

JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

FOR

Upper Canada.

VOL. III.

TORONTO, JUNE, 1850.

No. 6.

TOWNSHIP SCHOOL LIBRARIES—MEANS OF ESTABLISHING THEM.

[By R. BELL, Esq., M. P. P., for the United Counties of Lanark & Renfrew.]
To the Editor of the Journal of Education :

DEAR SIR,

My object in addressing you, is to call your attention to the subject of Libraries for the use of Common Schools in Upper Canada. I shall merely give you my ideas, with a few statistical facts, and leave you to discuss the subject, if you think proper to do so, in your own usual clear and forcible manner.

Every person will admit the advantage, and even the necessity of having good school libraries; but, few people are aware of the scarcity of books, in many of the rural portions of the Province. The little instruction which the children receive in many of the Common Schools, is entirely lost for want of suitable books. They are taught to read as a means of acquiring knowledge, but that knowledge is not put within their reach, and, consequently, their education, so called, ends when they have acquired a tolerable knowledge of reading, writing and arithmetic. Many of our young people, after leaving the schools, seldom see a book, unless a pedler happens to drop in their way some of the trash called cheap literature, which, in many cases, is worse than useless.

Reading, writing, and arithmetic, as commonly taught in the country schools, is no more education, than the scaffolding, set up by the mason or the carpenter, is the superstructure, when he is about to build a house. What would we think of the mechanic, who should so put up his scaffold, and there stop, under the impression that his house was finished? Are we much wiser, in the course we follow with respect to common schools? For want of libraries, do we not stop when the foundation is scarcely laid?

My remarks, of course, apply more particularly to settlements cut off by distance, bad roads and other causes, from towns or markets where a good supply of books might be obtained.

The next point to which I wish to call your attention, is the scheme, by which I propose to furnish at least one good library to each Township in the Province. To do this, a very large sum of money, would, of course, be required; and in the present state of our financial affairs, it is scarcely reasonable to expect that the Government would recommend so large a grant. Then turn to the Corporations in the several Counties and Townships, and we are told that they "have no funds"; that their expenditure is equal to, and in many cases exceeds their receipts. We are also told that if an attempt were made to put on an additional assessment for this purpose, the people would resist it.

The plan I propose is this: To take the money arising from Tavern Licences, which, for several years past, has been used to liquidate a debt incurred for the payment of losses in U. C. in 1837 and 1838, and which, in future, is intended to be paid over to the

several County or Township Municipal Corporations in the Province, and apply it in each County or Township to the purchase of School Libraries. If it were applied in this way for *even one year*, a very good beginning would be made; but set it apart for this purpose, permanently, and in a few years, we would have the most magnificent School Libraries to be found in any part of the world.

It is pretty generally admitted, that the sale of spirituous liquors is productive of much evil to the community; then why not allow the tax on the traffic to be applied to so good a purpose as that proposed? It would, to some extent, counteract the evil. But I must not, at present, give you my views on the licensing system.

Then with respect to the amount of this fund. By an official return before me, I find it averaged each year, during the three years ending the 1st Feb., 1849, about £10,500. For the future, say £10,000; and the population is in round numbers 750,000. This would give 20s. for every seventy-five inhabitants, and each Township of two thousand inhabitants, which is very nearly the average, (there being nearly four hundred Townships in U. Canada,) would have £26 13 4, a sum sufficient to purchase the first year, at least *Two hundred and Fifty volumes*. I assume that expensive works, would not, in the first instance be required: indeed, it would be imprudent, at any time, to put expensive books into such libraries. Volumes about the size of those in Harper's Family Library, or the Library sanctioned by the Massachusetts' Board of Education, would be furnished at a price rather under what I have allowed; and if a large number were selected and ordered at once, by the Superintendent of Education, a liberal discount on the usual prices would probably be allowed.

Can the money be spared for this purpose? In reply, I say yes! This is an entirely new source of revenue to the municipalities. It is like so much money found. There will be no necessity for retrenchment in the ordinary expenditure of the municipalities; no withdrawal of funds from specific purposes to which they have hitherto been applied.

The money for this year is already paid over to the respective bodies entitled to receive it, and perhaps, in many cases disposed of; but I would suggest that an Act should be passed, declaring that for the future, it should be set apart for Common School Libraries; or, if it is considered to be beyond the control of the Legislature, I would like to see the County Councils taking up the matter, and disposing of it in the way I suggest.

This year the money was paid over to the several Townships, according to the number of taverns, within their limits. This is unfair, inasmuch as some Townships get more than their share, and other equally well settled Townships, get nothing. In proportion to population, would be the better way.

Yours truly,

Toronto, 24th June, 1850.

R. BELL.