

THE JOURNAL
OF THE
Board of Arts and Manufactures
FOR UPPER CANADA.

FEBRUARY, 1864.

MECHANICS' INSTITUTES,

AS EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS FOR THE ADULT INDUSTRIAL CLASSES.

In the year 1838 we first became connected with the Mechanics' Institute of this city—a society which then comprised about 90 members, and occupied, as library and lecture hall, a large room of very unattractive appearance, up-stairs, in the old Market Buildings. The library then contained some five or six hundred volumes of books, and was open to the members on one evening only in each week. Weekly lectures were usually delivered during the winter season by gentlemen of the city and neighborhood, to perhaps a dozen or so of individuals; or if the subject was a very popular one, say on Laughing Gas, with illustrations, or some kindred subject, the audience would be considerably larger. These were times of hard struggling; the treasury was generally very low and often overdrawn; occasionally the directors would have to put their hands in their pockets and contribute of their own means to secure the continued existence of the Institute. Efforts were usually made as each season came round to establish classes in architectural and free hand drawing, or chemistry, or some other useful subject, but as a general thing with very limited success. These efforts were often entirely discontinued for a time, the discouragement was so great.

The foregoing is, no doubt, very nearly the history of many of the Mechanics' Institutes in the villages and smaller towns at the present day. We send a free copy of this Journal to each Institute, the existence of which we have any knowledge. Now and again we have a number returned, marked by the local postmaster, "Not taken out—Institute broken up." We wonder at the cause, and often ask ourselves the question—"Are these institutions not required by the youth of Canada? or have they a place to fill, and fail to use the proper appliances to ensure success?" We answer, such institutions are eminently fitted to benefit a community; but the men to take hold of them, to throw their energies into them for the benefit of the industrial classes, and induce them to avail themselves of the privileges afforded for self-culture, are in most cases wanting.

No doubt the withholding of the usual Legislative grant of \$200 to each properly organized mechanics' institute some five years since, has had much to do with the failure of some of them; and while our agricultural societies, universities, colleges and common schools continue to be so liberally supported by the Legislature, we do not see the justice of withdrawing this trifling support, which amounted for the whole United Province to the small sum of \$10,000 a year; but, thrown upon their own resources alone, if the managers of these institutions continue their self-denying efforts, success will at last amply repay those so engaged.

With several other active co-laborers, we have continued to devote a large portion of our time for the last twenty-six years to the Toronto Institute, and now have the satisfaction of looking upon it as perhaps the most extensive institution of its kind upon this continent, and occupying a building of its own we believe superior to that owned by any mechanics' institute in Great Britain. It has a library of over six thousand volumes of books, and a reading and news room well supplied and fitted up; and these are open on all week days from 8½ a.m. to 10 o'clock p.m. It has also a well organized system of evening classes for the instruction of such youths as are engaged in regular daily occupations, as well as numerous other appliances for the instruction and recreation of its members and subscribers. Of course we cannot look for all these results in localities containing small populations; but we do believe that if suitable rooms are secured and comfortably fitted up—a few of the daily papers and choice periodicals subscribed for and kept on the table—a well-selected though it may be small library formed, and kept open three, or, if possible, every night in the week—and, above all, the services of some one engaged as secretary and librarian, who has not only the ability but the enthusiasm necessary, success will be almost certain.

One satisfaction the directors of such institutions will always have, where they are successful, that by their efforts many young men are saved from the drinking and gambling saloons, from loitering at street corners, or spending their time in idleness, during the most dangerous period of life, and induced to habits of sobriety and study. In the course of our experience we have known hundreds such, many of whom are now filling responsible positions in society, resulting in part from their connection with these institutions. In every city and town how many youths are there away from parents and home, learning their various trades and callings, or who have homes entirely wanting in everything that could conduce to their mental or moral improvement; and how large a proportion there are,