the co-operation of the Community Centre, the Country Library Service and the inter-loan system, the community of Feilding has now available a service unlike anything previously experienced. Speaking of the Library at a meeting of the Feilding Borough Council this month, the Mayor, Mr. T. L. Seddon, said that he was satisfied that the action of the Council in going “free” was a step in the right direction and one which would not be regretted. In short, he continued, the Library had emerged from a condition of doubtful value to become one of the Borough’s most useful amenities.

The reaction to the new system in Feilding is encouraging. In the old subscription days a set sum of money was allotted to the library, which had to try to cater for all tastes. The attempt failed because the funds were only sufficient to enable us to buy in the ratio of six cheap books to one expensive one; but now, with the assistance of the Country Library Service, this difficulty has been very largely eliminated. Since the appearance of the Country Library Service books on the shelves, I think the old reading habits of the community have been broken down, for I have noticed that quite a number of the old die-hard readers of western, mystery, and light romantic books have evinced a curiosity as to what is inside the covers of the better books, and are now rapidly emerging from the set paths in reading that they have been following for so long. Books on crafts, world affairs, biography, and those with historical value have never been so much in demand as they are now.

With the winter coming on, the influx of readers is likely to increase, and it is hoped that the word “Library” (the storehouse of knowledge) will convey its true meaning to the residents of Feilding.

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 1868 Taylor’s “Past and Present of New Zealand” was printed in London by Macintosh, and circulated in New Zealand by H. I. Jones, of Wanganui. This Wanganui bookselling firm is still in existence, and some of you may know Mr. F. I. Jones who claims to be the only bookseller in the world who stocks nothing but New Zealand books. The same firm was concerned in 1870 with the distribution in this country of “Te Ika a Maui” by the same author. In 1869, a similar though not such a notable, instance of the work done by the bookseller-publisher was the publication of “Appeal to the Men of New Zealand,” by Femina, an argument for female suffrage, issued by J. Hounsell and Co., Nelson.

Suddenly comes a note which appeals to me, almost a trumpet call, one of conscious pride, when I find that a book with the title “Skits and Sketches,” by Silver Pen, was printed by T. McKenzie at the Steam Printing Press, Wellington. Here at last was the Deus ex machina.

At the same time I see the rise of Reed and Brett of the “Evening Star” Office, Auckland. Their first work “Craig’s Troubles, or Our Antipodean Courts and Laws,” was only a 23-page leaflet. Henry Brett is an important figure in publishing in New Zealand, and has to his credit a list of major productions culminating perhaps in “Early History of New Zealand” and Gudgeon’s “Defenders of New Zealand.” Historical publications at this period are beginning to come to the fore, reaching their zenith with the present-day production of centennial publications.

In 1878 there is an isolated specimen, an 8-page pamphlet by Bishop Suter on the omission of Nelson and Marlborough from the scheme of railways accepted by the Legislature. It was published by R. Lucas and Son, Book and General Printers of Nelson, and is typical of provincial town productions of which there are many examples too numerous to mention. R. Lucas and Son have occasionally brought out items of interest, their latest I think being J. D. Peart’s painstaking and capable “Old Tasman Bay.”

Again in 1878 a book of over 300 pages, “The History of Taranaki,” was issued by Edmondson and Avery, of New Plymouth. I am not sure whether they were the predecessors of
Thomas Avery and Sons Ltd., but perhaps they may provide an introduction to the firm of that name which has had a considerable influence on publishing in New Zealand, including within recent years the printing and publishing of the works of the Polynesian Society and the works of the late Mr. Lindsay Buick.

About the 'eighties, publications of the firms of Coulls, Culling and J. Wilkie begin to make their appearance. They published a number of notable works, particularly histories of the Presbyterian Church, and have always been noted, as printers, for the excellence of their work. The two firms amalgamated and are now known as Coulls, Somerville, Wilkie, Ltd., and have just completed the splendid history of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand.

So far as I know the first publication of moment of Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd. was Cox's "Recollections," a book concerning his experiences in Australia, England, Ireland, Scotland and New Zealand. It was a book of 272 pages, issued in 1884. It was the first of a list which can take its place with that of any English publisher, culminating in the printing and distribution of many of the excellent publications in connection with the Centennial period. From my experience of the work of Whitcombe and Tombs, I know just how much they have done for publishing in this country, and as a publisher, I take my hat off to them. Messrs. Whitcombe and Tombs, when they really do their best, can produce a book which cannot be bettered by any English publisher or printer that I know of.

I am particularly interested in a twelve-page leaflet on the amenities of Napier, issued by R. Coupland Harding in 1885. Coupland Harding was a printer who owed a great deal to Colenso during the years that he had his printing office, and who was a man in advance of his time and had a big influence on typography. I think some of Colenso's printing machinery went to Coupland Harding. By the way, Colenso's title pages have always impressed me by their dignity and simplicity.

Now we come to modern times, which requires at least an evening to itself. I have already mentioned Whitcombe and Tombs. There is also Harry H. Tombs, of Wellington who, as you know, is an artist-craftsman rather than a publisher. I have mentioned Thomas Avery and Sons, of New Plymouth. Then there was Fine Arts, of whom I know very little. They started in New Zealand as a publishing firm, not as printers, but found that their optimism and enthusiasm was not firmly enough attached to the anchor of commercial stability. You can perhaps understand that a publisher has to prune down his own estimates of potential sales ruthlessly, and in this they may have failed. National Magazines, which lately went out of business, was primarily a magazine publishing firm, but also issued a number of interesting books. Probably the latest New Zealand publishing firm is the Caxton Press of Christchurch. Mr. Denis Glover is a young man with both ideals and ideas, and has brought a great deal of enthusiasm to his work. Many of the works of the Caxton Press do credit to him and to New Zealand as a whole.

With regard to the Centennial volumes, some of which are even yet appearing, first and foremost are the ones brought out by the Government—the pictorial and historical surveys, Dr. Scholefield's "Dictionary of Biography," and the Centennial Atlas which will probably not be issued until after the war. I am glad to say that practically all of them have been printed and published by commercial firms.

We shall probably find that while the war is on there will be a dearth of books, firstly because of the cost of production, which has reached a stage where only the exceptional book can be published, and secondly because students and collectors have found that their shelves are full and their purses are empty for a while. Our minds are so occupied that we are unable to devote quite the same interest to the history of New Zealand, but there is still a great future for publishing in this country. I think you will probably agree with me that for its size and population and length of history there can be no country in the world which has such a magnificent record in the issue of publications as our own country. It will have a greater and bigger record as the years go by.

In conclusion, may I pay a tribute to the Libraries of New Zealand. With natural pride and prejudice, I have long felt that publishers have a great deal to do with the recording and the fostering of cultural influences which make a country, by preserving them in printed form. The ultimate aim of publisher and librarian is the same. Without publishers, there would be no libraries. But the debt of publishers, direct and indirect, to the librarian is immense.

(Concluded.)