

Music in Whanganui in the Early Days.

By GEORGE FREDERIC ALLEN.

IN the first number of the New Zealand Illustrated Magazine appeared an article headed "Old Musical Identities," which gave a very interesting account of music at Auckland in the early days*. This was followed by another good article entitled "Old Musical Days in Taranaki"***.

I propose to follow at a humble distance these two papers, by attempting to describe early musical doings in Whanganui, of which my personal knowledge began in 1862. Prior to that time there had been occasional concerts, but never any established musical society.

The origin of the Whanganui Choral Society was due to Mr William Bridson, who was previously, and is still, a member of the Auckland Choral Society. In 1862 I came to Whanganui as District Surveyor, and shortly after my arrival spent an evening glee-singing with Messrs Bridson and Richard and James Woon, at the house of the latter gentleman in Wilson-street. While we were at supper Mr Bridson asked, "Why don't you form a Choral Society here, Allen?" I replied that such an undertaking was beyond my ability and my ambition, adding that I thought there were very few folks in Whanganui who could read music. "Then there's the more need of a musical society to teach them," said Bridson. The Messrs Woon thought there was not material for such a society; but

* "Old Musical Identities," by W. E. Outhwaite, N.Z.I.M., Oct., 1899, p. 67.

** "Old Musical Days in Taranaki," by D. Saul, N.Z.I.M., Oct. 1900, p. 40.

Bridson, James Woon and I agreed to inquire, and to report a month afterwards. The result was that Bridson secured five names and I twenty. I was then asked to call a meeting, which was held in the old Christ Church Sunday Schoolroom. It was attended by over forty persons, all of whom entered as singing members, except two or three, who preferred being on the "honorary" list.

There were soon ninety singing and over thirty honorary members on the roll.

At the first practice meeting I was asked to act as conductor pro-tem, and I began by requesting all who could read music to come to one end of the room. In response nine gentlemen and seven ladies stepped forward, but of these one lady sang contentedly from a bass copy, and one of the gentlemen never succeeded in performing any other part than the soprano an octave lower.

I handed round copies of John Weldon's anthem, "O, Praise God in His Holiness," which (accompanied by Mr Davis on the harmonium) was fairly sung. Clarke Whitfield's anthem, "In Jewry is God Known," followed in very creditable style.

Then those who professed no knowledge of music were asked to sing "God Save the Queen." At first this was an ignominious failure, so we put on the bold dozen to lead, and, after two or three attempts, got something like the National Anthem out of the crowd.

At the first business meeting Mr Davis was elected pianist, myself conductor, and Mr Bridson deputy-