

ones at reasonable rates, and he strongly recommended the system adopted by the Educational Department at Toronto, Canada West."

If anything could add force to the official documents referred to, it would be the personal testimony of the Earl of Elgin, who was Governor General of Canada during the whole period of the establishment and maturing of the Normal and Library branches of the school system, who familiarised himself with its working, and aided on every possible occasion in its development. On one occasion, his Lordship happily termed the Normal School "the seed-plot of the whole system;" on another occasion, with no less force than heart, he designated "Township and County Libraries as the crown and glory of the institutions of the Province." On his resigning the Government of Canada, Lord Elgin prepared and presented to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, an elaborate report of his Canadian administration. In that report, dated December, 1854, he devotes several pages to a comprehensive view of our school system, including a minute account of the system of public libraries, and the general machinery and administration of the school law and its results. It may not be inappropriate to give Lord Elgin's statement in his own words, omitting only the concluding part of it, in which he gives the statistics, and candidly states and discusses the question of religious instruction. After adverting to the comparative state of education in Upper Canada in the years from 1847 to 1853 inclusive, Lord Elgin proceeds as follows:

"In the former of these years the Normal School, which may be considered the foundation of the system, was instituted, and at the close of the latter, the first volume issued from the educational department to the public school libraries, which are its crown and completion. If it may be affirmed of reciprocity with the United States, that it introduces a new era in the commercial history of the province; so may it I think be said of the latter measure, that it introduces a new era in its educational and intellectual history. The subject is so important that I must beg leave to say a few words upon it before proceeding to other matters. In order to prevent misapprehension, however, I may observe that the term school libraries does not imply that the libraries in question are specially designed for the benefit of common school pupils. They are in point of fact, public libraries intended for the use of the general population; and they are entitled school libraries because their establishment has been provided for in the School Acts, and their management confided to the school authorities.

"Public school libraries then, similar to those which are now being introduced into Canada, have been in operation for several years in some states of the neighboring Union, and many of the most valuable features of the Canadian system have been borrowed from them. In most of the states, however, which have appropriated funds for library purposes, the selection of books has been left to the trustees appointed by the different districts, many of whom are ill qualified for the task, and the consequence has been that the travelling pedlars, who offer the most showy books at the lowest prices, have had the principal share in furnishing the libraries. In introducing the system into Canada, precautions have been taken, which I trust, will have the effect of obviating this great evil." (See page 96.)

## II. Papers on Public Libraries.

### 1. INFLUENCE OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARIES ON THE CHARACTER OF CANADIAN JURIES.

In regard to the Public Libraries now established in many of our Municipalities, the regulations, as far as I can ascertain, are strictly observed, and good care seems to be taken of the books. A considerable number are now in circulation. On entering almost any house some library books may be found in it. A taste for reading appears to be forming fast, and the influence which these books will exert for good will soon be evident. I think I mentioned formerly that the inhabitants of Dalhousie and Lanark, and of some other back townships, got up circulating libraries at the first formation of the settlement. The influence on the inhabitants has been such, that juries taken from those townships have more than once been complimented by the Judge on the Bench for their superior intelligence. The same good result may in time be naturally expected to follow from reading the many excellent books now circulating through our townships.—*Extract from the General School Report, for 1857, of J. A. Murdock, Esq., Local Superintendent of Bathurst, &c.*

### 2. THE COMPANIONSHIP OF GOOD BOOKS.

From a valuable Lecture by the Rev. S. S. Nelles, M. A., President of Victoria College, Cobourg, before the Mechanics' Institute of that town, we select the following interesting remarks:

The society of men was better than that of books, but after the companionship of good men, the next best thing which God has given

to the world is the companionship of good books. It might be objected that a book is soon read, whereas the conversation of a friend was of a more enduring character. This was a great mistake. A great book is as fresh and inexhaustible as a great man, e. g., Milton's *Paradise Lost*. It pleased, in some cases at least, the days of our childhood, and when taken up again in maturer years new beauties unfold themselves to our view in that magnificent poem. It is inexhaustible, and the only weariness felt by the reader was that arising from his inability to ascend to "the height of that great argument" which

"asserts Eternal Providence  
And justifies the ways of God to men."

Books are always accessible. There is no reserve about them to any one who comes prepared to hold intercourse with them. By means of them the great minds of the race acquire an *abiding and universal presence*; they travel down through all time, and through all lands. If HOMER could visit Canada we should see nothing of him—the old blind bard might go about the streets of Toronto with his cane—like Charles Mackay, he might visit Montreal, Hamilton, Toronto and Kingston—these great centres of civilization—but we should neither see nor hear him. But in his *works* we have him, and he was happy to assure the audience that there was no reserve at all about the old gentleman to any who came prepared to enjoy his society! The absence of books would be the greatest barrier to the progress of the world. Through their means we were acquainted with the progress made in science and art by all passages. We were not called upon to roll the stone of knowledge slowly and toilfully up hill only to be rolled back again. Without books history would be a mere collection of meagre fragments, instead of a continuous web woven by successive generations as time rolled it up.

The lecturer then proceeded to descant upon the freshness and vigor of the Anglo-Saxon tongue as a means for the development of the intellect, dwelling most eloquently on the connection between the great power which God had given to the Anglo-Saxon race and their nervous literature, which received its intellectual perfection under an influence incomparably superior to that of any other—pure religion. Our fine rich language was a golden reservoir into which was distilled from various sources that divine ambrosial liquor which was the common property of the race.

Some hints on the *selection of books* was next thrown out. A want of taste for reading was often owing to a bad choice of books. Let them begin with some light reading—such works as they could relish. He did not mean Novels—which should be avoided—but such a work as Robinson Crusoe, which, though a work of fiction, was something very different from the books generally understood by the term "Novel." It had deservedly been pronounced one of the finest works in the English language, both as a work of art and in respect to the moral lessons it conveys. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* might next be read—a work *sui generis*—the paragon of allegories. This inimitable work might be read in three ways: 1. As we read it in childhood, as a simple, interesting story; 2. As a work of art; and 3. As a book of divinity for the Christian. In any of these ways, in all of them, the book could not fail to please and instruct. Gulliver's *Travels*, though disfigured with the characteristic coarseness of its author—Swift—might be recommended as a means of forming and educating the taste for better things. Narratives, biographies, and auto-biographies would follow and pave the way for history. John Foster's *Life* was a work which greatly merited the attention of all, and Dr. Kane's *Arctic Discoveries* was a book full of adventures which no one could read without interest who had any soul for the romantic. Macaulay was then most happily introduced by the Lecturer as a bridge connecting romance with history; and few will dispute the justice of this keen sarcasm.

A most earnest warning was then poured forth against the reading of bad books whose "words eat as doth a canker," filling the mind with images which desolate and blast the soul. A caution was also given against wasting time over books intellectually poor—books in which there is no power of thought. A great book may be easily known by its powers of reaction. A great mind will move another with a force proportioned to its own power; and hence, if a book does not move us—does not produce activity of thought—it should be thrown aside as useless. He who is constantly conversant with great minds will imbibe their spirit. A great book will stir up the fountain of thought within—will make a new era in a man's life—will place him upon the high table-lands of thought. Even on common place themes it is better to read the works of great men. In fact, only great minds can invest common place subjects with new interest and beauty. Genius is among the rarest of the phenomena of earth, and we prize it in proportion. If we have time to spend, let us do so in the society of Princes.

The Lecturer next eloquently urged the advice of Dr. Arnold, to keep up the proper proportions of reading. God has never yet given the whole of truth to any one mind, or sect, or party, and if we would