

37 YEARS' COMPETITION

Dunedin Society Encourages Young Entertainers

Special to the "Record"

by

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AWAY back at the beginning of this century some enterprising people formed the Dunedin Competitions Society, and at the first trials they held were disappointed to hear the judge of the elocution section say, wearily, after long consideration of a well-known draper who had been articulating in front of him: "Of a poor lot of competitors, I place Blank first!"

That sorrowful, but witty, judge, was the late Mr. T. H. Whitson. Since he first weighed—and found wanting—the talents of Dunedin would-be entertainers, many judgments have been made and spoken. But never again has there been anything so cutting as Mr. Whitson's faint praise.

For the Dunedin Competitions Society has grown beyond recognition since its humble beginnings in 1902. Not only is it the oldest competitions society in New Zealand, but it is the only one that can look back upon a record of much real and steady distinction. It is hardly fair here to make comparisons between Dunedin and northern centres, but at least in the South Island Christchurch supports the sole society that may challenge Dunedin.

THE seed of the Dunedin group was planted in 1901 by Mr. C. G. Smeaton, headmaster of the Macandrew Road School, who returned from an Australian trip full of enthusiasm for the educational as well as the entertainment value of competitions which he had seen at Ballarat.

On February 11, 1902, Mr. Smeaton called a public meeting, outlined the procedure at Ballarat, and pointed out such competitions were not childish, but of great importance in the development of mental instincts.

The following month the Dunedin Competitions Society was formed. President was the Mayor, Mr. G. L. Deniston and the committee comprised Messrs. J. A. Park, M. Cohen, J. F. Kirby, S. Solomon, J. H. Hosking, A. C. Hanlon, F. C. Higgins, D. M. Findlay, T. Whitson and the Rev. W. Curson Rogers. Mr. Smeaton and Mr. F. D. Grace were appointed secretaries, and Mr. G. C. Israel was treasurer. All these were prominent in business or their professions, and to-day the



ANOTHER MELBA?

... Who knows but this young singer may be taking the first step toward professional fame!

committee is still as representative of professional and teaching sections.

Dunedin thus became the parent of competitions societies in New Zealand. Other societies were formed subsequently in northern centres, but in 37 years Dunedin alone has never missed a session.

And this recalls a rather amusing story. The Auckland society, later to be disbanded, at one stage in its career offered a grand piano for the winning soloist in the principal piano section. For two years, in succession a Dunedin competitor travelled north and calmly took the piano. Thereafter grand pianos disappeared from the Auckland prize list!

Nevertheless, for all its triumphs, the Dunedin society has been through bad times, particularly during the Great War and the depression. The year 1914 was critical. Arrangements for the festival were well in hand when war broke out. A reduction in entries threatened financial loss, but the society decided to keep faith with its competitors. The gesture cost £300.

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MR. E. S. WILSON.

... Something of a record-maker.

THE first festival was held in St. Matthew's schoolroom—quite a modest affair. Next year the society engaged His Majesty's Theatre, and, apart from a cessation between 1914 and 1918, has taken the theatre every year since for two and a half weeks in August and early September. Messrs. John Fuller and Sons, often losing revenue from other sources, have faithfully kept the booking open.

Latterly the society has required not only His Majesty's (Contd. p. 36).