

## SCHOOL LIBRARIES—THEIR SOCIAL TENDENCIES.

The Library Fund for the State, consists of \$55,000 appropriated from the income of the United States' Deposit Fund, and an equal fund raised by tax. The object of the Legislature was to furnish every district in the State, with a library of good books for the instruction of adults, as well as infants. Out of the same, \$110,000 were annually appropriated for the payment of teachers' wages. A sum was, therefore, devoted to the tuition of children, equal to twice the sum set apart for the purchase of books. Besides this, the whole income of the Common School Fund, a like amount raised by tax, all sums raised by towns for School purposes, and all local funds are expended in the payment of teachers' wages. To us, it appears clear, that the amount expended for books, which are the silent teachers of all those who have advanced to a certain degree in knowledge, is quite small enough in comparison with the sum expended in the wages of Teachers, whose business it is to guide the toddling steps of infancy in the paths of science.

The common School is only the threshold of the temple of knowledge. Books are its corridors, entrances, and aisles, which lead to its inner apartments and higher seats. A child goes to the Common School, not merely to learn to read, write, and cypher, but having learned reading, writing, and arithmetic, that he apply his knowledge to the business of life.

We are impressed, deeply, and unalterably, with the conviction that the policy which founded, and has built up the School Libraries, is the wisest policy which any human government ever adopted. If this policy be adhered to, and goes hand in hand with the common school system, it will be the means of enlightening and enfranchising all the inhabitants of the earth. We should look upon the abandonment of this policy as the triumph of ignorance and parsimony.

Our friendship for the School Libraries is based chiefly upon their political tendencies. "*Magna est veritas et prevalebit,*" is an old Latin proverb, which a modern political philosopher has translated into, "Error is not to be feared when truth is left free to combat it." But before the invention of printing, and the publication of books, truth was never left free to combat error. Forms of government, institutions, laws, religion, were imposed upon the masses of the people, and upheld by brute force. All the so-called republics of antiquity were in fact oligarchies, in which a few men, styling themselves citizens, assumed all political power. The tillers of the soil in Sparta, Athens and Rome, were, with rare exceptions, slaves. Nine-tenths of all the cultivated land on the surface of the earth is now tilled by serfs, or slaves. Why so? Because truth is not left free to combat error. Books would teach serfs and slaves to know how base a thing it is to be a slave.

In books, all forms and systems of government and religion, all theories, opinions, acts and motives of men, are discussed, attacked, defended, praised or ridiculed; and the people sit in judgment to weigh and deliberate, to approve or condemn. Before the invention of printing, there could be no tribunal of such universal jurisdiction, possessing also such irresistible power to enforce its decrees.

"Before the diffusion of knowledge and inquiry," says Hazlitt, "governments were for the most part the growth of brute force, or of barbarous superstition. Power was in the hands of a few, who used it only to gratify their own pride, cruelty, or avarice, and who took every means to cement it by fear and favor. The lords of the earth disdained to rule by the choice or for the benefit of the mass of the community, whom they regarded and treated as no better than a herd of cattle, deprived their title from the skies, pretending to be accountable for the exercise or abuse of their authority, to God only—the throne rested on the altar, and every species of atrocity or wanton insult, having power on its side, received the sanction of religion, which it was, thenceforth, impiety and rebellion against the will of Heaven to impugn. This state of things continued and grew worse and worse, while knowledge and power were confined within more local and private limits. Each petty sovereign shut himself up in his castle or fortress, and scattered havoc and dismay over the unresisting country around him. In an age of ignorance and barbarism, when force and interest decided every thing, and reason had no means of making itself heard, what was to prevent this, or act as a check upon it? The lord himself had no other measure of right than his own will; his pride and passions would blind him to any consideration of conscience or humanity; he would regard every act of disobedience as a crime of the deepest dye, and

to give unbridled sway to his lawless humors would become the ruling passion and sole study of his life. How would it stand with those within the immediate circle of his influence, or his arrogance? Fear would make them cringe, and lick the feet of their haughty and capricious oppressor; the hope of reward, or the dread of punishment, would stifle the sense of justice, or pity; despair of success would make them cowards, habit would confirm them into slaves, and they would look up with bigoted devotion (the boasted loyalty of the good old times) to the right of the strongest as the only law. A king would only be the head of a confederation of such haughty despots, and the happiness, or rights of the people, would be equally disregarded by them both. Religion, instead of curbing this state of rapine and licentiousness, became an accomplice and party in the crime; gave absolution and indulgence for all sorts of enormities; granting the forgiveness of Heaven in return for a rich jewel or fat abbey lands, and setting up a regular (and what in the end proved an intolerable) traffic in violence, cruelty and lust. As to the restraints of law, there were none but what resided in the breast of the *Grand Seigneur*, who hung up in his court-yard, without judge or jury, any one who dared to utter the slightest murmur against the most flagrant wrong. Such must be the consequence, as long as there was no common standard or judge to appeal to; and this could only be found in public opinion, the offspring of books. As long as any unjust claim or transaction was confined to the knowledge of the parties concerned, the tyrant and the slave, which is the case in all unlettered states of society, might must prevail over right; for the strongest would bully, and the weakest must submit, even in his own defence, and persuade himself that he was in the wrong, even in his own dispute: but the instant the world, that dread jury, are impanelled, and called to look on and be umpires in the scene, so that nothing is done by connivance or in a corner, then reason mounts the judgment-seat in lieu of passion or interest, and opinion becomes law instead of arbitrary will."

From the moment that the press opens the eyes of the community beyond the active sphere in which each moves, there is from that time inevitably formed the germ of a body of opinion directly at variance with the selfish and servile code that before reigned paramount, and approximating more and more to the manly and disinterested standard of truth and justice. Hitherto, force, fraud and fear decided any question of individual right or general reasoning; the possessor of rank and influence, in answer to any censure or objection to his conduct, appealed to God and to his word; now a new principle is brought into play, which had never been so much as dreamt of, and before which he must make good his pretensions, or it will shatter his strong holds of pride and prejudice to atoms, as the pent up air shatters whatever resists its expansive force. This power is public opinion, exercised upon men, things, and general principles, and to which man's physical power must conform, or it will crumble it to powder. *Books alone teach us to judge of truth and good in the abstract: without a knowledge of things at a distance from us, we judge like savages or animals from our senses and appetites only:* but by the aid of books and of an intercourse with the world of ideas, we are purified, raised, ennobled from savages into intellectual and rational beings. Our impressions of what is near to us are false, of what is distant, feeble; but these last gaining strength from being united in public opinion, and expressed by the public voice, are like the congregated roar of many waters, and quail the hearts of princes. Who but the tyrant does not hate the tyrant? Who but the slave does not despise the slave? The first of these looks upon himself as a God, upon his vassal as a clod of the earth, and forces him to be of the same opinion; the philosopher looks upon them both as men, and instructs the world to do so. While they had to settle their pretensions by themselves, and in the night of ignorance, it is no wonder no good was done; while pride intoxicated the one, and fear stupified the other. But let them be brought out of that dark cave of despotism and superstition, and let a thousand other persons, who have no interest but that of truth and justice, be called on to determine between them, and the plea of the lordly oppressor to make a beast of burden of his fellow man becomes as ridiculous as it is odious. All that the light of philosophy, the glow of patriotism, all that the brain wasted in midnight study, the blood poured out upon the scaffold or in the field of battle can do or have done, is to take this question, in all cases, from before the first gross, blind and ini-