

# CHILDREN AND BOOKS.

## LITTLE STUDENTS IN PUBLIC LIBRARY READING ROOM.

### NOT MUCH CHANCE FOR GROWN-UPS SUNDAY AFTERNOONS.

#### Suggestion to Make a Children's Room in the Building Recently Vacated by the Hartford Club.

Not nearly all of the 10,000 book-takers whose names have been registered at the Hartford Public Library since the new numbering began in November, 1901, know that the reading and reference rooms are open on Sundays. Many of the men who crowd the reading room in the Sunday hours, from 1 to 7:30 p. m., never take out books, and have never been registered at the loan desk.

tables with scant room for eight at each, and an oblong table for six. Benches and folding-chairs have to be brought in on Sundays, and are more than filled, two children sometimes sitting in one chair. The total number of children recorded in the room last Sunday was eighty-five, of adults thirteen. It is impossible with as many children in the room as there are in an average schoolroom, and of all ages from 4 to 14, for any one in charge of the reference room to do justice to older readers.

A member of a young men's debating club came during the afternoon for information on labor unions. "I can't leave these children to get it for you," said the librarian. "The only thing that I can do is to take you to the shelves and let you look at the books—" but so much of the up-to-date material on the labor question is scattered in magazines that the reader could really find very little without the help that could not be given him unless fifty children were left to their own devices.

After a part of them had gone, and there was a period of comparative leisure and quiet with only twenty-seven in the room, all reading or looking at picture books, they were asked one at a time what streets they lived in. The following were reported: Arch, Avon, Chestnut, Donald, Front, Governor, Howard, Kennedy, Lawrence, Lewis, Madison, Morgan, Park, Talcott, Temple, Ward, Wells, West, Williams, Winter. The children who live near the North Street Settlement very rarely come to the library on Sundays, and

ously copied a title about prisons, a learned article in a book on social conditions in the United States. She gave him the book, but at the same time said, "I don't think that this is what you thought it would be. What you want is something about prisoners in the Civil War, isn't it?" showing him Kellogg's "Life and Death in Rebel Prisons," which was exactly what he was trying to get.

The greatest need of the Hartford Public Library is a children's room. Twenty-five per cent. of the whole circulation is on children's cards. During the last few years, the branches of the Arsenal School, Lawrence Street School, New Park Avenue School, Southwest School, Washington Street School, Wethersfield Avenue School and Wilson Street School, open one day in the week and taken charge of by the teachers, have relieved the overcrowding at the loan desk in the main library, but it is impossible under present conditions to do justice to both children and adults.

The library has done for eleven years and more an immense amount of work with children and schools under unfavorable conditions. The principal of one of the public schools lately said that the replies written by the children here to some questions asked by Earl Barnes as to who they would rather be if not themselves were pronounced by him to show much more power of expression and knowledge of historical characters than similar work done by children in other cities. This is partly due, the principal thinks, to their familiarity with books sent to the schools by the Public Library. The library can, however, do much more for children and schools, and can also help its older readers much more, if it can have an entirely separate children's department.

The first children's room in this country was opened in Brookline, Mass., about a dozen years ago, but was merely for reading. A pleasant, sunny room, where the children could go to the shelves and choose books to take home, was in the Denver Public Library in 1895. On the wall was Stevenson's motto:—

"The world is so full of a number of things,  
I am sure we should all be as happy as kings."

There are two rooms on the south side of the old Hartford Clubhouse, which, if the doorway between can be enlarged, will make a very attractive children's department. The front can be used for reading and reference, the back for bookshelves to which the children may be allowed to go. A smaller adjoining room can be used for school libraries and school duplicates.

The children's room can be kept open from 3:30 to 6 in the afternoon of school days, all day Saturday and on Sunday afternoons, by adding some hours to the time of the present extra assistants, without increasing the regular staff of the library. No new library is built now-a-days without a children's room. New Britain, Meriden, New Haven, Rockville, Derby, East Hartford, all have them.

The work of the debating clubs of the district schools and the high school must necessarily still be done in the main building. "Should you like to take charge of the children's room?" was said the other day to the head of the reference department. "Yes," was the answer, "but if I did I should have to give up the boys and girls who are beginning to use grown-up cards, and need help just as much, and I would rather keep them."



Children in the Library Reading Room on A Sunday Afternoon.

The reference room is used on Sundays by men and women who are employed during the week, and like to spend a quiet afternoon in study or reading. The number of grown-up readers is, however, smaller than it ought to be, because the room is crowded with children, many of whom do not come in the week to take books.

Last Sunday when the accompanying photograph was taken by Robert D. Chapman, there were at 2:30 o'clock, one man, one woman and fifty-one children in the room. The accommodation for readers consists of two round

not at all unless they have some special work to do.

The youngest child present on Sunday afternoon was a little girl of 4, who looked at picture books for two hours and more without making a sound. The books in demand by boys and girls varied from "The Three Little Kittens," "Little Black Sambo," and Walter Crane's picture books, through Andrew Lang's fairy books to Henty, Trowbridge and histories of the Civil War, with pictures. The photograph does not show that several of the children were at the card-catalogue, which they use more easily than older readers, but one boy brought the librarian a slip of paper on which he had labori-