

reading, with the allied habit of loose thinking. Dr. Kenyon, Principal Librarian at the British Museum, in a recent address before the Library Association at Exeter, takes a very different ground. He holds, as do American librarians, that the guidance of the reader's taste is one of the chief functions of the library, and that these libraries are not only flexible instruments for the diffusion of knowledge, but, what is still more important, the most available and accessible instruments for the maturing and ripening of the mind. He declared that the charge that the free library led to a "washy state of intellectual anæmia," because its chief activity is doling out inferior fiction, is effectually disposed of by statistics which show that in Great Britain the proportion of fiction called for at the public libraries is less than twenty-four per cent of the total output of the libraries, and that of this twenty-four per cent of fiction much the larger part is sound, wholesome, and excellent material for the reading of people at large. He also pointed out the great interest in scientific, historical, political, and sociological books as shown by the large number of books in these fields drawn from the libraries; and he expressed his strong conviction, based on his experience and on statistics, that the free libraries are adding materially to the higher culture of the nation, and are therefore to be counted among its chief educational resources.

THE MINNESOTA FOREST FIRE

A terrible fire raged last week in Minnesota along the border between that State and Canada. The area burned comprises many hundred square miles. A hundred persons are believed to have lost their lives, and about a thousand were injured by burns or are missing. The financial loss will reach several million dollars. The district is known as the Rainy River region. The Rainy River is about a hundred miles long and is navigable in part. It discharges into the Lake of the Woods, and divides Minnesota from Canada. The Canadian town of Rainy River, a lumbering center, lies about a hundred and fifty miles southeast of Winnipeg, and is on the line of the Canadian Northern Rail-

way. Across the river on our side are the smaller towns of Beaudette and Spooner. The country about these towns is covered with timber, and the settlers live by getting out logs, pulp wood, and ties, and also by farming in a small way. The present year has been, it is said, the driest in half a century, and the result such as to add enormous fuel to any little flame started in the forest. Last week's conflagration was presumably started by a spark from a passing train or else by the carelessness of some settler, either in the manner of burning his *débris* or in not having burned it at all. Certainly the event calls renewed attention to the necessity of legislation in both of these directions. In the first place, railways should be held responsible for damage from fires caused by them. In general, the starting of fires by sparks from locomotives may be prevented by the use of spark extinguishers. In the second place, settlers should be held accountable for the slash and *débris* resulting from their logging operations. The severity of a fire and the resultant damage are generally directly proportioned to the amount of dry *débris* on the ground. The disposal of tops and brush and other *débris* is insisted on by older countries than ours; we must have similar mandatory powers. We should insist that piling should go on as logging proceeds. The burning of brush piles should, of course, occur only when there is no danger of a spread of fire; it should generally be confined to the season of snow or rain. Last week's event calls attention not only to the causes of fire, but also to the large proportion of loss of human life and of physical injury. There has been, we are glad to say, a ready response in supplies and contributions; and it is particularly inspiring to note that these came immediately from Canada. The international barrier was forgotten. On its part, the Treasury Department at Washington telegraphed to the Collector of Customs that Canadian donations of emergency food and clothing should be admitted free, thus repeating its similar order at the time of the San Francisco earthquake. This was not especially magnanimous, but it certainly was sensible; for to "protect" the prosperous at the expense of the starving and suffering by a

strict application of the tariff law would be protection gone mad.

AN
EFFICIENCY-AND-ECONOMY
COMMISSION

The work of the so-called "Keep Commission" is still animatedly discussed in the Government bureaus at Washington. Its members were Charles H. Keep, James R. Garfield, Frank H. Hitchcock, Lawrence O. Murray, and Gifford Pinchot. It was appointed by President Roosevelt to obtain information which might lead to a more economical administration of the departments. It brought to light many interesting facts concerning the Government's mechanism. President Taft is now continuing that investigation, and has found an effective aid in his private secretary, Mr. Charles Dyer Norton, who as Assistant Secretary of the Treasury had begun such a work on his own account. In his effort towards a more economical administration and the institution of more scientific business methods the President's plan is to have a commission of experts to be headed by Dr. Frederick A. Cleveland, Director of the Bureau of Municipal Research of New York City and already employed as a member of the White House staff. These experts are to investigate means for co-ordinating administrative methods, curtailing expenses, and avoiding duplications. Furthermore, in each department there is to be a sub-commission of three members to co-operate with the central organization. The result should be, if not a standardization of all forms of administrative activity, at least a proper comparison of the cost and efficiency of the same forms of activity in the various departments. In particular, however, there should result the institution of a budget, a statement to be submitted to Congress of contemplated receipts and disbursements by the executive departments. There should certainly be an opportunity to compare proposed appropriations with those for the previous year, and, in general, a statement of affairs so simple and orderly that the man in the street may understand. If the new commission shall inaugurate efficiency and economy in the transaction of public business, it will deserve well of the country. It will also add to the Pres-

ident's prestige by being the third needed commission appointed by him, the others being the Tariff and the Railway Securities Commissions.

THE MASSACHUSETTS AND
MICHIGAN CONVENTIONS

The Republican and Democratic Conventions just held in Massachusetts and Michigan were significant of political moods and methods. In Massachusetts methods certainly were emphasized—that is to say, Republican businesslike despatch and Democratic dilatoriness, delay, and, according to some observers, inability to grasp a victory within sight. The Republicans renominated Governor Draper by acclamation. Their platform commends Mr. Taft's Administration, especially mentioning his part in securing the enactment of the railway rate, the safety appliance, the bureau of mines, the land withdrawal, and the postal savings acts. The platform admits that the present tariff has increased duties on many articles, but asserts that these were mostly luxuries. The Democratic platform demands downward tariff revision, freer trade relations with Canada, the income tax, a parcels post, the passage of an eight-hour labor bill, shorter hours of work for women and children, the initiative and referendum, direct nominations and primaries. This is all very well; but when the Democrats came to nominating a candidate for Governor, they found their forces embarrassingly divided; indeed, at this writing one of the most peculiar situations that ever arose in American politics faces them. The principal gubernatorial candidates were Charles H. Hamlin, Eugene N. Foss, and James N. Vahey. Riot reigned at the Convention. Unable to agree, the Convention appointed a committee. But the committee has also been unable to agree! What indication is here presented of Democratic capacity for self-government? The spectacle seems all the sorrier as with Mr. Hamlin as candidate the Massachusetts Democrats would have followed the brilliant political example of their party fellows in the Connecticut, New Jersey, and Ohio nominations for Governor. In Michigan the Republicans nominated for Governor Chase S. Osborne, a Progressive. The Michigan Republican platform indorses the Taft Administration