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CONTENTS OF THIS NUMBER:

	PAGE
I. THE FREE PUBLIC SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN UPPER CANADA	161
II. PAPERS ON YOUTHFUL CRIME AND ITS CAUSES.—(1) Youthful Crime and Cheap Periodicals. (2) Pernicious Reading for Boys who can Read. (3) Effects of Novel Reading in Belmont. (4) The Archbishop of York on Works of Fiction. (5) Young Men and their Readings. (6) Education and Absence of Crime in Peterborough	164
III. PAPERS ON READING AND ITS INFLUENCE.—(1) Books as a means of Doing Good. (2) Religious and Instructive Literature. (3) Magazines in England. (4) Periodicals in Switzerland. (5) Writing for Children to Read. (6) How to Spend Winter Evenings. (7) My Reading Rooms, and Reading in General. (8) Reading Habits	166
IV. PAPERS ON LIBRARIES AND BOOKS.—(1) Practical Value of School Libraries. (2) Lord Stanley on the Value of Free Libraries. (3) Public School Libraries in Upper Canada, 1853—1864. (4) Library of the Great Western Railway. (5) Free Library of Reference of the Board of Arts and Manufactures for U. C. (6) Dear Books in the United States. (7) Mediæval Book-Making	171
V. PAPERS ON SUNDAY SCHOOLS.—(1) Sunday School Libraries. (2) Sunday School Instruction in Upper Canada. (3) Resolutions of the Sabbath School Convention, held in Hamilton, C. W., on the 5th, 6th, and 7th days of September, 1865	172
VI. PAPERS ON SCHOOL BOOKS.—(1) Pernicious Influence of American School Readers, Histories and Geographies. (2) Lovell's Series of School Books. (3) Uniformity in School Books in Lower Canada. (4) An Unique French School Book	173
VII. PAPERS ON PRIZES IN SCHOOLS.—(1) Merit Cards in our Schools. (2) School Prizes in North Hastings	174
VIII. BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES.—58. Judge Haliburton. 59. Sir William R. Hamilton. 60. Sir William Jackson Hooker	175
IX. MISCELLANEOUS.—(1) Indian Summer. (2) Queen Victoria in Coburg. (3) Letter from the Queen to the Municipality of Coburg. (4) Swearing in of the Administrator of the Government	176
X. EDUCATIONAL INTELLIGENCE	175
XI. DEPARTMENTAL NOTICES	176

THE FREE PUBLIC SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN UPPER CANADA.

As the reading season, in connection with our Free Public School Libraries is now at hand, we have inserted in this number of the *Journal of Education*, for the information of Trustees and Teachers, a series of articles, or papers bearing upon the subject of libraries and library books.

We would especially call attention to those papers on page 162 which refer to the inevitable connection between the reading of sensational literature and crime. The proof of this ruinous connection between pernicious reading and youthful crime is but too evident not only in England and the United States, but also in our own country.* Recently, a mania for theft and other kindred

* As an illustration of this statement we would direct the attention of our readers to an article on this subject in the *Journal of Education* for April, 1861, in which cases which occurred in Canada are cited. We would also remind our readers of the instances of youthful crime which recently occurred at London and other parts of Canada, and which may most probably be accounted for in like manner,—as well as a familiarity with discharged convicts, as stated by the judge. A late number of the *London Prototype* says:—"The present year has developed an amount of crime in our midst which, we fancy, few imagined could exist. . . . But even looking at the city calendar solely, we find a record alarming enough; and in every case, we believe, the criminals were young men—and in some instances, sons of most respectable people. It was, we are told, a melancholy spectacle to see such an array of well-dressed, good-looking young men as stood in the dock on the closing day of the assizes, when Mr. Justice Hagarty was called on to pass the sentences. The learned judge himself commented freely and feelingly on the great increase of

crimes seemed to have possessed, not in all cases, the poor and ignorant, but, the youth of some of the more respectable and well educated families in the community. This depraved taste, and extraordinary fancy for crime seems to have been fostered to a lamentable extent by a familiarity with the daily records of the police-court, or with the recitals of successful crime prepared by professional writers of that class of criminal literature.

It is true that the facilities for religious instructions in the schools are ample; and that in Toronto, Hamilton, and all over Upper Canada, advantage is fully taken of those facilities; but such instruction, if not followed up, or if it is permitted to be neutralised by other adverse influences, caused by neglect to provide library books of a sound, moral, or healthful tone, then it is clear that an evil is growing up among us which should be checked without delay.

It must be obvious to every one who reflects for a moment on this subject, that if in our schools, boys are given a taste for reading and learning, it is unreasonable, not to say reprehensible, for the school authorities not to provide a supply of pure and healthy reading for gratifying those intellectual tastes which have been thus designedly created. To permit boys, whose desire for books and reading has been fostered, to select such works as they see fit, is to leave them open to most dangerous influences; for often the reading of the bad and disreputable books, which are to be found on so many of the book stalls, affords their unsophisticated natures the highest gratification. The taste thus vitiated grows by what it feeds upon; and the descent, it is well known, is easy from familiarity with the overwrought pictures of imaginary crime to the actual perpetration of it. The case of young Harter at Brockville, as given in this *Journal* for April, 1861, and the English cases mentioned on page 162 of this number, afford a painful proof of this.

It is, therefore, a serious responsibility which rests upon trustees to provide for this inevitable want in the school-room—a want which is inseparable from the very training which they are giving to the pupils. To meet this pressing necessity every

crime observable in a class of young men from whom much better things might be expected. 'It has been,' he said, 'a subject of remark to him that a great number of decent looking young men in Toronto seemed to be leading lives of infamy; and he was sorry to say their ranks were increasing. They were not of the lowest but of the better classes—young men who had indulgent parents, comfortable houses, enough to eat and drink, but who abandoned themselves to the most idle, dissolute and intemperate courses.' This is an ominous state of affairs. . . . That the educated respectable classes of society should send so many criminals abroad, and those, too, of the worst stamp, is a new and surprising feature of our social system."