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SCHOOL LIBRARIES.

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Disputes as to what is the first year of the new century seem now to be on the wane, so we may safely conclude that we have at last moved into the Twentieth Century.

At the opening of this new era the question quite naturally arises, "By what distinguishing features will the beginning of the twentieth century be marked, when its history comes to be written?"

We believe that the general diffusion of knowledge, and the struggle to place all men upon a footing where they will all have an equal chance, will be at least two of the distinguishing features. At what period of the world's history has the general public had easier access to useful information and noble ideals, expressed in good literary form, than at the present day? The cheap editions of works by the world's best authors, the circulation of excellent, yet low-priced, newspapers and magazines, the free public schools, the high schools and collegiate institutes, open to all at a merely nominal fee; the academies, colleges and universities, with their splendid equipments and low rate of tuition, should be, to the dullest person, most conclusive evidence of these characteristics. Our telegraph and telephone systems make events, discoveries and inventions, the property of the whole world in a few hours' time. The capture of a Boer stronghold in South Africa, the discovery in Germany of innoculation for the prevention of diphtheria, the invention of a new kind of explosive in France, become in a few hours, or days, the possession of the civilized portions of the sphere.

The universal diffusion of knowledge is also an important element in giving all men an equal chance, and in waking them up to the fact that they need that chance. The work of the churches, benevolent societies, trade's unions, and workmen's guilds, in helping the weak and the unfortunate, all aim at giving men an equal opportunity. Public ownership of public conveniences such as telephones, telegraphs, electric and gas lighting and electric and steam transportation, is simply another means towards the same great end.

Among those influences at work to-day to help in this diffusion of knowledge and increase the opportunities of the individual, public libraries occupy no mean place. None of us need to have had a very long or checkered experience to have come into contact, in some place, at some time, with such an institution. All the large towns and hundreds of the smaller ones throughout