

MECHANICS' INSTITUTES AND THE BEST MEANS OF IMPROVING THEM.*

I.

BY THOMAS DAVISON, TORONTO.

MOTTO.—“*To make the Mechanic a better Man ; the Man, a better Mechanic.*”

To the President and Executive Committee of the Mechanics' Institute Association of Ontario.

I PRESUME that the Executive Committee of your Association, in offering prizes for the best Essays on “Mechanics' Institutes, and How to make them more Attractive to Mechanics,” had in view the interests of all working-men, whether engaged in mechanical pursuits or not; therefore, the few suggestions I make will be directed towards the general good, without distinction of class.

In order to bring the matter clearly before us, we will imagine a town or village without a Mechanics' Institute or other Literary Association, and proceed to discuss the best method of establishing one, floating it off on the tide of public favour; and, secondly, the objects it should aim to achieve.

Whilst the interests and peculiar wants of working-men should be jealously guarded in forming a constitution and by-laws, care should be taken not to alienate the mercantile or professional classes, from whom all Institutes in this country receive the greatest support. Without going into details for the present, it will, I think, be found best to have the Board of Direction composed of twelve (12) members, namely, President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and nine (9) ordinary Directors. In places where a perma-

nent paid Secretary and Librarian is too great a tax on the resources of the Institute, and the office is honorary, that officer should have a seat at the Board. The composition of the Board should be six employers and six employees, regardless of occupation. In cities where there are an unlimited number engaged in mechanical pursuits to draw upon, half the Board is sometimes restricted to that class. In country towns, however, no small share of the members are to be found amongst the agricultural class, and for that reason they should have the fullest opportunity of being represented. Having formed the Board, obtained a sufficient number of subscribers to ensure success, and having secured a suitable building, we now proceed to furnish the Institute with a

LIBRARY.

It is an unfortunate fact that the public taste inclines to “fiction”—a taste that must be met by a judicious selection, the greatest care being taken to exclude anything approaching to what is known as the “yellow cover” style. The works of men like Dickens, Scott, Thackeray, Lytton, and many others, are now admitted by the most eminent clergymen to have a tendency to do good. History is perhaps the next section of the library that will demand attention. Next, books of travels and voyages. Scientific works should form an important feature in every library. It is to be regretted that whilst, as a rule, they are costly, they are but seldom read. There are, however, cheap editions of the most popular works to be had, sufficient to train and stimulate the artisan to further researches. Donations to this section may be readily had, if the Directors will make their wants known. All books of great

*[The Association of Mechanics' Institutes of Ontario some time ago offered two prizes, of \$40 and \$20 respectively, for the best and second-best Essays on “Mechanics' Institutes and the best means of Improving them.” Fifteen compositions were sent in, and the majority of the judges awarded the first prize to this Essay, by Mr. Thomas Davison, and the second prize to the following one, by Mr. Richard Lewis.]