

GIVE THIS JOURNAL TO A FRIEND

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"Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body."

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## THE SUBURBAN LIBRARIES

By COUNCILLOR G. MANNING.

One of the most interesting ways of using one's time is to read a book. But the choice of the book, or in other words its subject matter demanded, is decided by the mental content of the individual making the choice. Some people prefer novels which express in various ways the love of man for woman or woman for man, others prefer detective stories, and quite a few appreciate stories constructed on a background of religious thought or ideals. In this way, by reading such stories, individuals live for a time in a world of make believe. The imagination is stimulated, the emotions are aroused, and curiosity engendered. In other words, the reader experiences what are called "thrills" without the least effort or expenditure of will power. Because of these experiences novel reading has become most popular, and successful novel writers make a fortune. To meet the growing demand for books, libraries were founded, so that by co-operative effort the books could be secured on loan for the lowest possible cost. The suburban libraries of Christchurch have grown up or have been established to meet this need, but the question now arises—are such libraries fulfilling any necessary social function? Men and women utilise the hours of their leisure time organising and administering the suburban libraries, but for what purpose?—to provide reading matter at the lowest cost to the members.

## A New Purpose.

The reading of novels provides a method of using time in a very pleasant way. But it may also provide a method of relaxation from concentrated mental effort. This latter assertion inclines to the statement that novel reading is secondary or complementary to sustained mental effort. Therefore mental effort, being in the main constructive, or the endeavour to arrive at judgments in the relations of classes of facts, should be the experience of every healthy individual. Such experiences lead on to further mental development, and encourages logical thinking. But where are the facts to be secured on which the mind is to be exercised? Facts are perceived through experience or by research. The experiences of the individual, being very limited, the major facts are accumulated from the researches and experiences of numerous other persons. These are entered into books. Therefore by reading books which contain the facts or experience secured by others the knowledge of the reader is widened or deepened, and the judgments to be made are considerably increased. By this way education is experienced, and the wisdom of the individual enlarged.

## An Instrument with a Purpose.

Thus by the printing of books which deal with the facts of reality, with life in all its phases, with nature in its several ways of expression, individuals can understand the forces of nature, the problems of life, and the institutions evolved by man