

# THE ' VARSITY:

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## FREE PUBLIC LIBRARIES.

MR. HALLAM, a Toronto alderman, after making inquiries in England about the working of the Free Libraries Act, has come to the conclusion that we, in Ontario, ought to copy this piece of English legislation. Free Libraries in England are established on the strength of a special municipal rate. MR. HALLAM, whatever may come of his proposal, deserves the thanks of the community for what he has done. The free libraries of England, as the municipal libraries are called, are divided into two sections—lending and reference. In the number of volumes, the lending section outdoes the other. As a reference library, to be complete, should embrace nearly the whole range of literature, not wholly excepting current publications, the number of volumes in it should far exceed those in the lending section. But what is desirable to be done is not always identical with what it is possible to do; and if either section of a municipal library is to fall behind the other, the reference section is sure to be the sufferer. This has happened in England, and it would be much more certain to happen here.

Canada is deplorably behind the rest of the world in public libraries; and municipal aid, if it be forthcoming, should not be rejected. But we must not expect too much of municipal effort. Aldermen would have to take what they believed to be the popular view, and square their action with it. In favor of purchasing such books as are in immediate demand, they would be obliged to exert their influence. For the heavy tomes of a reference library, they would have no wish. The farther back they went, and the more difficult the books to procure, the less would they be desirous of obtaining them. Current literature would get an undue preference. The stream would run in the right direction, but it would be too violent. Current literature, which chiefly meets the demand for popular reading, has become, in various forms, so cheap that few are so poor as not to be able to purchase a fair supply of it; but of reference books the contrary is true; instead of getting cheaper, increasing years find them scarcer and add to their market value.

But let us not discourage municipal effort in establishing public libraries, one-sided though it would inevitably prove; for anything that will tend to remove the scandal of the paucity of public libraries in the Province ought to be welcomed. Only let us not deceive ourselves: municipal effort will never produce a great public library. Beside the free library, there will always be room for a foundation on which to build, by individual sacrifice, a really great public library. A great public library is the growth of time, of years, generally of centuries, and the longer the commencement is deferred, the more difficult is the task.

GIBSON once remarked that sculpture was impossible out of Rome, where, Englishman as he was, he had resided thirty years. Any branch of literature requiring extended research may, in the same way, be said to be impossible in Ontario. We do not overlook the Parliamentary Library at Ottawa

but that, though the best we have got, besides being very imperfect, is situated in a small city where political strife is too loud for profitable meditation and impartial reasoning. To Ottawa an Ontario literary man must, as things go, take his longings, and when he gets there, there is no certainty that his longings will be appeased. Great cities have a need of great public libraries; but it would be a revelation to us to find that the aldermanic rulers therein would have any ambition to meet the intellectual want. Free municipal libraries may have their place, but we do not expect the waters of intellectual intelligence in our municipal councils to rise higher than their source. Let the municipal councils of cities do their best in this direction; there will remain a much more important work for individual effort to accomplish.

## UNIVERSITY CONVOCATION AND THE ENDOWMENT QUESTION.

It would be hard to imagine a more complete fiasco than the meeting of Convocation held, or rather, attempted to be held, last June. That but three or four of our graduates should put in an appearance well deserved the thinly-veiled rebuke administered by CHANCELLOR BOYD, as Chairman of Convocation at the University dinner, and this disheartening event will, in all probability, be repeated unless some attempt is made to galvanize into life that somewhat lifeless body. The scanty attendance at the last meeting may be partially accounted for on the ground that, though there were some questions of a special, there were none of great or general interest up, for discussion. Only a persistent agitation of such questions as are of vital interest can make Convocation the progressive and influential body it ought to be; as its functions are wholly or almost wholly recommendatory, it is hopeless to expect any vitality to be exhibited in the discussion of minor measures. On the other hand, we cannot expect the Senate or the local Government gratuitously to come forward to carry out any apparently unsupported schemes. To any demands for action coming merely from individual members of the University, or from other independent sources, they naturally reply that Convocation was created for the express purpose of authoritatively presenting such demands, and refuse to recognize those coming from any other source as imperative.

No matter what new schemes are proposed or reforms advocated in matters concerning the University of Toronto or University College, they invariably, in the final analysis, hinge upon the vexed question of a further endowment. At present the expenditure of the institution trenches closely on its income; any unforeseen demand on the exchequer may bring about a very awkward state of affairs. An increase in the number of professorships is simply a necessity; the proposals to found fellowships and enlarge the building accommodation have virtually fallen through; in fact, it is evident that a suitable legislative grant could be applied never more profitably and effectively than now. To reconcile the strong general feeling on this subject with the apathy of Convocation, would be a difficult task; it is not by any means too late, however, to remedy the results of past inactivity.

Our Provincial University is essentially a State institution, and as the Province is its founder and sole benefactor, the Legislature ought not to leave it in a half-finished condition, incapable of further develop-