

much that was both witty and wise. In particular, he gave a humorous description of his fruitless endeavours, during several years, to comprehend the meaning of the current phrase, "the Manchester school." He had gone hither and thither vainly imploring explanation. Some people told him it was "all cant," others confidently asserted that it was "all cotton." But, he said, in that room his doubts were suddenly dispelled. Looking around, he now saw that "the Manchester school" was a library of books, open for the instruction of all classes, whether rich or poor. May the time soon come, he added, when all our towns and cities shall possess as good a seminary.

Following up this train of thought, another great author, who was present, Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, quaintly remarked, that "a library is not only a school, it is an arsenal and an armoury. Books are weapons, either for war or self-defence. And the principles of chivalry are as applicable to the student now, as they ever were to the knight of old. To defend the weak, to resist the oppressor, to add to courage humility, to give to man the service and to God the glory, is the student's duty now as it was once the duty of the knight."

I owe these apposite quotations to a writer of special authority upon the subject matter of this essay, namely Mr. Edwards, the first librarian of the Manchester Free Library, whose work on "Free Town Libraries, their formation, management, and history," would be very serviceable to the advocates and promoters of similar institutions in Canada. The book was published simultaneously in London and in New York in 1869. *

I cannot close my paper more suitably than by citing Mr. Edwards' words in summing up the advantages which, even at that early period in their annals, had already accrued from the establishment of free public libraries in the United Kingdom.

"By the imposition of a rate so small that it can never become burdensome to any class of ratepayers, nearly half a million volumes have been already provided for free public use, in thirty-four British towns. Without exception, the working of all the free libraries so established and brought into active operation has proved eminently satisfactory to all classes of the ratepayers. It has largely promoted that industrial education which fits men for their specific callings in life, as well as that wider education which reaches farther and higher; and in not a few towns the introduction of the rating principle has already proved itself to be not a discouragement, but a strong stimulant to the exercise of private liberality. For it is seen to give the best possible assurance that liberal efforts to promote the intellectual self-culture of the present generation will continue to be productive of good to generations yet to come."

* See also a pamphlet by W. S. Green, Librarian of the Worcester (Massachusetts) Free Public Library, entitled "Library aids, and guides for readers," published in Boston, in 1882.

Since the publication of Mr. Edwards' volume, we learn that the steady growth of the Free Library system in Great Britain since 1871 is shown by the fact that there are now over 80 distinct communities that possess Free Libraries. These institutions have in the aggregate nearly 2,500,000 (two million five hundred thousand) volumes, and their annual issues run up to over nine million books. In twelve years the books contained in about two-thirds of the Libraries have been quadrupled. In twelve representative towns the following percentage shows the rate of the issue of novels in comparison with all other books: The lowest gives 56 and the highest 77 per cent. (Library Association Conference, 1883.)