechanics' Institutes in Canada have proved a failure, and have not tended to produce the beneficial results contemplated, there cannot be a question of doubt, and if any should arise as to the accuracy of these remarks, let the Provincial Government of Ontario call for a certified return of the number of working mechanics, in every city and town that receives the annual grant, who are subscribers, and the nature of the trades they follow. Also, require a statement of the titles and class of books purchased annually for the libraries, and whether a discount had been obtained by all the Institutes on the publishers' prices, as is customary to allow to public libraries, or, if it has gone into the hands of stationers, who take an interest in them for their own especial benefit. Let an investigation at once be made into the details of the application of the annual grants towards these institutions, and it will soon be discovered that, almost without exception, the bulk of the grant is not spent, as it should be, upon scientific and technical works, such as should be found on the shelves of a mechanic's library, but that it is laid out mostly on books of fiction, which are detrimental to technical study.

These (so-called) Mechanics' Institutes are, in fact, mere reading-rooms and libraries for the convenience of merchants, their employees, and professional men, and these are the classes who derive the benefit of the annual grant and not the mechanics.

When a sum of money is annually voted for a special purpose, it would be wise for the Government to ascertain that the money has been applied for the purpose intended, and not diverted from its proper channel, and it would be prudent, before renewing such grants, to obtain such information, and if it has not been found of benefit to mechanics in the support of the Institute, the money might be applied more usefully in some other form, from which more direct results would follow: for instance in the support of Industrial Schools. It may be said that if the mechanics themselves do not care to profit by the donation, the fault is theirs. To some extent this may be true—but it has to be borne in mind that the mass