

THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF THE CANTERBURY
PUBLIC LIBRARY TO 1878

Every age does not produce a Napoleon or an Einstein, a Shakespeare or a Beethoven, yet there are many names in every age which, although famous in their own particular spheres, remain unknown to the world at large. Originality is such a rare gift that the average man must remain content to use those things which have been discovered, invented, and formulated for him by others. Yet, in spite of its rarity, its worth is seldom recognised. People accept the ultra-modern household comforts of the twentieth century without comment, seldom pausing to reflect on the weeks and months and often years of research that have gone to produce such wonders of science. In like manner the printing press and all its boons are accepted with scarce mention of names such as Gutenberg or Caxton. The age of questioning and suspicion has been replaced, in highly civilised societies, by an age of acceptance. The invention lives, the inventor is long since forgotten.

Let us, in contradiction of the spirit of the age, pause for a few seconds to consider the name of George Birkbeck who was born at Settle, Yorkshire in 1776. He studied medicine at Edinburgh and London, taking the degree of M.D. in 1799 at the University of the former city, and shortly after became professor