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MECHANICS' INSTITUTES.



THE leading article of the June number of this magazine contained this query: "Are Mechanics' Institutes in Ontario a Failure?" In reply to this question we have received several letters from correspondents, not intended for publication, but pointing out many disadvantages under which mechanics labour with respect to the present condition of these institutions. We could have wished that our correspondents had expressed their opinions in such a shape that we could have published them. We are, however, pleased to give insertion to a letter from

Mr. Edwards, Secretary to the Association of Mechanics' Institutes, at Toronto, which may throw more light on the subject. Mr. Edwards is a gentleman who, for many years past, has taken great interest in scientific and technical matters, and naturally feels intimately concerned in the success of these institutes, with which he is honourably associated. Although he does not altogether take the same view respecting them that we have done, or consider that they are in so unsatisfactory a condition as we have stated, he appears, however, to approve, generally, with the drift of our remarks.

We think that there exists a misunderstanding with respect to the meaning of the wording of the Statute under which they are incorporated—which says for "Library Associations and Mechanics' Institutes." Now does this mean Library Associations in connection with Mechanics Institutes—or, Library Associations independent of Mechanics Institutes, if the citizens of a town wish to establish one?—Or, does the Act mean that the two must be combined, and again is the grant by the Legislature given distinctly for Mechanics Institutes, apart from any Library Association? It is very evident that, as the matter now stands, advantage is taken in some places of the working of the Act and that, on the construction, put in the words *Library Associations*. Non-mechanics consider that they have the privilege to form a Library with just sufficient mechanics connected there with to suit

their object—call it a Mechanics' Institute—and draw from the Government two dollars for every one subscribed. It is very quickly done: one or more interested persons, having some influence, start to work among their friends to get up a Library Association; two or three manufacturers or well-to-do mechanics are connected with it for form sake, and, presto! the institution is formed. When working mechanics are afterwards asked to join it, they feel they have been slighted; that it is not organized as they would have wished; that its management is under the hands of a clique, and they refuse to have anything to do with it. At the same time many of these mechanics will expend more money annually in purchasing magazines and books than would have paid for their subscription to a Mechanics' Institute three-fold. It is our opinion, and always will be, that it is the duty and privilege of the manufacturers and master mechanics to take the initiative in the formation of every Mechanics' Institute, and then invite the citizens of the place to join as members of the Library, and to participate in the technical instruction given in the evening classes.

We hardly ever hear of any Library Associations unconnected with Mechanics' Institutes. We have visited many places in which libraries have been formed, open to all classes, but which have generally resulted in failure; and yet their failure was not the result of mechanics not supporting them, but owing to the want of support of the whole educated population. Had there been any Government grant to be drawn upon in aid of these Libraries, some one, probably, would have tried to keep them up. But as respects the Mechanics' Institutes of the Province of Ontario, although the Statute says for "Library Associations and Mechanics Institutes," there can be but little doubt as to the meaning of the Legislature in giving the grant, and that it was for mechanics only—that is, for the education of the industrial classes, and not for the benefit of private individuals, who desire to form a Library and Reading Room.

In further corroboration of the justness of our remarks in the article in June number, let us take a glance at the list of the 35 delegates who represented, at Ottawa, last September,—21 of the 58 Institutes receiving Government grants: We have two members of Parliament—an excellent selection—we wished there had been more; one machinist; four stationers; six ironworkers; (founders); one coal merchant; two clergymen; one soap