

It is now apparent that four forces obstructed the committees; shortage of finance; the necessity for voluntary service; the knowledge to choose non-fiction; the subscription system and its attendant evils. Because of these difficulties no action was taken, and the City Council continued to dole out its annual subsidy regardless of the fact that public money was being squandered on third rate literature. The educational value of the suburban libraries remained practically nil.

One reason for this, and possibly the chief one, is undoubtedly the subscription basis; and these following remarks apply also, though to a slightly lesser extent, to the Canterbury Public Library. While on a visit to Christchurch in 1947, Mr. L.R. McColvin, librarian to the city of Westminster and a noted English authority, contended that the system was founded on a series of false basic principles, and chiefly, that it should be a free library service and not a subscription one. "Libraries have to be free and open to everyone. What is being done in Christchurch now is to offer a limited service to a limited number of people." Furthermore, he pointed out that public libraries should provide all classes of reading not better supplied by commercial and technical libraries, and that subscription libraries are inclined to cater for the lower denominators in reading tastes and, as a result, come into competition with the cheapest purveyors of books.<sup>(80)</sup> A substantially similar criticism of the city library service had been made thirteen years earlier when Munn and Barr declared that the suburban libraries were, in effect, nothing more than voluntary groups of neighbours engaged in

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80. "Star-Sun", February 8, 1947.