THOUGHTS ON THE HISTORY OF THE PRINTING AND PUBLISHING OF BOOKS IN NEW ZEALAND.

By Mr. A. W. Reed.

An address delivered at a meeting of the Wellington Branch of the New Zealand Library Association, October 29th, 1940

In 1851 Williamson and Wilson published a pretentious journal of an Expedition from Auckland to Taranaki, undertaken by Sir George Grey. I mention this book principally because I believe Williamson and Wilson is the first firm in New Zealand which has any claim to fame for its publishing activities. This particular book contained the English and Maori text of many of the legends collected by Sir George Grey, and incidentally, the main part of the book first appeared in the columns of the “Maori Messenger.”

The earliest note I have of verses published in New Zealand is “New Zealand Minstrelsy,” by Golder; published by R. Stokes and W. Lyon, Lambton Quay, Wellington, and sold by the author. I wonder whether Stokes and Lyon were the publishers, or whether the author was the publisher? At any rate he handled the work of distribution, which is really the work of the publisher. The last three pages consisted of a list of subscribers’ names. If you contemplate issuing a book of verse, you might well take these three pages from Mr. Golder as a golden rule—particularly if you are selling the copies yourselves. The experience gained in compiling such a list before you spend your money in printing, will pay you a big dividend!

Hugh Carleton naturally turned to Williamson and Wilson in 1854 when he wished to have his famous “Page from the History of New Zealand” published, and the following year the same firm did Davis’s “Maori Mementoes,” a record of Maori addresses presented to Sir George Grey. Messrs. Williamson and Wilson deserve recognition as the first New Zealand publishers, because they exercised some discretion and taste in what they printed, and so far as facilities offered in those days, they gave publicity to the work that they brought out. John White’s “Maori Superstitions,” a reprint of lectures delivered to the members of the Y.M.C.A., was issued by the same enterprising firm about this time.

In 1860 Sir William Martin had “The Taranaki Question” issued by the Melanesian Press. About this time there seemed to be a revival of mission presses. The Church Missionary Society press had gone, as its function had been usurped by other printers, but there followed presses at St. John’s College, and the Melanesian Press at St. Stephen’s, both established by the missionaries.

“The Taranaki Question” was a book of 152 pages, and is mentioned because there are two points of interest in connection with it: first, that it is a revival of activity by mission presses, and secondly, because it was printed for circulation amongst members of the Imperial Parliament and General Assembly of New Zealand. There have been many successors—books issued especially for circulation amongst members of Parliament in the hope that they will influence the administration of the country. Just two or three days ago I had someone in my office who had had a book printed in one of the Dominions and circulated to every member of Parliament there, and he said that within twenty-four hours certain sweeping reforms were made entirely along the lines suggested in his pamphlet. This must surely have been an exceptional case! But there is something to be said for this method, for the book we are discussing led to a torrent of Replies to the Taranaki Question, and Answers in Reply to the Answers to the Remarks on the Taranaki Question—to the delight and benefit of printer and papermaker.

In 1861 came the first novel printed in New Zealand. This was “Taranaki—a tale of the War,” published by Mr. W. C. Williamson, of Williamson and Wilson, but which seems to have been unfavourably received.

By the way, it was at this time that Chapman’s “New Zealand Monthly Magazine” was brought out, published by T. G. Chapman, Bookseller and Stationer, Auckland, another publisher of good repute in those early days.
In 1863 "Old New Zealand," by Judge Manning, was published. Two editions were issued simultaneously by Smith Elder and Co., London, and Creighton and Scales, Auckland. This was the first New Zealand book to attain in later years the dignity of translation into Danish and German. In the same year the same publishers brought out a 6d. pamphlet by Jerningham Wakefield entitled "What will they do in the General Assembly?" So far as I can see it deals with what Wakefield would do in the General Assembly if he had the chance, rather than with what the General Assembly would do.

The next year I am interested to see a crop of Dunedin publications concerning the New Zealand Exhibition. It is of interest to-night because I suppose the very latest of New Zealand publications is the "History of the Centennial Exhibition" which is just off the press within the last day or so. Fergusson and Mitchell, of Dunedin, were the printers, so that Dunedin evidently had the monopoly of exhibition publications.

The year 1866 sees the real beginning of the work of the Government Printer, George Didsbury being the Government Printer at that time. A whole evening could profitably be devoted to the growth of the Government Printing Office. At first various firms were asked to tender for the work, and both Mr. Williamson and Mr. Wilson, of Auckland, were successful tenderers. Later Didsbury, who was the first foreman, was promoted to the rank of Government Printer. He had an interesting collection of machinery which included the old Pihoihoi Press. The first publication was a pretentious issue, Hector's Geological Survey. Through the years the number of books brought out by the Government Printer has grown to such an extent that a record of them would make a book in itself. But the Government Printer has never been a publisher, as we reckon publishers to-day. I would commend those of you who might be interested in the rise of the Government Printing Office to read the chapter on it in that splendid publication "The History of Printing in New Zealand," brought out by the Wellington Club of Printing House Craftsmen. The book costs £3/3/-, so that you will probably take it from the library shelves rather than buy it yourselves.

To be Continued.

CANTERBURY BRANCH.

The annual meeting was held on January 20, and the following officers were elected: President, Mrs. A. L. Wilson; Vice-president, Mr. H. Jackson; Hon. Secretary-Treasurer, Miss M. Watson; Committee, Misses M. T. Ennis, G. L. Jeffreys, Messrs. E. J. Bell, C. W. Collins, W. H. Ford, J. C. Wilson.

GENERAL NEWS.

Bye-Laws.

A set of model bye-laws for small free libraries is available at the offices of the Country Library Service, Parliament Buildings. Copies will be sent to members on application.

Mr. J. D. Stringleman.

The Hon. Secretary of the Canterbury Branch, Mr. J. D. Stringleman, has resigned to join the Fleet Air Arm. The good wishes of members will go with him on active service.

Mr. W. J. R. Scollay.

Mr. Scollay of the staff of the Wellington Public Libraries has joined the R.A.F. and is in training. He will be in New Zealand for a period of about seven months before completing his training here. He has the best wishes of the Association.

Municipal Libraries.

We have received from Mr. L. Montague Harrod, the Hon. Secretary of the London and Home Counties Branch of the Library Association, a copy of the quinquennial Report on the Municipal Library System of London and the Home Counties, 1939. The report is issued free to members of the London and Home Counties Branch of the Library Association, while the price to others is 1s. 3d. post free. A well-produced, 26-page document, the report covers many aspects of the subject and bears evidence of careful and authoritative compilation.

Canterbury Public Library.

A report in the Christchurch Star-Sun of Tuesday, January 28, indicates that the Christchurch City Council has decided against taking