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# The National Home Reading Union 1889-1930

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## The National Home Reading Union

Robert Snape

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Popular reading engendered curiosity and debate throughout the Victorian era. Through its capacity both to teach and to subvert, reading had a complex symbolism that was determined by the dynamics of what was read by whom and for what purpose, and several social institutions thus took an active interest in its development and indeed in its control.<sup>1</sup> An impulse to influence what people read permeated the whole of the nineteenth century, and as Richard Altick has shown,<sup>2</sup> the parameters of reading were formed through modes of intervention as varied as the censorship of political reading at the beginning of the century, the Evangelical encouragement of reading as moral instruction and rational recreation, and the utilitarian promotion of reading for technical instruction and self-advancement.<sup>3</sup> The skill of reading was not always, of course, applied within an intended context and by the 1840s the popularity of sensational and demoralising literature produced the paradox that reading itself became a part of the social problem of leisure it had been intended to resolve, thus heightening its profile and inducing reforming initiatives such as publishing ventures, the provision of libraries and reading rooms and increased elementary education.<sup>4</sup>

Following the publication of Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*<sup>5</sup> in 1869 and the Education Act of 1870, the focus of the debate on reading shifted from the political and moral concerns of earlier decades towards the cultural aspects of reading. This was particularly so from around 1880, as the realignment of the expanded reading public and increased commercialisation accentuated the gap between literary culture and popular reading.<sup>6</sup> The ambiguity of reading was reflected in differing reactions to the emergence of a mass reading public, which was interpreted by some critics<sup>7</sup> not as a sign of progress but of decline in which the idealised concepts of culture and reading of Arnold and Ruskin were becoming submerged under a new mass culture of comics, cheap newspapers and entertaining magazines. Elementary education had produced a generation of working-class readers who, having been taught how to read in a technical sense but not how to read progressively or systematically, overwhelmingly preferred the new journalism of *TitBits* and *Pearson's Weekly* to literary fiction or educational books, and as a number of late-nineteenth century surveys of popular reading revealed, Arnoldian ideals of culture were far from being socially

realised.<sup>8</sup> There was, too, the fear that the more graphic novels and comics had a harmful influence on the behaviour of young women and boys, sometimes to the point of actively encouraging crime.<sup>9</sup> Such pessimism did not, however, completely displace the characteristic Victorian confidence in the power of universal literacy and cheaper books to bring about social and cultural homogeneity, and the instruction and didacticism that had typified intervention in reading in the mid-century were moderated through a realisation that persuasion and guidance in how to read systematically might prove to be a more successful method. Thomas Wright<sup>10</sup> was one of a number of contemporary critics to attribute a want of 'culture' amongst the working classes to a lack of 'judicious guidance' in reading, but although there was a growing awareness of the desirability of such guidance - both Ruskin<sup>11</sup> and Frederic Harrison<sup>12</sup> had published advice on choosing what and how to read - theoretical treatises were of little use to the new working-class reader. Not only was the gulf between the *Illustrated Police News* and Dante too wide to contemplate without intermediary assistance, but the chances of a relatively uneducated reader coming into contact with published guides such as these were slender. The self-educated reader was, as David Vincent suggests, a myth, for no working person could make progress solely on a basis of elementary education and personal unaided effort.<sup>13</sup> If Literature and literary culture were to be effective in the campaign to promote self-cultivation, it would be necessary not only to direct the new readers of the elementary schools towards canonical texts but to teach them how to read independently and reflectively and to induce a process of self-improvement based on a recognition of externally prescribed standards. As the concerns about reading became more acute, the urgency of providing practical advice on choosing what to read was increasingly voiced,<sup>14</sup> but the problem remained, as a contemporary observer noted,<sup>15</sup> that significant progress would be made only if some method of collective communication with readers could be devised. The question thus arose of how to connect with working-class readers in a communal context. Church organisations, Sunday schools and social clubs offered a forum in which reading practice could be influenced through direct contact with readers, but their scope was somewhat limited. However, public libraries and adult education offered possible routes to a wider public.

The debate on popular reading was of immediate practical relevance to public libraries. Since their introduction in 1850, public libraries had been criticised for their extensive provision of recreational reading. Their image as storehouses of popular novels<sup>16</sup> was resented by librarians because it represented a distortion of their concept of libraries as essentially educational institutions

and also undermined their aspirations to professional status. It is important to note, however, that it was not simply the provision of fiction *per se* that was questioned – Mudie had long since set a pattern of supplying his middle-class clients with novels - but the predominance of the reading of non-literary fiction of little educational or moral content by working-class and female borrowers who were considered susceptible to its influence.<sup>17</sup> There were also criticisms of fiction ‘on the rates’ from middle-class ratepayers who objected to funding the recreational reading of working-class library users.<sup>18</sup> Libraries were thus obliged to be seen to take action to encourage borrowers to read books other than popular novels, and consequently introduced public lectures on bibliographic and technical subjects in order to stimulate educational reading. As the demand for popular fiction continued to rise, library lectures began to deal with the subject of reading itself.<sup>19</sup> In Birmingham, for example, a thematic series of talks offered guidance in choosing books that would create a ‘taste and desire for reading’.<sup>20</sup> Nottingham library also provided half-hour talks about books,<sup>21</sup> though such lectures were, on the whole, unsuccessful in reducing the demand for fiction. Although adult education seemingly offered a more controlled environment in which to encourage independent and reflective reading, it had generally failed to engage or retain the manual workers for whom it was intended, and what little provision was available tended to be confined to scientific and technical subjects. A more liberalising curriculum was introduced through university extension schemes which provided structured courses underpinned by recommended reading, and, from the 1870s, extension lectures were organised in a number of provincial towns. Being heavily influenced by Arnold’s views on education, university extension placed a high importance on systematic guided reading which led to the establishment of associated reading schemes, notably the Oxford Home Reading Circle and some regional circles. However, extension’s predominantly middle-class appeal, itself reinforced by the fact that its level of education was too advanced for the bulk of the reading population, limited its potential to promote guided reading across the social spectrum.<sup>22</sup>

#### *Chautauqua and the founding of the National Home Reading Union*

The fragmentary progress in establishing a popular framework of adult education and guided reading in England was contrasted by the success in North America of the Chautauqua movement.<sup>23</sup> Founded in 1871 as a camp meeting of the Methodist Episcopal Church at Lake Chautauqua in New York State, this evolved into the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Reading Circle comprising over 100,000 workmen, farmers, teachers and housewives who read prescribed

books over a four-year course. The aim of the circle, which was widely imitated throughout North America,<sup>24</sup> was to nurture the habit of daily reading through a formalised winter programme, its emphasis on system and method being underpinned by lists of prescribed reading, local discussion groups and an annual summer camp with classes and lectures. Chautauqua exercised a significant impact on the thinking of the British educational establishment and having visited it, HM Inspector of Schools Joshua Fitch urged that reading circles should become an integral element in all university extension courses in order to encourage the reading of the 'best books'.<sup>25</sup> The most ardent British admirer of Chautauqua was John Brown Paton, the Principal of the Congregational Institute in Nottingham, who learnt of the scheme through Bishop Vincent, its co-founder. Paton was one of the most influential Congregationalists of the late-Victorian period and was actively involved in various projects to improve the social and moral conditions of working people. Being particularly interested in the moral welfare of young people, he was aware of their patterns of reading and what he perceived as the corrupting influence of cheap literature, and had founded the Recreative Evening Schools Association to encourage progressive reading amongst young adults.<sup>26</sup> Chautauqua offered an inspirational example of the large-scale programme of popular education Paton wished to introduce in Great Britain, and, with the support of John Percival, the Headmaster of Rugby School, and the parliamentary educational reformer A.H.D. Acland, he formulated a system of home reading circles, modelled on Chautauqua, that would provide 'some guiding hand to show folk what to read' and would be primarily for uneducated working people and for young adults who had recently left school.<sup>27</sup> His anticipation that the universities would assist in the development of the scheme was, however, thwarted, as they were prepared to do so only if it remained exclusively associated with their own extension programmes.<sup>28</sup> Adamant that his new scheme should embrace the Chautauqua principle of inclusiveness, Paton refused to be limited to the middle-class constituency of the universities and subsequently founded the National Home Reading Union as an autonomous organisation in April 1889. This event was reported in the *Times*<sup>29</sup> which noted that the Union would prepare courses of reading for different classes of people, but especially artisans and young people.

The aims of the National Home Reading Union were to guide readers of all ages in the choice of books, to unite them as members of a reading guild and to group them, where possible, in circles for mutual help and interest; it would, on the one hand, 'check the spread of pernicious literature among the young', and on the other, 'remedy the waste of energy and lack of purpose so often

found among those who have time and opportunity for a considerable amount of reading'.<sup>30</sup> The Union would not simply encourage reading but would develop it within a systematic framework, and would educate readers in the practice of reading reflectively and to personal advantage; Paton devised the phrase 'Associative Reading' to describe the process through which social reading in the context of a circle would involve each member in a discussion of the Union's prescribed books and thus aid a more complete understanding of the subject. Although primarily for relatively uneducated readers, the Union also hoped to appeal to the established reader; not only would it teach those who could not yet be properly classified as readers what and how to read, but it would also make reading more profitable to existing readers, for as it noted:

'Many who are deeply sensible of the advantages of reading miss the best fruits of their labour owing to want of guidance. They do not read the books most suitable for their purpose; their eyes are not opened to the special qualities or virtues of the books they read; they have not the habit of codifying their knowledge ... In a word, the Union endeavours to persuade men and women, young and old, to graduate to the University of Books'.<sup>31</sup>

The Union had influential allies in Fitch and John Churton Collins and in Percival, who became its chairman. Robert Yerburch, formerly secretary to Paton's Recreative Evening Schools Association, was vice-chairman and Alex Hill, the Master of Downing College, was appointed chairman of the Executive Council and was thus responsible for the selection of subjects to be studied and the compilation of the reading lists.

The National Home Reading Union was in essence a British replication of Chautauqua. Its basic unit of activity was the local reading circle, which had a minimum of five members and chose which of the seasonal courses set by the Union it was to follow. Circles were encouraged to meet fortnightly or monthly at each others' houses, or in a public library or schoolroom, and to work under a voluntary leader who would direct the meeting, lead discussions of the chosen books, collect subscription fees and distribute copies of the Union's monthly magazines. As a systematic approach was of the utmost importance, members were to read the same book at the same time, and as the Union frequently pointed out, a number of people doing all sorts of reading according to individual choice did not constitute a circle.<sup>32</sup> Three courses were offered: a General Course (annual subscription three shillings), an Artisan's Course (subscription one shilling and sixpence) and a Young People's Course (subscription one shilling). The prescribed reading was challenging,

and members were advised not to skip what at first appeared difficult. The General Course was for those 'whose leisure is limited, who do not want to specialise, whose need is for books dealing with subjects of common interest in broad general outlines'; it normally included a standard novel, a play (usually Shakespeare) and a selection of books on science, history, social science and travel. Its subjects in the first reading season were English literature, *The Iliad*, English history, inorganic nature and political science, while the Artisan's list featured Carlyle's *Past and Present*, Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* and several biographies of working men.<sup>33</sup> For each course the Union published a magazine with commentaries on the set books and related questions to which members were invited to prepare short essay answers to be read aloud and discussed at circle meetings.

Foreseeing potential difficulties in obtaining the listed books, the Union had them published, in a colour-coded binding for each course, for direct sale to circles, though the residue of unsold books forced the abandonment of this practice. A more sustainable method was introduced with the Home Reading Book Union. Through this, circles notified the books they wished either to lend or to borrow to the Book Union librarian who then circulated details, thus enabling circles to borrow books at a fee of 2d per book per month, payable to the lending circle. A further imitation of the Chautauqua scheme was the award of a certificate to readers who completed a course of reading, a process that necessitated the completion of individual memoranda sheets which were filed at the Union's headquarters.

The Chautauqua circle consolidated its collegiate ethos through a summer school which brought together its dispersed members for a programme of lectures, classes and practical lessons, and this too was adopted by the Union in the form of an annual summer assembly. As if to emphasise its distinctiveness from the university schemes, the National Home Reading Union was launched with an assembly in Blackpool in July 1889, a highly symbolic venue purposely chosen with a view to the Union's intended appeal to working-class readers. The scene of this first assembly was described by Churton Collins as a spectacle of visitors gazing in wonder at theatres and concert-halls placarded with names they had never seen anywhere but on the title pages of books and in the columns of literary reviews.<sup>34</sup> How many of Blackpool's holiday-makers were familiar with the columns of these journals remains a matter for speculation, for although Churton Collins claimed that some lectures were attended by over 500 people, Alex Hill later conceded that Blackpool had been an "infelicitous" choice, with miners and mill-hands being conspicuous through their absence.<sup>35</sup>

### *Reading Circles*

Union reading circles were established throughout England and in parts of Scotland and Wales, 6,343 members being enrolled in the first year. There was no particular geographical pattern of development, although it was in the main an urban institution. The Union attributed this to 'rustic apathy, poverty, outdoor interests, the exhaustion of agricultural work and the necessarily large distances between readers',<sup>36</sup> though an additional factor may have been the absence in country areas of as strong a tradition of book ownership and reading as in towns.<sup>37</sup> Doubtless these factors, together with the scarcity of partner agencies, tended to make Union activity more difficult to initiate in country areas, but successful rural circles did exist, and the very conditions of social isolation and the lack of competing attractions added to the appeal of communal reading as a sociable leisure pursuit. There are a number of examples of Union circle activity in remote locations such as those in the hamlet of Knowle Green in Lancashire and in the Devonshire village of Coombe Martin, a parish of only 1,500 people, which had twelve members who met fortnightly in each others' houses. Unlike organisations such as church groups or trade union classes, the Union was genuinely open to everyone, as any group, organisation or individual was free to initiate a circle, irrespective of religion, social class or political creed. Subsequently Union activity was widely, if unevenly, dispersed across the social spectrum. Circles assumed a variety of forms, sometimes simply as a group of friends or, as suggested by the Union, founded by churches, clubs, co-operative societies, labour unions, Sunday Schools, Adult Classes and Pleasant Sunday Afternoon associations.<sup>38</sup>

The National Home Reading Union tended to be most successful in circumstances that were favourable to its incorporation and development within existing reading contexts. The Victorian custom of family reading, for example, readily accommodated the Union model of a reading circle, and reading aloud was also a common circle practice. Reading aloud not only emphasised the sharing of the reading experience but it also had connotations with respectable reading; it was not uncommon, for instance, for Victorian parents to insist that their children read aloud in order to monitor what they were reading.<sup>39</sup> In the communal context of a circle, plays clearly lent themselves to reading aloud, and part-reading Shakespeare was a popular circle activity. The fact that several Union circles voluntarily adopted the practice of reading aloud suggests that it contributed to members' enjoyment, and one circle in an evening continuation school in a working-class district of

London avoided dissolution only when its members' interest was revived through involving them in reading the parts of the characters of *The Merchant of Venice*.<sup>40</sup> Reading aloud also gave scope for inventive interpretation where it allowed readers to interact with the text. An interesting example of this is found in a circle of domestic servants in which the girls dramatised a prose text, acted the parts of the characters and changed indirect narration to direct.<sup>41</sup> The practice of reading aloud also facilitated the Victorian tradition of passive listening,<sup>42</sup> a method employed in the Union circle formed by St. Mary's Embroidery School Workshop in Wantage in which the girls listened to a reader as they worked.<sup>43</sup> The expansion of the Union was further aided through the affiliation of numerous local literary societies to whom the systematic approach of the Union offered a more structured regime. In some cases Union circles were founded upon existing circles, such as Glasgow's Eclectic Reading Club whose own circle pre-dated the Union but joined to 'give more definition to our reading'.<sup>44</sup>

As records of the reactions of Union members to the books they read are extremely rare, it is difficult to arrive at a sense of the impact of the Union on individual readers. However, its promotion of systematic and progressive reading can to some extent be evaluated through the reports of circle activities published in its magazines. These represent only a small proportion of the total number of circles and leave several questions unanswered as they rarely relate the experiences of circles that failed to take root or declined. Nevertheless, they provide evidence of the places in which reading took place, the extent to which systematic reading was undertaken, the purposes and benefits of circles as perceived by readers and circle leaders and the socio-economic context of National Home Reading Union activity. They also provide an indication of the success of the Union in achieving its stated objective of encouraging reading amongst working-class and young adult readers. Circles differed markedly in their size and social composition and to a lesser degree in the way in which they were conducted. Although intended primarily to fulfil an educational function, cordial relationships were essential to their success, a fact acknowledged in the Union's advice to use the first few meetings in getting to know each other. Several circles originated in readers' desires to advance their own knowledge, while others flourished as middle-class social gatherings. Some were of mixed gender and social standing, some were characterised by a denominational profile and several were women's circles. The following paragraphs offer some detailed analysis of National Home Reading Union Circle activity within specific social contexts.

### *Reading circles and social class*

While it welcomed anyone who wished to participate, the Union's primary aim was to recruit those who had only a basic level of education. Of all types of reader these were the most difficult to reach, and although the Union offered an Artisan's Course during its first reading season of 1889-90, which was widely promoted throughout the industrial north,<sup>45</sup> this failed to recruit a viable number and was replaced by a Special Course for middle-class readers wishing to pursue an advanced syllabus. Although there are isolated references to circles operating within trade union and co-operative contexts, these remain exceptional. The Union was clearly unable to underpin its strategic development through alliance with national working-class organisations in ways similar to that in which it was adopted by schools and church bodies. Despite this setback, circles of working-class readers were established in a variety of contexts such as workingmen's clubs and technical institutes.<sup>46</sup> Some were founded through readers' own initiatives, such as a circle in Leicester that comprised three leather trade workers, two clerks, a hatter, a 'working woman' and an engineer's model maker.<sup>47</sup> Another circle, formed in a midlands factory, met in dinner breaks to read its chosen books – which included *Alton Locke* – and to discuss related political and social topics,<sup>48</sup> but circle activity of this sort appears to have been short-lived. Despite the durable tradition of working-class collective reading, few references are found to working-class Union circles after 1900, suggesting that working-class readers either found the Union unappealing or discovered that it did not meet their expectations. The relative scarcity of appropriate communal reading arenas militated against the growth and expansion of working-class circles, but though such openings were not common they certainly existed, and other factors contributed to the Union's failure to become the association of working-class readers Paton had envisaged. In a period of increased political education and activity the non-political nature of the Union may have diminished its appeal to readers who joined in the expectation of something similar to a Clarion 'meet',<sup>49</sup> while those looking to the Union for formal instruction in technical or scientific topics would have been similarly disappointed. The demanding nature of the reading lists raised a further potential barrier. As a volunteer who had tried unsuccessfully to organise a circle of working-class men reported, it was difficult to ignite interest in what was perceived to be 'dry' reading.<sup>50</sup> A further disincentive was the traditional working-class suspicion of action recommended by middle-class activists. Circles which allowed working men to progress under their own terms stood a better chance of success than those which imposed the Union's method unremittingly, as occurred when the leader of a circle of

eleven farm workers allowed the men to choose Jeffries' *Open Air*, thus giving the circle meetings scope for the members to discuss topics familiar to them.<sup>51</sup> Overall, the Union's failure to engage the sustained interest of working-class readers was consistent with that of much middle-class intervention in working-class reading. As Jonathan Rose notes, while working-class self-culture and associative reading operated effectively through the channels of mutual improvement organisations so long as these were devised and operated by the working classes themselves, middle-class and philanthropic initiatives were more likely to be rejected.<sup>52</sup>

The Union's failure to appeal to working-class readers contrasted sharply with the successful formation of numerous circles of middle-class readers; indeed, one critic claimed that the Union was in essence a 'hobby of the leisured'.<sup>53</sup> The majority of published reports were from circles of an essentially middle-class composition that gathered in members' homes, usually in the afternoon, when meetings were integrated within existing social programmes. It was not uncommon, for example, for a home-based Union circle to be followed by afternoon tea or parlour games. Several factors combined to facilitate this tendency, particularly the established place of communal reading in middle-class family life and the availability of a room sufficiently large to accommodate upwards of a dozen people. Examples of such middle-class circles include one in Rotherham, composed mainly of girls who had left school, which met fortnightly on Thursday afternoons at members' houses; a circle of fifteen in Berkswell, which met monthly in members' houses between 4.00 p.m. and 6.00 p.m. when prints from portfolios of illustrative material hired from the Union were displayed on 'several' tables, and a Bath circle which also met in members' houses in a 'comfortable drawing room circle'.

The Union's middle-class appeal was further enhanced by the reputation of its prescribed lists of worthy books which offered a readily available and trustworthy menu of respectable and instructive reading. Despite the importance of their social aspects, most middle-class circles appear to have treated the reading programme seriously and some had an evident commitment to higher self-education, as was the case with a circle in Liverpool which included amongst its twenty members an Inspector of Schools and a Presbyterian minister and elected to study the works of Dante and to read aloud cantos from *Purgatorio* each evening.<sup>54</sup> However, a National Home Reading Union meeting could also be simply a vehicle for a social gathering, as can be seen in the example of the reunion, in a select café, of the five Southport circles in 1904, which featured speeches by the town's literati, glees, songs, recitals and games.<sup>55</sup> The social context of such circles effectively

excluded participation by working-class readers, and their conduct suggests that reading, both for serious study and for socialising, offered opportunities for social interaction and a vehicle for informal and genteel leisure association.

#### *Reading circles with denominational connections*

The role of evangelical religion in the development and promotion of reading and the Union's roots in Paton's Congregationalism enhanced the appeal of the National Home Reading Union within non-conformist communities. The growth of church-based circles was aided by the prominent status of reading within non-conformist denominations, the relaxation of puritan attitudes to recreational reading (which created a more liberal approach to fiction), and by the ease with which the Union's methods could be assimilated within existing recreational programmes of sewing circles, Pleasant Sunday Afternoons, rambling clubs and the like. In Nottingham, for example, a Union reading circle operated within the context of a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon class,<sup>56</sup> and in Haslingden a circle was formed in association with the local branch of the Boy's Onward Club and a Baptist Church.<sup>57</sup> Even if not attached to a formal programme, the Union offered a safe and useful form of recreation; the Albion Congregational Young Peoples' Association circle in Hull, for instance, was of mixed gender and reported a 'good social side' to its activity.<sup>58</sup> On a wider scale, the Union model was adopted by the Diocesan Reading Circles and by the Wesley Reading Guild. Sunday Schools clearly had an interest in the services of the Union, and the Birmingham Branch of the Midland Adult Sunday School Association recommended the formation of reading circles for all its 5,000 members,<sup>59</sup> though the subsequent activity, if indeed any, remains an unknown quantity.

The Union's associations with Congregationalism led to an unexpected and far-reaching development in outdoor recreation. In 1891 T. Arthur Leonard, a Congregationalist minister in Colne and a former student of Paton, organised a walking holiday for working men as a rational outdoor alternative to commercial holiday resorts.<sup>60</sup> Conscious of the failure of the summer assemblies to attract working-class holidaymakers, Paton adopted Leonard's more successful model as a means of bringing Union members together; the walking holiday of 1893 took place in the Lake District under the auspices of the National Home Reading Union, where the interest of the rambles was enhanced by field talks and evening discussions with a Union-sponsored lecturer. This loosely formed walking holidays organisation was consolidated into the Co-operative Holidays Association (CHA) which operated as a sub-group of the Union, its communication being conducted

through the Union's magazines until it commenced publication of its own journal, *Comradeship*, in 1908. The interests of the CHA members were served by the introduction of an Open Air Course, and several local branches of the CHA organised reading circles within their winter programmes of social activity.<sup>61</sup> Leonard promoted the Union at CHA meetings and encouraged the formation of CHA reading circles in Glasgow, Leeds, Oldham, Middleton and Burnley. The success of the relationship with the CHA owed much to the fact that both organisations appealed essentially to the same constituency, and for a period before the secession of the CHA in 1908, the automatic enrolment of all its members in the Union gave a substantial though artificial boost to the Union's membership. The CHA eventually took the place of the Union's summer assemblies, which had themselves long since abandoned Blackpool and its working-class holiday crowds for genteel inland resorts such as Ross-on-Wye and York.

#### *Reading circles in schools and public libraries*

Few institutions had a greater practical interest in systematic reading than schools. Literature was a relatively late addition to the school curriculum and the utilitarian emphasis on the mechanical skills of reading tended to exclude the cultivation of the imagination necessary to cultural awareness and had, as Frederic Harrison observed, produced a 'high-pressure Reading Machine'<sup>62</sup> that instilled neither the desire nor the ability to read progressively.<sup>63</sup> Methods of teaching English thus focused on grammar, syntax and learning by rote rather than on interpretation and reflection, and the poor standard of reading amongst young people who had left school was, as we have seen, a factor in Paton's founding the Union. The potential role of the Union in improving the teaching of reading was recognised by the Board of Education in its recommendation that the Union might help teachers not only to enhance children's appreciation of literature but also to inculcate the habit of reading beyond school age, and it encouraged schools to establish reading circles in co-operation with the Union.<sup>64</sup> In numerical terms this proved to be the most successful area of the Union's activities as the combined membership of school circles eventually exceeded the aggregate of the other sections. Various education authorities urged their schools to join the Union and by 1897 6,803 children were members of 287 school-based circles in London, Birmingham, Bolton, Bristol, Cardiff, Halifax, Keighley, Nottingham and Todmorden. By

1912 this had expanded to 400 school circles with an estimated 75,000 members, most of which operated under the London School Board. Participating schools often organised several circles for different standards of reader; one, for example, had a circle for 'average' girls who read Wordsworth's poems and *Little Nell*, and another for the higher advanced classes, who read Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome* and Cook's *Voyages*.<sup>65</sup> When fully developed, co-operation with the Union could raise the profile of books and reading throughout the school, by, for example, encouraging pupils to bring in objects related to the books, write accounts of their own home reading, draw illustrations of events in books, or memorise and enact narrative passages.<sup>66</sup> Reports from school circles suggest that teachers found them a useful aid to curriculum delivery and that children enjoyed them, although once again the structural limitations on working-class participation were exposed by the not infrequent resentment of children's reading by working-class parents and by the inability of poorer children to afford the listed books.<sup>67</sup>

Public libraries had for several decades experimented with methods of reducing the issues of novels; it had in fact been proposed at the Library Association's conference in 1879 that libraries should abandon the purchase of popular fiction altogether. However, the introduction of open access from 1893 onwards and the fear that this would encourage readers to borrow even more popular fiction effected a marked growth of interest in providing guidance to readers who, for the first time, could browse the shelves of lending departments. At a local level many libraries published their own magazines with thematic lists of recommended books, while at a national level the development of guidance and advice to library users was championed by Ernest Baker who devised a hierarchical method of fiction classification as a means of enabling borrowers to 'learn what are the best works' and published a definitive *Guide to the best fiction*.<sup>68</sup>

Despite their mutual interest in systematic and guided reading, collaboration between public libraries and the National Home Reading Union was slow to develop, although Norwich public library bought copies of the listed books required by the local branch of the Union as early as 1891.<sup>69</sup> Some libraries also sought the Union's assistance in presenting introductory lectures on books and reading, but it was not until the publication of a paper by Churton Collins<sup>70</sup> which suggested that much could be done to stimulate progressive reading through co-operation between libraries and the Union and an address to the Library Association in 1903 by Alex Hill<sup>71</sup> that co-operation assumed the form of library-sponsored circles. The first of these were established in Stepney that year, where five libraries offered Union courses on English Literature 1688-1879 and

on Ruskin as Art Teacher. Public library circles were also established in Colne, where meetings were held in the public library on Saturday evenings<sup>72</sup> and in Darwen where a library circle operated under the leadership of a member of the Congregationalist-dominated library committee. Other libraries too formed Home Reading Union circles, some of which were facilitated by new public library buildings incorporating lecture halls and meeting rooms expressly for this type of extension activity<sup>73</sup>, while at a less formal level of involvement, many libraries used the Union's lists to help readers choose useful books.

The precise number of library circles is unknown, though one estimate suggested that of a possible 600 libraries, 105 were associated with the Union, of which only five organised Union circles.<sup>74</sup> Some libraries, however, established independent circles based on the Union model.<sup>75</sup> Despite their shared objectives, the relationships between public libraries and the Union were never harmonious because librarians resented the Union's interference in what they considered their professional domain, a perception the Union's patronising tone did little to refute when it conveyed the impression that librarians themselves needed advice in the selection of books. The Library Association remained suspicious of the Union, approving the seemingly innocuous inclusion of a Union-sponsored magazine, the *Readers' Review*, in locally produced library magazines only after a prolonged delay. Ironically, what had the potential to become the most fruitful of the Union's co-operative enterprises was thwarted by professional insecurity and insensitive zealotry. Further barriers were the practical difficulties of obtaining speakers and circle leaders and the questionable legality of paying lecturer's fees through the library rate, both of which were primary causes of the cessation of the Stepney circles in 1911.

#### *Women's reading circles*

Women's reading was an area of special concern throughout the nineteenth century, and as Kate Flint shows, various methods were deployed to control and guide what women read.<sup>76</sup> Although increased leisure time and the ability to afford both new novels and the fees of the circulating libraries offered expanded reading opportunities to middle-class women, the dictates of respectability determined what women might read, and care had to be taken not to leave sensation novels or translations of French novels in the drawing room where daughters or servants might

come across them.<sup>77</sup> The National Home Reading Union was therefore particularly suited to assuaging anxieties about the reading of young women and domestic servants, and several Union circles fulfilled this function. One such comprised mothers, together with their daughters who had recently left school, who joined a circle 'to keep their mental life fresh and alive'.<sup>78</sup> Another circle (in Brighton) was composed entirely of domestic servants and led by their mistress.<sup>79</sup> Participation in a Union circle was also an effective method of preparing schoolgirls for the time when they would become responsible for choosing their own reading.<sup>80</sup> Even at the close of the nineteenth century many middle-class girls received at least a part of their education at home and once again the Union merged into contemporary practice where it was adopted as a vehicle for home-based informal education by women, especially those who wished to remain intellectually active after leaving school. An example is found in the case of a mother of four children, who, in order to be an 'intelligent companion' to them had joined a circle for mental stimulation and for the active involvement demanded by its discussions. Her remarks suggest that the Union fulfilled an acutely felt need for intellectual engagement, which for many women was perhaps never satisfied:

'I am determined to keep up the habit of studying something which requires an effort, lest I should find myself quite unable to read and think sensibly, as so many married women are. I find the reading of a good book helps...for I have to make a definite effort myself, which is not necessarily the case at a lecture'.<sup>81</sup>

Women thus saw the Union as a useful social arena in which they could participate in informal education, and those in rural areas, whose access to intelligent conversation was somewhat limited, particularly valued the Union's extension of educational opportunity. However, from the published reports, it seems that most women's circles were formed not expressly for the purpose of controlling reading nor for intellectual purposes, but as a rational and genteel form of domestic social activity. There were many such circles, (usually, though not always, middle-class in composition), and in some the social aspects of the meeting were valued at least as highly as the reading element. In contrast to closed circles of middle-class women there were occasional examples of socially mixed circles. One such, in Barton-under-Needwood in Staffordshire, was led by a schoolmistress and comprised three teachers, five domestic servants, a dressmaker, a postmistress and a number of clerks' daughters. Although the practice of reading was approached seriously – all members insisted on taking a Shakespeare course whenever one was offered – the

Union also provided a social forum that transcended the social and religious boundaries of the small community in which it operated, and as the leader noted:

'The National Home Reading Union is common meeting ground. It is not 'Parish Work'.

There is no *de haut en bas* about it. Girls who attend chapel are members, and what else could they join? There should be circles in every village, I am sure of it'.<sup>82</sup>

There is little evidence of participation in Union activities by working-class women other than the involvement of domestic servants and schoolgirls referred to above. It might have been expected, given the predominantly female readership of public library fiction, that the library profession would have been more active in encouraging women's reading circles, but attitudes to women's reading were by no means uniform. Some librarians and commentators were contemptuously dismissive of the recreational nature of women's public library borrowing – one newspaper went so far as to remind its female readers that novel reading must not interrupt their domestic duties<sup>83</sup> – but this was balanced by a more liberal recognition of the value of escapist reading to women who spent most of their lives in industrial and domestic drudgery. This view was perhaps not so much altruistic as realistic in its acknowledgement that women living in such conditions were simply not in a position to devote time and energy to a course of improving reading. James Duff Brown appreciated this and understood why women enjoyed the novels of Rosa Carey, Emma Worboise and other female authors who wrote novels of every-day life for women readers.<sup>84</sup> The domestic barriers between the working-class housewife and reading were also cited by 'Working Woman' as an explanation of the reluctance of young female library users to progress to George Eliot and Charlotte Bronte,<sup>85</sup> and it seems reasonable to surmise that the social conditions of home and the workplace that acted as a disincentive to progressive library reading must also have militated against participation in the National Home Reading Union.

### *Networking the Union*

The Union was most effective where it worked collaboratively with agencies sharing similar aims and values. The rationale of the Union was founded on voluntarism and its success in any location required active zealots to promote its cause and provide circle leadership. Crucially, in Bolton, this was available in abundance. An initial attempt to found a Union circle in Bolton in 1891 failed after only six weeks, though in 1894 a second attempt, through a *conversazione* at the Wesleyan Sunday School in Edgworth, resulted, as the *Bolton Journal*<sup>86</sup> reported, in the Union

taking a firm hold with a General Course Circle of 13 members, a circle of unspecified numbers, a girls' circle, two circles of day school children and a circle of 70 members taking the Young People's course in connection with the Lad's Club. The General Course circle had read *Utopia*, Spencer's *Man versus the State*, Parrott's *Citizen Ruler*, Kingsley's *Alton Locke*, Thomas Elwood's *Life*, Shakespeare's *King John* and Carlye's *Hero worship*; the circle of the higher standard of girls had read Gardiner's *History*, Mrs. Fawcett's *Lives of eminent women*, Kingsley's *Westward Ho*, Clarkson's *Life*, *The Merchant of Venice* and several other 'small books'.

This exceptionally high level of activity was due to Annie Barlow, a mill-owner's daughter, who actively promoted the Union in the Bolton area over a period of 36 years, often using the family home in Edgworth as a venue for circle meetings and Union gatherings. Barlow was a major figure in the national management of the Union, being, variously, editor of the *Home Reading Union Magazine* and national co-ordinator of applications for subject portfolios. The strength of the Union in Bolton owed much to her enthusiasm, but of equal importance was the collaborative involvement of other institutions, notably evangelical religion and the Co-operative Holiday Association. Barlow was also a committee member of the CHA and was once acknowledged by Paton as the single most important link between the CHA and the Union. Her father, J. R. Barlow, was the chairman of Mawdsley Street Congregational Church Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Association, and for several years the Mawdsley Street Congregational School was the venue for the annual meetings of the Bolton branch of the CHA. Annie Barlow habitually attended these meetings both as a CHA member and as a representative of the Union. The meeting of 1899 was a particularly auspicious event at which the Barlows were joined by both Paton and Leonard, the latter reading a letter from Alex Hill in support of the CHA which also explained how the Union could assist members in preparing for their holidays by teaching related aspects of history, architecture and natural science.<sup>87</sup> The intensive inter-connections between the Union and other local institutions ensured it retained a high profile, and for many years the relationship in Bolton between the Union and the CHA was a reversal of the original arrangement, the CHA being the larger organisation and the Union operating as an extension of it. From approximately 1915 onwards the Union re-established itself as an autonomous body under the guidance of Annie Barlow, and continued to hold meetings and summer fetes at the Barlow family home. It had over a hundred members in 1919 and remained as one of the last active branches until the demise of the Union in 1930.

*The rise and decline of the National Home Reading Union.*

If the Union did not become the force for change foreseen by its founders, neither was its impact negligible. By 1906 13,052 readers had joined and at the outbreak of the First World War the Union had branches in Barbados, India, New Zealand and other colonies and dominions and was firmly established in London schools. It would, moreover, be misleading to judge the impact of the Union solely in terms of registered members, for it influenced methods of teaching English, initiated the model of educational holiday that was eventually adopted by the Co-operative Holidays Association and, as one enthusiast noted, offered a valuable addition to urban social life.<sup>88</sup> The wave of enthusiasm that impelled the launch and development of the Union in the period before 1914 was noticeably weaker in the following years, during which there was a gradual decline until the forced conclusion of business in 1930. Paton's death in 1911 marked a significant point, depriving the Union not only of his charismatic and missionary driving force but also of his fund-raising acumen. Finance was an inherent weakness throughout the Union's existence, an unavoidable condition if fees were to remain affordable to working-class readers, and it was never possible to fund a major propaganda campaign. In essence the Union was a philanthropic undertaking which avoided bankruptcy only through financial aid from its promoters. At the close of the first year its overdraft was paid through donations of £500 from Yerburch, £300 from the Paton family and several smaller sums from, inter alia, Longmans, Macmillan and various City Companies. The philanthropic spirit of the late nineteenth century was essential to its concept and development and was reflected in the lengthy lists of donors published in the early annual reports. Paton not only gave money - not least £400 to launch the endowment fund of 1910 - but as Alex Hill recalled, whenever the need for financial assistance arose, (and it is clear this was frequently), Paton knew the man or City Company to whom to apply – philanthropy was his business.<sup>89</sup> Continual increases in operational costs exacerbated the Union's parlous financial condition, and in 1923 disaster was averted only through assistance from 'generous friends'.<sup>90</sup> However, at the close of the 1929 session, with only the Bolton branch remaining active due to the indefatigable Annie Barlow, philanthropic rescue was, for the first time in the Union's history, not forthcoming, and closure was inevitable.

The decline of the Union in the post-1918 period was hastened by developments in adult education. Although not exclusively an educational organisation, the Union's credibility was, particularly in the Victorian-Edwardian period, based upon its educational potential. The post-war

expansion of the WEA and the birth of the BBC eroded the need for an organisation such as the National Home Reading Union, especially one with a seasonal and non-accredited curriculum. The BBC effectively displaced the Union's educational role through its provision of booklists, broadcasts for the common reader and communal listening and discussion groups. It was not to the Union that the public library of the 1920s turned but again to the BBC, librarians' interest in establishing library-based discussion groups gathering momentum as they abandoned what little involvement they had in the Union.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, the decline of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Reading Circle in the same period occurred through substantially similar reasons of lack of finance, alternative avenues to learning and competition from new forms of entertainment.<sup>92</sup>

The third and perhaps most significant factor in the decline of the Union was the fundamental change in its social and cultural context. The Union was established at a time when Arnoldian concepts of culture informed the thinking of educators and librarians, and when the social importance of literary culture and the status of the novel as a symbol of morality and inspiration had not yet been displaced. On the other hand, the birth of the Union coincided with the beginning of a period of cultural confusion and contradiction, and while Paton's arousing metaphorical play upon the 'highlands of our noble literature where blows the free air of heaven to refresh and inspire the mind'<sup>93</sup> had served to animate circle leadership before the First World War, the sense of an urgency to transform working-class cultural awareness had lost much of its vitality by the 1920s. The war had a profound effect on the Union, partly through the forced disintegration of circles and restrictions on lighting, but more significantly through its subversion of the unquestioned belief in cultural authority and moral progress that had nurtured the Union before the war. The dynamism of Victorian reform that had been the Union's driving force, already diminished through Paton's death, was further weakened by mass culture, the changes in cultural perceptions heralded by modernism and the distancing of the serious writer from the common reader. The work of the Leavises is enlightening in this respect. At first glance, Queenie Leavis' *Fiction and the reading public*,<sup>94</sup> published in 1932, has many similarities with commentaries on popular reading published forty years previously, at around the time of the Union's inception. Both convey a sense of despair with popular taste in reading, an anger with commercialism's abandonment of cultural responsibility and a *de haut en bas* view of a public that had acquired the habit of reading while, in Leavis' expression, 'somehow failing to exercise any critical intelligence'.<sup>95</sup> The striking difference between

Leavis' analysis and its Victorian counterparts, however, was her resignation to this and the corresponding lack of an imperative to address or change the situation. Absent were the missionary vision, the philanthropic inspiration, the Victorian energy for reform and, notably, the optimistic confidence in the overarching power of literary culture and the English novel. On the contrary, all that could be done must 'take the form of resistance by an armed and conscious minority', firstly in sociological research of the history of the reading public and secondly in the teaching of English in the education system, though even this latter was within the context of a rearguard struggle against mass culture. Unlike Paton and the founders of the Union, the Leavises were obliged to countenance popular culture not only in its printed forms but in its new guises of radio, cinema and advertising. In an age of mass production, in which Literature had been marginalised, traditional culture was to be preserved by an educated elite, a "university public". There could hardly be a greater contrast with the National Home Reading Union's vision, which was not of a university public – Paton had rejected affiliation with university extension - but of a public university of books. For the Leavises, mass society and what had become a minority culture were mutually exclusive<sup>96</sup>, a view brought to its final conclusion in Eliot's argument that culture was for the minority and not to be shared by the many.<sup>97</sup> In this context, the idea of the National Home Reading Union had clearly become anachronistic.

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## ENDNOTES

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Abbreviations:

AR: National Home Reading Union *Annual Report*.

NHRU Magazine: National Home Reading Union *General Reader's Course Magazine*, unless otherwise indicated.

1. See Alberto Manguel, *A history of reading*, (London: Harper Collins, 1996), 213-223 for a further discussion of the symbolic reader.
2. Richard D. Altick, *The English common reader. A social history of the mass reading public 1800-1900*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).
3. See Stanley Harrison, *Poor men's guardians. A survey of the struggles for a democratic newspaper press, 1763-1973*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974) and J.M. Golby and A.W. Purdue, *The civilisation of the crowd. Popular culture in England 1750-1900*, (London: Batsford, 1984). Jonathan Rose's *The intellectual life of the British working classes*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), adopts an alternative approach in focusing on readers' responses to texts rather than on literary production.
4. Victor Neuburg, *Popular literature. A history and guide*, (London: Penguin, 1977), 217-233 and James Walvin, *Leisure and society 1830-1950*, (London: Longman, 1978), chapter 4.
5. Matthew Arnold, *Culture and anarchy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).
6. See David Reed, *The popular magazine in Britain and the United States 1880-1960*, (London: The British Library, 1997), chapter 4.
7. Examples include: A. Strahan, 'Bad literature for the young', *Contemporary Review*, vol. 26 (November 1875): 981-999; M. MacColl, 'Morality in fiction', *Contemporary Review*, vol. 60 (August 1891): 234-252; T.M. Hopkins, 'A protest against low works of fiction', *Westminster Review* 149 (January 1898): 99-102; J. Leigh Garrett 'What do the masses read?' *Economic Review* 14.2 (1904): 166-177.
8. See Edward G. Salmon, 'What the working classes read', *Nineteenth Century*, vol. 20 (1886):108-117 and Walter M. Gattie, 'What English people read', *Fortnightly Review*, (1889): 307-321.
9. Kate Flint, *The woman reader 1837-1914*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) and Patrick A. Dunae, 'Penny dreadfuls: late nineteenth-century boys' literature and crime', *Victorian Studies*, (Winter, 1979): 133-150.
10. Thomas Wright, 'On a possible popular culture', *Contemporary Review*, vol. 40 (1881): 25-44.
11. John Ruskin, *Sesame and lilies*, (Orpington: G. Allen, 1868).
12. Frederick Harrison, *The choice of books and other literary pieces*, (London: Macmillan, 1920), 1-93, (originally published 1886). Harrison had also delivered a lecture on the benefits of guided home reading in Manchester in 1875, see *Manchester Guardian* 25 March 1875.

13. For further detail on the theme of mutual assistance in developing reading and learning see David Vincent, *Literacy and popular culture: England 1750-1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 258-267.
14. See Altick, *English common reader*, 370-376; Flint, *Woman reader*, 50-52.
15. Salmon, 'What the working classes read'.
16. Robert Snape, *Leisure and the rise of the public library*, (London: Library Association Publishing, 1995). The debate on public library fiction, which became known as the Great Fiction Question, was in essence not whether libraries should provide fiction but about what type of fiction, the consensual view being that literary fiction should be promoted while popular fiction should be kept to a minimum.
17. See Guinevere L. Griest, *Mudie's circulating library and the Victorian novel*, (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1970), 137-140, for a brief account of the 'Young Girl' standard, which in effect obliged authors to omit anything that would be unsuitable for family reading aloud if they wished to be accepted by the circulating libraries.
18. An outstanding example is M. D. O'Brien, 'Free libraries' in T. Mackay, (ed.), *A plea for liberty: an argument against socialism and socialistic legislation*, (London: Murray, 1891), 329-49.
19. R. Haxby, 'The history, organization, and educational value of municipal library lectures', *Library Association Record*, (1911): 123-132.
20. 'President's Address to the Library Association', *Library Chronicle* 4 (1887):129-135.
21. Thomas Kelly, *A history of public libraries in Great Britain, 1845-1975*, (London: Library Association, 2nd ed., 1977), 201. Despite assertions that library lectures created a demand for educational reading in libraries, the evidence suggested that this was transient; see Peter Cowell, 'Experientia docet; or, thoughts and experiences of a public librarian', *Library Chronicle*, (1888):157-166.
22. L. Goldman, *Dons and workers. Oxford and adult education since 1850*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
23. A detailed account of the rise and decline of the Chautauqua movement is in Theodore Morrison, *Chautauqua: a centre for education, religion and the arts in America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).
24. In addition to Chautauqua, which was the largest reading circle, there were several smaller Catholic reading circles and numerous unaffiliated local groups often not church-related; see Thomas F. O'Connor, 'American Catholic reading circles 1886-1909', *Libraries and Culture* 26.2 (Spring, 1991): 334-347.
25. J.G. Fitch, 'The Chautauqua Reading Circle', *Nineteenth Century*, vol. 24 (October, 1888): 487-500; for a further contemporary account, see J.H. Vincent, 'Chautauqua, a popular university', *Contemporary Review*, (May 1887)
26. See John Lewis Paton, *John Brown Paton: a biography*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1914), 270-297 and Freeman Wills, 'Recreative Evening Schools', *Nineteenth Century*, vol. 20 (July, 1886): 130-138. The Recreative Evening Schools Association was adopted by the London Board of Education, a body that later fostered the development of National Home Reading Union circles in London elementary schools.
27. George Radford, *The faculty of reading. The coming of age of the National Home Reading Union*, (Cambridge: 1910), 13.
28. John Churton Collins, 'The National Home Reading Union and its prospects', *Contemporary Review*, (August, 1890): 193-211.

29. *Times* 16 April 1889. The Union was launched at the Earl of Aberdeen's London residency; amongst those present were Temple, Percival, Fitch, Dean Farrar, George Howell M.P., T.E. Heller of the National Union of Teachers and B. Jones of the Co-operative Wholesale Society.
30. *AR* 1891-92.
31. *AR* 1896-97.
32. *NHRU Magazine* 1:3 (December, 1889).
33. *NHRU Magazine* 3:1 (October, 1891).
34. Collins, 'The National Home Reading Union and its prospects'.
35. Alex Hill, quoted in W. Temple, *Life of Bishop Percival*, (London: Macmillan, 1921).
36. *AR* 1909-10.
37. A distinction observed in David Vincent, *Bread, knowledge and freedom: a study of nineteenth century working class autobiography*, (London: Methuen, 1981) 109-113 and 131.
38. *AR* 1896-97.
39. See Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, *A history of reading in the west*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 321-322.
40. Radford, *The faculty of reading*, 58-63.
41. *AR* 1913-14.
42. See C. Plumptre, 'On the formation of public reading societies as a recreation for the working class', *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science*, 1861. There were several precedents for this mode of activity, not least the Public Reading Society formed in 1859 to provide communal readings for the entertainment and instruction of working - class people.
43. *NHRU Magazine*, 17:2 (October, 1905). Although the titles of what was read are not recorded, the report noted that lighter books had been chosen as 'very stiff' books were not compatible with working.
44. *NHRU Magazine* 18:9 (May, 1910).
45. George Howell, Liberal MP and trade unions supporter campaigned on behalf of the Union in industrial areas.
46. A circle had been established in Salford Technical School by 1892; *NHRU Magazine*, 4:1 (October, 1892).
47. *NHRU Magazine* 4:5 (February, 1893).
48. National Home Reading Union, *Notes, reports and announcements*, 1894; Vincent, *Literacy and popular culture*, 259, cites an example of miners discussing literature in work breaks underground.
49. Harry Moncrieff, *Roots of Labour*, (Yeovil: Linden Hall and Coventry: Industrial Pioneer, 1990), 112-113.
50. *NHRU Magazine* 5:4 (January, 1894).
51. *NHRU Magazine* 18:1 (September, 1906).
52. Rose, *Intellectual life of the British working classes*, chapter 2.

53. A retrospective quote in *The Reader*, (October 1926).
54. *AR 1913-14*.
55. *NHRU Magazine* 16:5 (February, 1905). In the closing years of the twentieth century social reading circles enjoyed a revival in popularity. A detailed account of this phenomenon and of the dynamics of modern group reading is given in Jenny Hartley, *Reading Groups*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
56. *NHRU Magazine* 4:8 (May, 1893).
57. *NHRU Magazine* 4:1 (October, 1892).
58. *NHRU Magazine* 16:8 (May, 1905).
59. *NHRU Magazine* 17:7 (April, 1906).
60. See T.A. Leonard, *Adventures in holiday making. Being the story of the rise and development of a Peoples' Holiday Movement*, (Manchester: Holiday Fellowship, 1936).
61. *Comradeship* 1:1 (October 1907); this occurred for example in Blackburn, Bolton and Huddersfield.
62. Frederick Harrison, 'A retrospect of seventy years', in *Autobiographic memoirs volume two 1870-1910*, (London: Macmillan, 1911), 311-334.
63. This situation was in part due to the narrow approach to English in the teacher-training curriculum, which the Manchester Pupil-Teacher college sought to redress by enrolling its trainees in Union circles; *NHRU Magazine* 18:6 (February, 1907).
64. J. Marchant, *J.B. Paton*, (London: James Clarke, 1909), 247-261.
65. Radford, *Faculty of reading*, 62.
66. *NHRU Magazine* 15:9 (June, 1904). This pattern prevailed at an elementary school in Redditch in which the teacher had planned the integration of Union based reading within the curriculum over a five-year period.
67. Marchant, *J.B. Paton*. Several reports from school circles included the request that the Union might take into account the availability of cheap editions affordable to the children, *NHRU Magazine* 15:9 (June, 1904). The London School Board attempted to circumvent this obstacle by selling the recommended titles at half price.
68. Ernest A. Baker, *A descriptive guide to the best fiction: British and American*, (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1903); Ernest A. Baker, 'The classification of fiction', *Library World*, (1898-1900): 198-201 and 216-220.
69. Kelly, *A history of public libraries*, 201.
70. John Churton Collins, 'Free libraries: their functions and opportunities', *Nineteenth Century*, (June, 1903): 968-981.
71. Alex Hill, 'Public libraries and the National Home Reading Union', *Library Association Record*, (1903): 615-622.
72. *NHRU Magazine* 16:7 (April, 1905).
73. This occurred in Norwich and Swansea; Kelly *A history of libraries*, 158-9 and 164.
74. Joseph Pomfret, 'Reading circles', *Library World*, (1911): 289-294.

75. W.J. Harris, 'The organisation and conduct of reading circles; adult and junior', *Library World* 17 (1914-15): 69-72.
76. Flint, *The woman reader*.
77. 'Fictions for French firesides', *Blackwood's Magazine* 72 (November, 1852): 545-553.
78. *NHRU Magazine* 18:9 (1907).
79. *AR* 1913-14.
80. As for example the circle that operated at St. Hilda's school in Newcastle-upon-Tyne that 'had helped the girls to begin to read independently'. National Home Reading Union *Notes, reports and announcements*, 1894.
81. *NHRU Magazine* 18:9 (May, 1907).
82. Radford, *Faculty of reading*, p.58.
83. *Northern Daily Telegraph* (13 September 1906).
84. James Duff Brown, 'In defence of Emma Jane', *Library World*, (1900-1901): 215-219.
85. Working Woman, 'Do public libraries foster a love of literature among the masses?' *Chambers' Journal*, Series 6:3 (1899): 134-136.
86. *Bolton Journal* 22 September 1894.
87. *Bolton Journal* 7 January 1899.
88. *NHRU Magazine*, 15:9 (1904).
89. Quoted in Temple, *Life of Percival*.
90. *AR* 1922-23.
91. G.B.Harrison, 'The place of the National Home Reading Union in the public library system', *Library Association Record*, (1927): 27-35. At this juncture Ernest Baker was chairman of a new committee which included Canon Lyttleton, a former headmaster of Eton, John Bailey, President of the English Association, and F.S. Boss, a Chief Inspector under the London County Council. See also C.A. Siepmann, 'Group listening to broadcast talks', *Library Association Record*, (1929): 55-58.
92. Morrison, *Chautauqua*.
93. John Brown Paton, 'Public libraries and the National Home Reading Union', *Library Association Record*, (1908): 488-497.
94. Queenie Leavis, *Fiction and the reading public*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932).
95. Leavis, *Fiction and the reading public*, 7.
96. F.R. Leavis, *Mass civilisation and minority culture*, (Cambridge: Minority Press, 1930).
97. T.S. Eliot, *Notes towards the definition of culture*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1948).

