

another. The only test we can apply to the content of a public library is the test of significance. If the book meets that test, in the judgement of competent persons, the public is entitled to find it on the shelves of the library... We are not justified in barring gates which lead to roads we may not happen to approve."<sup>(1)</sup>

In the light of this statement, a study of the library facilities of any community should be very revealing, and yet no-one has undertaken such an investigation to substantiate or disprove the many scathing criticisms levelled at the libraries of Christchurch over a long period. To know that such criticisms are justified is not sufficient if the mistakes of the past are to be rectified. A first essential is to know how and why those mistakes occurred so that similar mistakes can be avoided in the future. The purpose of this thesis is to remedy this omission and, by tracing from its earliest beginnings the growth of the Christchurch library service, to provide the background necessary for any criticism of that service. An added incentive is provided by the fact that library development in the metropolitan area of Christchurch not only forms a complete unit but is also unique in New Zealand.

In England and the United States of America it is generally accepted that public libraries are not only free and supported from the rates but also are the natural extension of the system of public education. Although a number of libraries and mechanics' institutes were founded in the early years of this province for a similar purpose many members of library committees and the public generally appear to have forgotten that the city library maintains a reference service; that it has books available for inter-loan between libraries; that it supports an excellent service for the younger members of the community; that it is compelled by law to keep open, a free reading

1. "The Press", Christchurch. September 15, 1935.