

supplying themselves with pleasant reading matter, partly at public expense.⁽⁸¹⁾ It is indicative of the general lack of interest that the majority of the people showed such apathy in the face of exploitation by a few of their fellows. Worthy councillors would hold up their hands in horror if it were suggested that a charge should be made for admission to Hagley Park and the other city reserves. They have never been reserved for subscribers or even for ratepayers. It is a great pity that with such a worthy concept of the needs of the body these same men were prepared to overlook the needs of the mind.

The longer the subscription system continues the greater the danger that the literary taste of the public of Christchurch will be permanently impaired. This danger was emphasised by the editor of "New Zealand Libraries" in 1938 when commenting on the rapid growth of the shop libraries throughout the country. In suggesting that a good many libraries in New Zealand, particularly those in the larger and medium sized municipalities, would be faced with the unpleasant duty of recording a substantial decrease in issues, he made the following challenging comment.

"This is due to the activities of the shop libraries which have taken away a large part of the light fiction reading public ... This part of the public, since it is the part which pays the most, received far more attention than it has deserved, and in libraries where the free system is the ideal the financial loss will be regretted, but the reduction of the proportion of fiction lending to other parts of library work will be realised as being largely a help and not a detriment. It is a fact that for years past our libraries have been relying on revenue received from the readers of ephemeral reprint fiction rather than on subsidies, which as educational institutions striving against difficulties to fulfil their proper functions, they might reasonably have expected from the rates. The necessity for providing light fiction, coupled with the fact that this has been a moderately lucrative enterprise, has enabled library committees to rely on the revenue received from this source and to feel satisfied that a library has been

81. Munn and Barr op. cit. p.22.