

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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DO YOUNG PEOPLE WANT BOOKS ?

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I shall begin by saying flatly, "Yes, young people do want books," and I shall spend the rest of my time in justifying this statement. By implication, I am concerned with the whole group of young people from thirteen to eighteen years of age; in my discussion I shall limit myself to the large number of boys and girls who have been called somewhat euphemistically, "reluctant readers."

No one asks of the good readers, "Do they want books?" They are the joy of teachers and librarians. They are the reading aristocracy, the divine remnant. Their interests are definite, their requests specific, their ability, too often, the deciding factor in library book selection.

It would be a great relief if we could say of the other group, "They do not want books." As it is we usually act as if they do, but we are subject to periodic pricks of conscience; then we indulge in tabulations of non-library-users, deplore the influence of radio and motion pictures, and shake our heads over the future of democracy. Yet there is only one certain way of discovering whether these boys and girls want books. That is to bring them to the library and to buy books which they can and will read. The library must do this if it is to be truly a public library.

For a number of years in a branch of the New York Public Library I worked as librarian and club leader with boys and

girls who were "reluctant readers." During the past year, as assistant in the New York Public Library in charge of work with trade, vocational and continuation schools (which receive the "reluctant readers" when they leave junior high school), I have discussed books and the library with many groups whose attitude toward both has ranged from the politely indifferent to the frankly hostile. In talking to these boys and girls informally about their own interests and their varying experiences with reading and libraries, I have learned a number of things.

Reasons for "Reluctance"

The term "reluctant readers," like any other general term, is misleading for it groups into one class boys and girls whose reluctance is due to different causes. Some of them have been so discouraged by required reading beyond their ken that they are conditioned against books in general. Some of them, good readers in the children's rooms, have been unable to make the transition from fairy tales and simple children's stories to fiction with an adult point of view. Some of them are so limited in reading ability that they cannot find books which are mature enough in contents to interest them but at the same time simple enough in vocabulary. Some of them have had unpleasant encounters with library regulations. Some of them, surprisingly enough, have never belonged to the public library. Each one of these "reluctant readers" must be considered individually so that his particular problem can be solved. The encouraging fact is that, with the exception of the very lowest IQ's, every one of these boys and girls