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

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## A NOTE ON THE MOST URGENT POLICY PROBLEM OF THE SMALL LIBRARY

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When asked by my good friends Mr Brettell and Mr Wiltshire to contribute a short article to the Linwood Library Gazette, I readily consented to do so on personal grounds and because of my admiration of the work that is being done at the Linwood Library. But when I attempt to put my thoughts on paper, I realise that I have neither the knowledge nor the experience to speak with authority on library affairs. From experience gained at New Plymouth as member of a smaller library committee on the one hand, and on the other as delegate to library conferences where one meets the representatives of the large libraries, I have come to realise that great differences exist in the policy problems confronting the directorate of the two categories of libraries.

The common problem of New Plymouth and Linwood is to adapt our methods and come into the scheme of a central library with an organisation so different from our own. Our foundation and development has hitherto been individualistic. Linwood is still practically supported by the subscriptions of its members. Our New Plymouth library started in 1848 on a subscription basis, and after many bitter struggles and vicissitudes, it still relies for the greater part of its sustenance on subscription. But particularly in later years, the local body has tended to identi-

fy itself with the library by granting increasing financial assistance by way of subsidy. Such a position, according to the ideas of modern librarians, is eminently unsatisfactory. It arose from, and is perpetuated by two factors: the desire of subscribers to keep their individuality and the unwillingness of local bodies to accept the financing of an essential public service so long as any group of enthusiastic readers display their willingness to carry on their own shoulders this public utility. In this cynical neglect of their responsibility, they can rely on the support of the non-literary rate payer who is unaware of what he is missing in not having an adequate supply of good reading matter.

The individualistic nature of the small library is thus both its weakness and its strength. While it is absolutely true that nearly all libraries in New Zealand owe their existence to individual effort, yet they are all faced with the inevitable necessity of linking up with larger and stronger units to form a National Dominion-wide Library with headquarters at Wellington.

We smaller libraries will have to make a reorientation of our ideas. Although we may seem to be on the point of being swamped by our larger neighbours, and may have to give up ideas which appear to us to be very important, I am convinced that we will gain more than we lose by a system of co-operation.

Under the compulsion of the traditional conceptions of library service it is of course impossible, from the nature of the