

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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LEYS INSTITUTE

By A. BRETTELL

Though there are many of our citizens who from time to time have heard or read of Leys Institute, there may be some who have but a vague idea as to what its activities are, and why it is called an institute. I propose to attempt briefly to relate how and why it came into being.

Leys Institute was founded under a bequest of Mr Wm. Leys.

After making full provision for his family he wished that the surplus estate be invested until the amount so accrued be sufficient to build a brick building to cost not less than £2000 and to equip the same for the purpose of a Free Library and Mechanics Institute, in the Ponsonby district, to be called the Leys Institute, and, when complete, the whole to be conveyed to the citizens of Auckland. During 1905 a deputation from the Library Committee of the Auckland City Council, waited upon the trustees of the endowment, for the purpose of ascertaining the prospects of an early completion of the building, but discovered that it would take ten years for the accumulated fund to satisfy requirements.

As the need was urgent Mr W. T. Leys offered to contribute one half of the cost of erection and equipment if the Auckland City Council would provide a suitable site. This generous offer was accepted, the present site in St. Mary's Road, Ponsonby was bought and the building proceeded with. Apart from the cost to the Council for the site £850, the building and equipment cost £3,500. Mr W. T. Leys also presented 4,400 volumes, and over 1,000 volumes were

given by the Auckland Free Libraries, duplicates of standard works.

At the official opening, Mr W. T. Leys was eloquent in praise of his brother's high ideals, broad sympathies and his simple hearted desire to serve the community in which he lived.

Born in 1852 he arrived in Auckland in 1863 and soon became apprentice to a bookbinder. When 20 years of age he commenced business on his own account. Though he never had a large business, he lived carefully and invested his savings wisely. A life of self denial, but ever ready to help those in need. He became chairman of the Auckland Liberal Association, and a keen student of everyday affairs. "Old age Pensions" was a subject near to his heart, and a lecture he delivered in 1893, was later printed and widely circulated throughout the country, exercising considerable influence in securing adoption of the old age pensions Act in New Zealand. In a pamphlet he wrote we find many gems, but space only allows reference to one.

"If we patiently trace the footprints on the highroad of life, we see the working masses are diligently plodding on, exercising their mental and physical skill to the utmost of their ability, and receiving in return just enough to keep body and soul together . . . We might well say 'Labour destroying inventions' when we consider that with all these wonderful scientific and mechanical aids which should daily and hourly lighten man's toil-some lot and increase his happiness in this world; his burden of toil, of sorrow and of suffering is as hard to bear as ever it was."