As the twig is bent so is the tree inclined’ is an adage that particularly applies to the Children’s Library in Adelaide. An astonishing number of people will ask ‘What is this library, and where is it?’ The better to answer these questions for all whom they may concern, a representative of The Register attended the Children’s Library on Saturday afternoon. It was a happy spectacle. Miss Whitham, the lady superintendent, was in charge of about 50 children, who were seated at tables scattered about the spacious room. The very structure of the library contributed to its lure to book lovers, for there were nooks and corners, and cozy spots where tables and chairs were arranged close to inviting-looking magazines and bound volumes. None of the children were forced to read any special book; each young thirster for knowledge chose his or her pet subject, and settled down at any of the tables. Some read keenly, others in fits and starts; but all gave a fair amount of attention to what they were doing.

What impressed one most was the feeling of freedom everywhere - the atmosphere of Montessorism. It was an unspoken compact between the children and their supervisor, the happy fruits of mutual love and understanding. The young people were there because they wanted to dip into favourite authors, and read some coveted story. But fiction did not claim them all. Some came as readers, but others again came as students to ‘read up’ a particular subject for an essay, or study Boy Scout work. Another section of lads hovered about the shelves containing the latest information about engineering, and airships and flying. Miss Whitham said this last was a particularly fascinating department just now. Then, again, the older girls loved the Pollyanna Books by Eleanor Porter, and Australian stories by Ethel Turner and her contemporaries. Ellis’s series of adventure and Indian books were never ‘cold’ in the shelves, when the boys were about, and were greatly read. Jules Verne was also fairly well in demand - a notable achievement to serve two young generations! Nature study works were growing in favour, and hunting and travel tales were always on the tables. With old and young, boy and girl alike, fairy stories were never tired of. This is a healthy link between the world of yesterday and that of to-day. Who among us does not remember the thrill of ‘Rose Red and Snow White,’ of ‘The Dwarfs,’ and of ‘The Sleeping Beauty?’ Yet to-day we see other children delight in what delighted us, and a golden link of humanity is forged.

Happiness With Profit.
It was a happy scene, indeed, on Saturday afternoon. A feeling of quietude hung over the Library. It was not the de-pressing hush of a forced silence, but rather an expectant peace in which young minds were reveling with favourite subjects and engrossing stories. The kingdom of children had foregathered happily and expectantly, and the ordinary world of noise and duty was temporarily forgotten. Discipline was observed, but never obstructed - and it was rather the wellbeing that agreeable companionship evolves than the sterner order of rigid rules. Many parents had accompanied their children, and sat with them, and even shared their books. One young-looking and happy mother occupied a table with her five daughters, ranging in ages from seven to 15, and it was an inspiring scene. Silently the book would be passed for mother to read some line or passage that had particularly pleased the child, or a picture was quietly indicated illustrating a part of the story. Happy nods and smiles were interchanged, and then all would be engrossed for a few minutes.
Then more understanding, silent pantomime! There is nothing quite so wonderful and beautiful as a mother with happy children about her. Miss Whitham said this library was not only open on Saturday afternoon, but on Sundays, too, and also on all public holidays. Often on Sundays fathers brought their children, and then went into the other library to read, and later called back for their charges. Altogether the juvenile book section has proved a valuable institution, and as parents grow to learn about its free advantages, without doubt the present accommodation will prove all too small.

As a rule between 70 and 80 children assemble on ordinary occasions. But once a month Miss Hammett Dyer kindly devotes a Saturday afternoon to a ‘story hour,’ and then the place is crowded. And very happy is that time. South Australia enjoys the distinction of being the pioneer in this child movement, and this is largely due to the work of the General Secretary (Mr. J. R. G. Adams), who was impressed with a similar innovation when travelling in America. Some of our other States have been in correspondence over the matter with the local Public Library Board, so, no doubt, the Children's Library will become a general addition. Judged by our own results, it certainly should, for the cultivation of a taste for reading profitable books in leisure hours will prove a great asset to children in later times. Reading cultivates reflection, and reflection produces thoughtful men and women. Dreams, books are each a world; and books, we know. Are a substantial world, both pure and good; Round these, with tendrils strong as flesh and blood Our pastime and our happiness will grow.

The Advertiser of 23 July 1915 on page 10

ADELAIDE Praised
CLEAN AND BEAUTIFUL

In her report on her recent visit to Melbourne and Adelaide, delivered before the women's section of the Town Planning Association of New South Wales, Mrs. G. A. Taylor says:- 'Adelaide impressed me as one of the finest cities I have ever seen in town-planning and wholesome living conditions; and this judgment is formed after keen observation of about 40 cities visited and studied within the past twelve months, many of such claiming to have special attractiveness in their planning. The Adelaide women are very keen on keeping their city free from slum living conditions and congestion generally. The great and pleasing feature of Adelaide is the belt of park land encircling the city. The suburbs are laid out beyond these park lands with direct roads, each forming a radius with the city as a centre. The streets are laid out to form rectangular blocks, and looking along any of these streets fine avenues of trees fill the distance with a country-like effect. These avenues of trees are in many cases our native gums, and it was interesting to note that through the destruction of bird life Nature's balance had been interfered with and these gums became infested with insect pests, making it necessary to cut out much of the timber. This pruning spoilt very much of the grace and symmetry of these otherwise handsome trees; thus it will be seen that the question of preserving bird life is also a town-planning necessity, if the city is to maintain the beauty of its foliage. The belt of park lands was purchased originally for £2,400, and now after 75 years, it is estimated that the value of the land is about £8,500,000. This is an object lesson as to the necessity of cities taking the earliest opportunity to acquire necessary park lands and lands for other city improvements In motoring through the suburbs I was delighted to notice the houses invariably surrounded with garden and grass plots, so that light and air were allowed all round these detached cottages.
The spirit of cleanliness was rampant in Adelaide. I am sure that anyone neglecting to keep his grass plot cut, the garden cultivated, the house painted, and the window curtains clean would be ostracised by his neighbors. All this indicated a free and happy existence, the reflection of well-planned surroundings. Even in the so-called slum quarters the atmosphere is so sweet and uncontaminated that the children seem to be the happiest little mortals alive. Fifteen of them I found sitting on the kerbstone, singing, 'Here we are, here we are again,' with all the vigor and energy of their chirping friends, the sparrows.

In the city library I found a lovely little institution called a children's library. This was filled with all the sweet, healthy literature that delights the boy and girl. They had little seats and little tables and a little lady attendant, as proud of her library as if all the children in it were her own. The children took the matter with much dignity and observed strict silence and decorum with all the gravity of grown ups. In the park lands Adelaide has double advantage, as through this area Torrens Lake has been formed by damming a small river. The water is covered with graceful black swans, ducks, cranes, and water hens. Those are all quite tame and introduce a charm to the place that would be advertised as 'an attraction' in any other part of the world. Fifty black swans followed us round for the welcome crumb, which reminded me of the famed pigeons of St. Mark's, at Venice. I found that the city council had its own nursery. One of the attractive features is the annual planting of flowering plants in different parts of the city parks. They also develop the growth of trees for street planting in this nursery.'