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## FREE PUBLIC LIBRARIES.\*

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TORONTO.

WE are met here for the public inauguration of a movement of no slight significance in the history of our city, of our young province, of our still more youthful Dominion. To-day Toronto celebrates the close of her first half-century's existence as a city; and as we thus enter on a new civic era, we fittingly mark its advent by the opening of the first Free Public Library in Canada. It is an event fraught with high promise for the future; an evidence of progress which as an old citizen of Toronto I can estimate at its full worth. It is moreover a creditable index of the value attached to intellectual culture in this trading and manufacturing community; the institution of what, if widely used, must become a school in which popular education will be advanced in some of its most practical forms. A free access to books is the most

innocent, the most delightful of all luxuries. It is a privilege which I associate with my own youthful experiences; and when I landed a stranger in Toronto thirty-two years ago, the dearth of books and the utter absence of anything deserving the name of a library, in the University or elsewhere, struck me as something truly appalling. I was then fresh from Edinburgh, where the University library alone numbers 140,000 vols. Yet that is altogether secondary to the Advocates'—third in rank among British libraries—with its 265,000 printed vols. and 3,000 MSS., as free to any literary worker or special student as this institution can be. My position was that of an immigrant workman just landed and finding an absolute lack of his most needful tools. From early years I had been accustomed to the ample freedom of well-stored book-shelves at home, including the collection of a deceased relative, a Scottish clergyman, and so had been familiar from

\* Inaugural address delivered at the opening of the Toronto Free Public Library, March 6th, 1884. Revised by the author for THE MONTHLY.