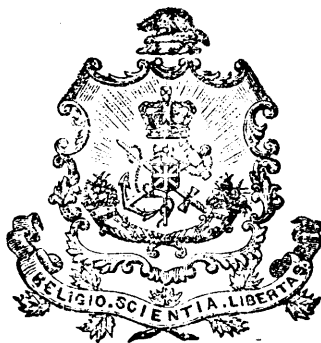


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CONTENTS OF THIS NUMBER

	PAGE
I. UNIVERSITIES and Colleges, as well as Common Schools, the interest of a whole people.....	145
II. MISCELLANEOUS—1. Every Child has a right to a good Public Education. 2. Should all Children be compelled to attend School? 3. How to secure the support of Common Schools. 4. The Relation of Teacher and Pupil. 5. Importance of Application to Study.....	150
III. EDITORIAL—1. Educational Institutions of a Country, one Interest. 2. Trustees' Blank Reports, &c. 3. Proceedings of Municipalities in regard to Public School Libraries. 4. Suggestions to Trustees. 5. Robert Stephenson and the Britannia Bridge.....	152
IV. EDUCATIONAL INTELLIGENCE—CANADA. 1. School Movement in the Village of Colborne. 2. Victoria College. 3. School Celebration in the County of Hastings. 4. Township of Elmsley. 5. Central School at Hamilton. 6. Education—UNITED STATES—1. State School Funds. 2. Education in the United States.....	157
V. LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC INTELLIGENCE—1. The Magnet in the Useful Arts. 2. The Comet. 3. Transmutation of Metals. 4. Use of Geological Knowledge. 5. Advantages of Burning Smoke. 6. Decimal Coinage. 7. Public Libraries. 8. Congress Library. 9. Valuable Table. 10. Sir Isaac Newton and Voltaire on Railway Travelling. 11. Anecdote of Pitt.....	158
VI. STATISTICS OF THE BRITISH NORTH AMERICAN PROVINCES—1. Upper Canada. 2. Lower Canada. 3. New Brunswick. 4. Nova Scotia. 5. Prince Edward's Island. 6. Summary. 7. Population of Chief Cities.....	159
VII. Advertisements.....	160

UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES, AS WELL AS COMMON SCHOOLS, THE INTEREST OF A WHOLE PEOPLE.

From the Inaugural Address of the REV. JAMES WALKER, D.D., President of Harvard College, delivered May 24, 1853.

An impression prevails, at least in some quarters, that what is done for common schools is done for the public; while what is done for colleges is done, at best, for learning and learned men. The State is often hindered, I believe, from legislating in favor of colleges by an opinion hastily formed, that it would not be to legislate for the public, but for a class. I hope to be able to show, that this opinion is without any solid foundation; that it originates in certain popular mistakes and fallacies, which it will not be difficult to expose; that every man and woman and child has a substantial interest in the prosperity of these institutions; that, from their first establishment in the Middle Ages to the present hour, they have constituted one of the most active and effective of the democratic elements of society; and consequently, that it ill becomes a people who have placed themselves at the head of the great democratic movement of modern times, to suffer these institutions to decline, or to become so expensive for want of public aid as to exclude all but the rich from their advantages.

I suppose I may begin by taking it for granted that a thoroughly educated man is a great public blessing. Here and there an individual is to be met with who still counts the disparities of genius and learning

among the difficulties in Providence; as if the bestowment of genius and learning were a kind of favoritism. But this is to forget that to increase knowledge is not the same thing as to increase happiness; on the contrary, if we may believe the Hebrew sage, it is to increase sorrow. When God raises up a Sir Isaac Newton, it is not that he may make Sir Isaac Newton any better or any happier than other men; if he happens to be so, it is from causes which are open to others as well as to him. Sir Isaac Newton lives that all men may be benefited by his discoveries; the instrument is one, the blessing is manifold and universal.

Perhaps it will be said, that the public benefactor is not he who discovers a new and important principle, but he who applies it, who introduces it into common practice, and so makes it the property or privilege of all.

I have neither space nor disposition to reopen here the vexed question between the scholar and the practical man, which contributes most to human progress. Both are necessary. Sometimes, indeed, both happily concur in the same person, and then we have not merely the skillful artisan, but the great artist; not merely the adroit and successful politician, but the great statesman. One thing, however, is plain; principles must be discovered *before* they can be applied. Moreover, the cases are extremely rare of important discoveries, even in the social sciences, which are struck out in the collisions of active life; they almost always come as the reward of patient and solitary study. Adam Smith's "Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations," is one of the four works named by Sir James Mackintosh as having "most directly influenced the general opinion of Europe during the last two centuries." Yet Adam Smith was a solitary thinker, a mere scholar, and what is worse, in the opinion of some, a professor too. To show how little he sympathised with practical men, and how little the practical men of his day sympathised with him, it is enough to say, that Pitt could not understand him, and that Fox would not take the trouble to read him. This was true, not more than fifty years ago, of speculations, many of which have now become as household words. In short, nothing better illustrates the influence of pure speculation on the prevailing habits of thought, and the material interests of the community, than the whole history of political economy. What has been done is simply this. Thinking men first informed their own minds by earnest and patient study on the matters calling for change. They then published to the world the results; the conclusions, and the reasons on which the conclusions were founded. The world read. It saw, it could not help seeing, wherein it had erred, that it had erred, moreover, to its own wrong and hurt. The light gradually found its way among the people, into the text-books of common schools, into the education of the common mind. Thus what is a great discovery made by scholars and scientific men in one age, becomes the common sense of the age that follows.

But again it may be objected, that all these things can be gained,