

strangers to the blessings of education and to the elevating and ennobling influences of books—those priceless legacies of the great and good—

“ Whose ample page
Rich with the spoils of time,”

in literature, science and art, history, biography and poetry, have accumulated in vain for them.

It is true that we may be unable to reach many of our criminals by education, even were Schoolmasters to be appointed among them (owing to the fact that they are generally beyond the age for that purpose,) but we may by means of the Chaplain, the Prison Schoolmaster, and a well selected library of instructive and appropriate books open the door for the return to rectitude and honor of many of the younger criminals, whose moral perceptions are not yet blunted by continuous contact with vice, and whose lives are not yet hardened by crime. Such an influence might give a new bias to their feelings and tastes, and inspire with a purer and nobler ambition some of those who are now only famous in the annals of crime.

The subject is worthy of the attention of County Councils, on which have been conferred by the Legislature ample power to establish such Public School Libraries as they may judge expedient.*

From many places in which Public School Libraries have been established, the most gratifying assurances have been received by the Department of their beneficial effect. As a sample, we may quote the following testimony from the City of Hamilton, the local superintendent of which, in a recent comprehensive and interesting report (which has been published by the Board of Trustees in a neat pamphlet,) remarks:—

“ The Library, an important feature of our school system, was established in the month of October, 1855, but was not opened for distribution till towards the close of that year. Its advantages are now very generally appreciated, and its influence for good felt throughout the entire city. There is no class in the community to whom a Library can be made more directly beneficial than to the pupils attending our Schools. Their attention is so exclusively confined to their Text-Books and to their peculiar school studies, that one of the greatest deficiencies observable among the scholars of our higher classes is the want of that ready and practical information which can be obtained only by an intelligent course of general reading. As the use of the Library is freely extended to all, and as the selection of books is frequently made with much judgment and discretion, it may be fairly hoped that they will promote a general acquaintance with literature and science,

* It may be appropriate to mention in this place that, since the foregoing was written, the Municipal Council of the Metropolitan Counties of York and Peel have, at the suggestion of the Deputy Superintendent of Schools for Upper Canada, appropriated the sum of £25 towards establishing a public library in the County Jail, and that the Warden has written to the City Council to induce them to aid in the same benevolent object. It is also gratifying to know that the subject of Prison discipline and reformatory, education will shortly engage the attention of the Legislature, as indicated by the following paragraph in His Excellency's speech on opening the present session of Parliament, on the 15th inst:—“ Your zeal in the cause of Education is known and appreciated by all the World. It is important to consider whether we cannot combine the reform of the juvenile offenders with the punishment of their crimes. At the very least, it is incumbent upon us to take care that such punishment does not in itself afford fresh opportunities for debasing the criminals and instructing them in vice.

“ I regret to say that the Presentments of numerous Grand Juries throughout the Country, which I have directed to be laid before you, shew too clearly the want of improvement in the construction and discipline of our Gaols.”

and at the same time improve the pupil's taste and enlarge his range of thought.

“ The Library has been productive of much good in another way. Our country has been deluged with every description of trash in the shape of paper-covered novels and light literature. These are sold in the book-stores, vended about the streets, and almost forced upon the purchaser in steamboats and railroad cars. The prices at which they are offered are so extremely low that they are quite within the means of the humblest individual. There can be no question that their effect is demoralizing to the last degree, and every philanthropist will hail with joy the development of a healthier tone of public reading. Now it may be reasonably expected that these Libraries, spread as they are over all the country, and consisting of books at once instructive and entertaining, will materially tend to improve the public taste and cultivate a desire for reading of a more elevating description. It is believed that such a result may be observed already, to some extent, in our city. The number of books drawn weekly from the Library has steadily increased, and that they are read with profit and advantage, at least by the pupils, is evidenced by their increasing intelligence and avidity to read. Nor are the beneficial effects of the Library confined to the scholars alone—the volumes taken from it being the magnets that hold many entire families enchained around the social fireside during the long evenings of Winter. Frequently an hour is thus rationally spent which would otherwise have been devoted to less objectionable pursuit.”

As the subject is one of much interest, it may be proper to insert here, for the information of Municipal Councils and School Trustees, the following extracts from the Chief Superintendent's Report, containing a complete exposition of the principles upon which the system of public libraries have been established and maintained, and a statement of the means which have been employed by the Department to give practical effect to the provisions of the law on the subject.

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

The Chief Superintendent, in his Annual Report for 1854 (pp. 9-13) remarks:—

“ Before noticing the steps which have been taken to introduce this branch of our system of public instruction, I will reply to the only objections made to it. It has been objected, ‘ that the purchase and sale of school requisites and books for public libraries, ought to be left to private enterprise—that the government ought not to have a map or book establishment for the supply of schools and municipalities with these essential instruments of sound education and general knowledge,—that the private trader ought not to be injured by government with whom he is unable to compete.’

“ This objection is based upon the acknowledged fact, that school requisites and books are supplied to local municipalities much more economically and advantageously for the latter by the aid of government than by private traders. It is then, a question, whether the interest of public schools and municipalities are first to be consulted or those of private individuals?

“ It is also to be observed that the same objection may be urged upon the same ground and with equal force against any system of public schools whatever, as they interfere with the trade of the private teacher; for in proportion to the excellence of public schools, and the degree in which they are aided by the legislative grants and local assessments, and education to indi-