

The Leys Institute

HISTORY OF THE INSTITUTION.
THE OFFICIAL OPENING.

Several hundred people on March 29 gathered outside the new building in St. Mary's-road, Ponsonby, called the Leys Institute, to witness the ceremonies of handing it over to the City Council and of officially opening it for the use of the public. Amongst the assemblage were the R.G. Bishop of Auckland (Dr. Lenihan), the Hon. T. Thompson, W. C. Smith, W. J. Beehan, M.L.C.'s, Messrs. Alison, Baume, and Kidd, M.H.R.'s, the Revs. Archdeacon Calder, Canon Nelson, Dr. Egan, Rabbi Goldstein, R. Somerville, Luxford, Jellie, Farrell, North, and Mr. Chas. Watt, the Mayor of Auckland (the Hon. E. Mitchellson) and Mrs. Parr, Court, Brown, Bagnall, Knight, Casey, the town clerk (Mr. H. W. Wilson), the city engineer (Mr. A. A. Wrigg), the Mayor of Parnell (Mr. J. Fitt), Mr. A. E. Rosser (for the Trades and Labour Council), Messrs. J. O'Brien, W. B. Leyland, J. J. Holland, H. Brett, E. Morton, J. L. Tole, W. J. Napier, J. Savago, G. E. Mueller, J. H. Upton, G. George (Auckland Technical School), J. Secrott, J. Christie, E. T. Hart, Leighton, Douglas ("N.Z. Herald"), W. Coleman, A. Cameron, W. J. Speight, J. M. Brigham, W. Thome, J. St. Clair, R. Farrell, J. M. Shera, R. Warnock, W. J. Courtney, W. J. Ralph, J. Bridge-water, T. U. Wells, T. Peacock, J. W. Tibbs, Jas. Muir, J. McK. Geddes, W. J. Rees, Professors Brown and Talbot-Tubbs, Dr. Inglis, and many others. The gathering was representative of every class in the community.

THE MAYOR'S SPEECH.

The Mayor, taking his place on the dais, said: To-day should be, and I think we may take it for granted that it is, a "red-letter" day in the history of Ponsonby, for we are now assembled for the purpose of opening the Leys Institute, as a Free Public Library and Mechanics' Institute, within a building which is not only a credit to the architect who designed it, but also a great adornment to the district. Viewed from any point, from the other side of the water or from any portion of the harbour, the building stands out in great prominence, and the view obtained from the upstairs windows is both beautiful and extensive. The site has been admirably chosen, as being within the radius of the penny sections of our tramway system, thousands of persons will be able to avail themselves of the great privilege afforded them of using what will ultimately be one of the best libraries and reading-rooms in the colony. The Leys Institute was founded under a bequest of the late Mr. W. Leys, who formerly occupied the position of chairman of the Ponsonby School Committee, who died on the 5th October, 1899, and who, during his life, took a great interest in the education and training of the young and the betterment of the people. The late Mr. Leys, by his energy and devotion to his business, accumulated a considerable amount of property, the value of which is steadily increasing, all of which will ultimately be owned by the City as an endowment for this institution. Auckland has been exceptionally fortunate in having had many philanthropists, who have made valuable bequests to the citizens for charitable and other purposes, and the bequest of the late Mr. Wm. Leys is not by any means the least of them. His will, after making provision for his family, directs that the surplus income should be accumulated until the amount so accrued should, in the opinion of the trustees, be sufficient to build a brick building at a cost of not less than £2000, and equip the same for the purpose of an institute, in the nature of a Free Library and Mechanics' Institute in the Ponsonby district,

to be called the Leys Institute, and that when completed the building and contents should be conveyed to the Mayor and Councillors of Auckland, to hold in trust for the citizens, and that if funds were available, after the payment of other charges on the estate, the trustees should pay to the City Council the sum of £100 per annum, towards the support of the Institute, and that after all the parties benefited by the will are deceased, the whole of the property and securities comprised in the estate shall be conveyed to the Corporation of Auckland for ever, for the purpose of supporting the Leys Institute. The trustees were directed to frame regulations for the management of the institution, subject to the stipulation that no religious lectures or discussions should be allowed. During last year a number of Ponsonby residents expressed a desire to have a free library and reading-room erected in Ponsonby. Upon this being made known to the Library Committee of the Auckland City Council, a deputation from that committee waited upon the trustees for the purpose of ascertaining what prospects there were of the Leys Institute being brought into existence at an early period. It was then ascertained that at the rate of accumulation ten years at least must expire before effect could be given to the intentions of the testator, but, in order that no time should be lost, Mr. T. W. Leys, one of the trustees, with great generosity offered to contribute one-half the cost of erecting and equipping of the building, provided that the Corporation would provide a suitable site. I need hardly say that this offer was gladly accepted by the Corporation and the trustees, the result being that the present site was acquired at a cost of £850. Mr. R. M. Watt was entrusted with the preparation of the plans, the lowest tender, that of Messrs. J. W. Jones and Sons, for £2582, with certain modifications, was accepted. The total cost of the building, furnishings, and equipment will be about £3000, exclusive of the library. Of this sum Mr. T. W. Leys has contributed £1500. The funds in the hands of the trustees only amounting to £1200, Mr. T. W. Leys has advanced to the trustees £300 to enable them to fulfil their part of the bargain, so that the total cost of land, building, and equipment, exclusive of the library, is about £3850. The library, presented by Mr. T. W. Leys comprises 4100 books, including the latest editions of the Encyclopaedia Britannica (35 volumes), Chambers' Encyclopaedia (10 volumes), The Century Dictionary, Watts' Chemistry (four volumes), and many other standard reference works, also a representative selection of classical literature, history, biography, travels, science, law, medicine, theology, poetry, drama, and fiction. There are in addition 1018 volumes consisting of duplicates drawn from the Auckland Free Library, which include a valuable collection of standard historical and technical books, so that the Institute opens with a library of 5118 volumes, to which additions will be made from time to time. The number of books in the Auckland Free Public Library when it was opened by the Mayor in 1880 was 5300 volumes, the Leys Institute, therefore, opens with 118 more books than the Auckland Free Library had upon the day of its opening. Mr. T. W. Leys has spent a large amount of money and time upon the purchase and selection of books which will be useful to students. The library contains the very latest editions of literary, scientific and technical works. In some of the classes it will be found that the books are later and more comprehensive than those in the City Library. In the leading department, while there is a full representation of all the old standard novelists and the best writers of current fiction, other departments of literature have not been

neglected. The 44 volumes of the "Story of the Nation" series, perhaps the best collection of works ever published upon the history of the nations of the world for popular circulation and general information, which will be found on the shelves of this branch, is specially worthy of note. The lending library also includes many recent books on travel and biography. Before passing to a description of the building, I would like to say that had it not been for the generosity of Mr. T. W. Leys in coming to the rescue, the establishment of the Leys Institute would not be the established fact that it is to-day, and to him I think the public owe a deep debt of gratitude. It is not often that we find our citizens contributing so generously as Mr. T. W. Leys has done during their lifetime, and as a member of the Library Committee I take this opportunity of thanking him for the very great interest he has always taken in the work of the Auckland Free Library. As Mayor of the city, and on behalf of the citizens of Auckland, I tender to him the thanks of the city for his noble and generous gift. The reading room, as at present arranged, has seating accommodation for 60 readers, and the newspaper and magazine room for 22, so that with the accommodation in the chess-room for 50 players, the institution has seating accommodation for 122, which could be increased without overcrowding. The hall will be available free for classes, clubs and societies formed in terms of the general rules regulating the formation of such associations in connection with the institute. It may also be lent free, or at a reduced rate, for any other purpose approved by the Committee of Management subject to the condition that no religious lectures or discussion shall be allowed within the institute, nor shall any entertainment be permitted which causes annoyance or disturbance to the occupants of the reading or chess rooms. The ordinary charge for the hire of the hall for meetings, lectures or classes, subject to these conditions, shall be fixed by the Committee of Management. The Committee of Management consists of nine members, two of whom shall be trustees of the late Mr. Wm. Leys and three shall be elected by members of the institute. The other four are nominated by the City Council, the first members chosen being Councillors Parr, Etrican, Bagnall and Brown. The three elective members are to be chosen at a meeting of the subscribers held in the first week of May. The librarian is prepared to take the names of subscribers to the lending library at once. The trustees will pay to the Council £100 a year for the maintenance of the institution, which more than defrays the librarian's salary. It is believed that with this aid the establishment being started entirely free from debt, the revenue arising from the subscribers and hall will render the institution entirely self-supporting. But as it is being conveyed absolutely to the Corporation, and thus becomes a branch of the Auckland Free Public Library, governed under the provisions of the Municipal Corporations Act, it is entitled to share in the funds arising from the library rate. The whole of the estate of the late Mr. Wm. Leys ultimately becomes an endowment for this institution, and it will be a very valuable one indeed.

THE LIFE OF THE FOUNDER.

Mr. T. W. Leys, in handing the Mayor a silver master-key of the building, said: I think you will understand that the occasion which has called us together is one that stirs within me a deep emotion. It recalls many memories of a brother who was playmate, school-fellow, companion, and friend for more than 40 years. His early struggles for success, his ideals in life, his intellectual aspirations, religious doubts, his broad sympathies for his fellow-men, and especially for those who, like himself, were leading laborious lives, his simple-hearted desire to make his life of service to the community in which he lived—these are the impressions that remain clearest in my mind. It is fitting, and will, I believe, be agreeable to you if I say something about the founder of this institution and the circumstances out of which it was evolved. Mr. William Leys arrived in Auckland in 1853, being then only 31 years of age. For a short time he went to school in Newton, and was then apprenticed to the trade of book-binder. At 20 he entered into business on his own account, and continued to follow his trade until two years before his death, which took place on October 5, 1899, at the early age of 47. His business was never a large one, consisting mainly of the work done with his own hands; but he lived very carefully, and invested his savings judiciously. His life was one of self-denial, but he had an open heart and hand for those in need. I know that almost the first £100 he saved was given to a relative who had brought himself into difficulties through his own reckless wastefulness, and the gift was made so unostentatiously that it was months before I discovered what he had done. For 26 years, and until within three months of the date of his death, he never left the provincial district of Auckland—a life unostentatious in its way, with comparatively few pleasures, undistinguished perhaps, but still the life imposed by circumstances upon the great majority of mankind. For him, however, the daily task, the affairs of the land in which he lived, were full of interest. His political and religious opinions were always liberal, and he was for some time chairman of the Auckland Liberal Association. He was as energetic a champion of the gospel of work as Carlyle, but he also saw the difficulties under which the masses of the people labour, and his sympathies were especially drawn out towards those who find themselves worsted by time and misfortune in the battle of life, struggling bravely but ineffectively with waning powers to preserve their independence. It was this feeling that induced him to commence a vigorous agitation in favour of the Old Age Pensions, and I believe that the lecture which he delivered in 1893 and subsequently circulated broadcast throughout the country, had considerable influence in securing the adoption of the Old Age Pensions Act in New Zealand. In the course of this address he reviewed the system adopted in Germany, and the schemes propounded by Mr. Chamberlain and Sir Robert Stout for granting pensions in consideration of certain premiums paid in early life by the recipients, and he showed the impracticability of these proposals. The basis he laid down for the payment of pensions was that subsequently embodied in the Old Age Pensions Act of

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