

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 LIBRARY SITUATION IN CHRISTCHURCH

By Dr. G. M. L. LESTER.

The City of Christchurch is turning in its sleep and dreaming dreams of libraries and museums. Dreaming, let us hope, dreams which may be translated into realities in the next few years. When the libraries which now serve Christchurch were instituted, a library was looked upon as a miscellaneous collection of books, where subscribers could borrow books for amusement, recreation, and perhaps for what was then called "improving the mind." The idea was, that if people wanted to read widely and to supplement the reading which their own bookshelves afforded, they should club together and buy more books that they could enjoy in common. There was no clear idea that a well-organised library was an essential part of the educational machinery which it is the duty of every progressive city to provide for its citizens. The consequence has been that the libraries of Christchurch have been, and still are, of much the same scope and character as the lending libraries which at seaside resorts help people to dispose pleasantly of their leisure hours, and that the really educational part of a library, the reference department, has been sadly neglected. We find, however, quite in early times traces of a wider view of the scope of a library in the name Mechanics' Institute, which was attached to many of the early libraries, and in these Institutes there lay the germ of a reference library. Later on the group of intelligent and able men who I used to meet with such pleasure many years ago in the Trades Hall, by founding the Workers' Education Association, proved that they

at least fully valued the education value of literature. In spite of this the city still lacks a good reference library. A full well-organised reference room is of course the most important part of any library, and no city is complete without one. The circulation of miscellaneous literature may perhaps be left to private enterprise, but it is the plain duty of a city to provide for its citizens a reference library. And this for two reasons—(1) In the first place such an institution provides for men and women what we may call adult, or post-graduate education. No sensible person thinks that his education ends with school or college days. The experience of life which he cannot shirk, will continue the development of one side of his mind and character as long as he lives, but there is another side of his development which depends very largely on books. Books are expensive things, and the high priced book of to-day may be almost useless tomorrow. Surely it is the duty of a great city to put at the disposal of all those who wish to use them seriously these indispensable aids to the development of mind and character. (2) There is another and most important side to the work of a reference library. It is obviously to the advantage of a modern city that its tradesmen, its merchants, its craftsmen, its professional men should be the best of their kind. Not only should they be well and truly trained, but as their work in life develops they should be kept in touch with all that is best and most modern in the theory, practice and method of their vocation in life. This means in many cases an outlay on books, periodicals, and journals which is absolutely prohibitive for most men. Surely it is only fair that the city should