

lished, but even those libraries must be fixed libraries; and the time may come, perhaps, when they may be read through, and there is a great advantage in having a change of books, and if these itinerating libraries—such libraries, I presume, not always being of the same kind, but varying in the character and description of its books—if these itinerating libraries are sent about to remote villages and hamlets, and are there detained for three months, and then changed for others, you keep up the interest, which otherwise would flag; and I think it of the greatest importance that these libraries should be as widely diffused as possible.

#### GOOD LECTURES A STIMULANT TO READING.

Let me for one moment now advert also to lectures. Now, I think that, however good lectures may be, they are not a substitute for reading or a substitute for books. They are a most useful auxiliary to the reading-room and to books. The great object of the lecture is, I think, to lead people to books, ("Hear, hear," and applause), not to let them go away satisfied that they have got from the lecture what no lecturer would ever think or dream himself capable of giving them, a thorough knowledge of the subject on which the lecture is given; because the great object of the lecture, I think, ought to be to excite an interest to stir up the mind, and to excite that curiosity of the mind which is implanted in every man, and which only wants a right direction, and to give that curiosity a right direction. If lectures are so understood,—if they are intended to stir up a spirit and taste for reading,—then I think they are in a proper place, and cannot be too highly commended. (Applause.) Books, however, it has been observed by M. Guizot, in a recent work of his, in a sentence which is worth remembering, "Books are the tribune from which the world is addressed." Lecturers can only address the few present confined within the walls in which they lecture, but books circulate among thousands. Books convey sentiments, exhortations, narratives, incidents, and instruction which may be diffused as the means of spreading those books exist; and therefore I still, without undervaluing the advantages of those lectures, attach the greatest importance to the reading-room, to a well-selected library, and to the itinerating libraries. (Loud applause.)

#### ALLEGED FAILURE OF MECHANICS' INSTITUTES.

I will just, then, advert for a moment or two, now before I sit down, to the complaint which has been made by some—they are termed ignorant people, and I believe, generally speaking, that ignorant and perhaps not very zealous friends of education do complain, that mechanics' institutes have been failures. And here let me just say that sometimes people depreciate them and say, "Why, what can a man get from reading the books in these institutions, for the knowledge is all superficial and will do very little good?" and they therefore throw cold water on the efforts of benevolent persons who try to spread education among the masses of their countrymen.

#### BENEFITS OF EVEN SUPERFICIAL KNOWLEDGE.

I was reading the other day one of those able papers written by one of the deepest thinkers, perhaps, of modern times—I mean the late Sir James Mackintosh—in which he combatted this objection. I contend that there is no deeper thinker and better informed man—a man whose knowledge can be called deeper than his upon most subjects; and yet he says, he stands there as the advocate of superficial knowledge. I don't mean of superficial knowledge as against knowledge of a deeper kind, but superficial knowledge in those who have to choose between what may be termed superficial knowledge and ignorance. Sir James Mackintosh says, speaking of the immense advantages which the art of printing has conferred upon the world, that it has broken down a barrier between the rivalry of a great body of mankind. But then, he says, a great body of the people cannot be profound, but, at the same time, the great truths which regulate the moral and political relations of men lie not very far below the surface; and it does not require that a man should be a philosopher, that he should go deep into the arcana of science, in order to apprehend those great moral and political truths. (Loud applause.) He goes on to say that the great works in which scientific discoveries are made, and scientific truths are stated, are not read except by a few; but that the truths which these works contain, pervade gradually the minds of a reading people—even though that reading may be of a kind that is almost superficial, and, by a variety of almost unseen and circuitous channels, they penetrate everywhere, even to every shop and every hamlet. (Loud applause.) He then goes on to compare and demonstrate this by a beautiful illustration, which I only wish I could repeat *verbatim*, but the substance of which is this:—He says that this may be illustrated by reference to the course of nature; and he then describes, in his glowing language, a magnificent scene, in which there is an expanse of a beautiful lake over the course of a magnificent river, which

attracts the admiration and commands the attention of those who look at it; but they regard not for a moment, or understand and appreciate that unseen mist which, exhaling from the surface of the lake and river, spreads itself over the adjoining country, and produces that beauty and fertility which we admire and profit by. (Loud applause.) Do not let us, therefore, be discouraged by thinking that all knowledge which by wise men, or rather by very learned men, may be termed superficial, is useless; and don't let any man abstain from entering upon the path of knowledge, and endeavor to lead others to do the same, because they may not attain those heights which they might desire, but which circumstances may place beyond their reach.

#### MIDDLE CLASS EXAMINATIONS.

Let me advert to an important subject of public interest—I mean that of those examinations which are to be held, the examiners being members of two universities, in different parts of the country, and of which we have heard a great deal lately. I see that a paper was read at one of the meetings of this institution, I think two or three years ago, by Dr. Dodd, in which he lamented that there was much talent which was wasted, which was thrown away, which was not developed, because there were no stimulants to honors to draw it out. He then contended that a university residence was not essential to the acquisition of knowledge, and that if knowledge could be acquired, and a sufficient test of the acquisition of that knowledge could be obtained, the great object was then within our reach; and he recommended for this purpose some southern university. Now, without undervaluing at all the advantages of a residence at universities, I could agree that it is most important and desirable that those whose means, circumstances, employment, and occupations debar them from access to universities as residents, should have places within their reach for having that stamp placed upon them by competent authority which was acquired by others more fortunate than themselves at the university. (Applause.) I rejoice, therefore, that the council of the union has placed itself in communication with the authorities of the universities, and that arrangements have been made by which examinations will be held in the present year by members of the University of Cambridge at Newcastle, and that it is hoped a similar examination will take place by the examiners at the University of Oxford in the course of next year. I hope that many of our northern youth will enter as competitors for the honors thus placed within their reach,—not because they will estimate the honor itself as any advantage, but that they will look upon it merely as empty honor to be paraded only—but that it will give them a stimulus to their own exertions and a confidence in their own powers, and thus lead them on to be useful members of society, and to confer benefit by the exercise of their talents not only on themselves but upon their fellow-countrymen; I cannot help hoping that there will be a large number of our northern youth who will avail themselves of those advantages, and that the young men of the north of England will hold their own—to say the least—against the young men of other parts of the country in obtaining honors. (Loud cheers.)

#### 2. CHARLES DICKENS, ESQ.

*The Pursuit of Knowledge illustrated by recent examples of Working Men.*

#### NUMBER AND OBJECTS OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN ENGLAND.

Mr. Charles Dickens was recently appointed chairman of a public meeting held at Manchester, to distribute prizes to competitors at recent examinations of pupils at the evening schools, made up entirely of mechanics and laboring men. His speech, which explains the objects and success of the institution, is thus reported in the *Guardian*:—At the top of the public announcement of this meeting are the words, "Institutional Association of Lancashire and Cheshire." This title does not suggest to me anything in the least like the truth. I have been for some years pretty familiar with the terms "Mechanics' Institutions" and "Literary Societies;" but they have unfortunately too often become associated in my mind with a body of great pretensions, lame as to some important member or other, which generally wants something done for it, and which is very seldom paid for, and which takes the names of the mechanics most grievously in vain, for I have usually seen a mechanic and a dodo in that place together. (Laughter.) I therefore began my education in respect of the meaning of this title very coldly indeed, saying to myself "Here's the old story." But the perusal of a very few lines of my book soon gave me to understand that this Association is designed to correct the old story, and to prevent its defects from becoming perpetuated. I learned that this Institutional Association is the union in one central head of 114 local institutions and mutual improvement societies, at an expense of no more than one dollar to each society, suggesting to all how they can best communicate with, and profit by, the fountain-head and one another, keeping their best aims steadily before