

*Charles Towsey of Henley upon Thames in the County of Oxford Gentleman*

*Mary Harriet Sparks*

*W. B. Moorhouse*

# TOWSEY TALES

**NAME:** Arthur John Towsey

**BIRTH DETAILS:** June 1847 Henley-upon-Thames

**DEATH DETAILS:** 9 June 1931 Cambridge, NZ

**CHART REF:** Towsey Chart B1

**MARRIAGE DETAILS:** 25 July 1871 St. Paul's, Dunedin NZ

**SPOUSE:** Jessy Hawkins Mackay

## PART 2 of 5

The letter to Mister West, mentioned in the article below, would have been sent together with a large shipment of new music that Arthur John had selected for Mister West's shop in Dunedin. Looking at the titles of some of these new songs, gives some impression of the types of music to which people were listening at that time.

### MR A. J. TOWSEY IN LONDON

By the last English mail Mr G. R. West, the music-seller, of Princes street, received an interesting letter from Mr A. J. Towsey, the musician, who is at present on a visit to Europe. Mr Towsey relates his experiences in the musical world of London, and freely expresses his opinions concerning the great singers and instrumental soloists before the London public. In the course of his communication he says:—"Madame Antoinette Sterling (contralto) is a *darling*. I did not think that such ease, grace, and refinement and delicious sounds could emanate from any living being. Of the men (who sang at a ballad concert Mr Towsey attended at St. James' Hall), Lloyd has a lovely tenor of the rich liquid tone, quite delicious, if you could use such a term. Santley is just as great a favourite as ever, and well he deserves to be. Poor Madame Goddard went through her solos as perfectly as usual, but the public did applaud, and that was all. She played 'Where the bee sucks,' but it scarcely moved the people at all. We had a harp solo by somebody whose name did not appear on the programme, and who had to fill a gap occasioned by the unavoidable absence of Sims Reeves. There were over 20 items on the programme, and 11 of them were encored. The following night I went to hear 'Judas' in the Albert Hall. Of course I had never been in the building before, and it alone took my breath away. It is very enormous, but, being lighted with the electric light, you could see

almost everybody in the vast building. Dr Stainer was at the organ, Barnby conducted; and, besides the usual Albert Hall choir and orchestra, we had the band of the Coldstream Guards—1000 performers in all—soprano in red sashes and white dresses, contraltos in blue sashes and white dresses. What struck me perhaps more than anything else was the perfect accompanying to the solos. Sometimes you could almost fancy that only one stringed instrument was accompanying." Mr Towsey goes on to state that on the succeeding night he went to hear "Eli," by the Sacred Harmonic Society, which was conducted by Sir Michael Costa, with Willing at the organ. Madame Patey sang the Evening Prayer, and it had the effect of melting the audience. The celebrated March was encored, and Costa had to bow his acknowledgments. On the following Saturday he (Mr Towsey) went to the Popular Concert at St. James', at which the following performers were present:—Miss Jonatha, pianiste; Miss Marriott, vocaliste; Herr Joachim, first violin; Ries, second violin; Zerbini, viola; Piatti, 'cello; Reynolds, double bass; and two horns by Stanten and Mann. He remarks: "I do not think I ever had such a real musical treat before. As Lewis would say—'It was food.'" He also refers in enthusiastic terms to performances of "The Messiah," the opera, and the numerous "sights" of London city which he has had an opportunity of witnessing. Without mentioning anyone in particular, he desires to be remembered to all his New Zealand friends, and hopes to be reunited to them in the course of a year or so.

*Otago Daily News, Dunedin, 30th May 1879*



Dunedin, 2nd June, 1879.

# NEW MUSIC. NEW MUSIC.

Per Mail. Selected by Mr A. J. Towsey.  
Also, fresh supplies of Popular and Standard Songs,  
&c., &c.

Tho' lost to sight, He is all to me, Pinsuti's arrow  
and song, When thou art near, Old love-letters, Kerry  
dance, London Bridge, Darby and Joan, Little maid  
milking, Merry buggare, Better land, Never again,  
Regret, Silver cup, For ever faithful, Hans Sachs,  
Song of a shirt, Reason why, My palace, Blue eyes,  
Doll song, Clear and cool (Behrend), Olivia, Three  
sailor boys, Nancy Lee, Will he come, Lost chord,  
Twickenham ferry, Blue Alistian mountains, Golden  
shore, The way thro' the wood, Clear and cool (Do-  
lores), Nancy Lee march, Olivia waltz, Solo and duet,  
Love and duty, The change, The wood, De-rer than  
life, Song over a child, Together, White cockade;  
Shall I, like a hermit; Forsaken, True to the last,  
Village blacksmith, Then you'll remember, Magic of  
music, Moon light sonata, I never can forget, Waiting.  
My white rose, Snowdrift galop, Encore galop, Mes-  
senger of love waltz, Moulinette's polonaise, Schu-  
maun's lento, Connaught lancers, Tour's audante, The  
bargeman, Sivia's over the sea; Drink, puppy,  
drink; Drink, puppy, drink polka; Sivia's be-ux  
fours, Kuhe's Rienz, Cyprus polka, Can't stop galop,  
Afghanistan quadrilles, Candamar waltz, Firelike fan-  
cies, 1 to 6, by Cot-ford Dick; Molloy's songs, after  
Hans Andersen; Little match girl, Story of the  
nightingale, The old house, The lovers, Two little  
lives Death of the nightingale, Punchinello, The old  
street lamp, Flitting day, Eileen a-n-n-a-h, Killarney,  
Army and navy, Only to love, Blind girl to her harp.  
The Baritone and Tenor Album.

Just published—

Grandfather's Clock, as sung by the Mammoth Min-  
strels, and recorded nightly.

All the latest novel is extant just received—15,000  
pieces—too numerous to advertise.

GEORGE R. WEST,

Music Warehouse,

Princes street.

Bruce Herald, Dunedin, NZ, 11th July 1879

THOSE who have heard of a pianist named Towsey, who used to play at concerts in Dunedin, may not be aware that this is the same gentleman who is "doing the block" in the musical world at home, as is chronicled in the columns of a morning contemporary. Some friend of this musical autocrat has favored the journal referred to with an extract from one of his letters which describes in the most gushing, pretty, and charming little style imaginable, how Mr Towsey is on the most intimate terms with, and has heard all the musical "gems" and "darlings" both male and female, who delight the lovers of music in England; how this brilliant star on the musical horizon with praiseworthy filial affection took his father to visit the "town," had a great "out," purchasing cups, and visiting no less than a dozen silver-smiths. But this is not all. This great man actually rubbed shoulders with the Prince of Wales himself one evening at the opera, and the Prince behaved with the most gracious condescension. He also came across a young man who lately "skedaddled" from Dunedin, and nearly frightened him "out of his skin. There is a lot more chit-chat in the extract we refer to, but as it is one of those affected gushing, egotistical, and snobbish effusions, which we happily do not often meet with, we think we have given enough to show to what a pitch of self-conceit it is possible for some men to work themselves up to. We hope to hear no more of this man until he returns and resumes his musical labors in Dunedin.

It is also interesting to read an article from another Dunedin newspaper, The Bruce Herald, where the journalist has quite a different perspective on Mister Towsey and his ilk.

I mentioned previously the underlying motivation for sending men like A J Towsey out to the colonies; to help prevent the degeneration of British culture in the Empire's remote outposts.

Making such plans within the confines of some ancient, entrenched cultural institution back in London, would have seemed straightforward enough. But when the specific rituals of genteel behaviour were transposed to the more basic society of the New Zealand colony, many of the finer points of that social system would inevitably have seemed quite out of place.

Being a relatively small group, all struggling together against the same difficulties in building a new society, together with a natural freedom of spirit that would blossom when removed from the oppressive weight of a firmly entrenched ruling ethos, resulted in a situation where the affectations of the middle class that would have been automatically accepted back home, became the subject of ridicule and resentment amongst those who were open to accepting the new freedoms and opportunities that colonial life



Bertold Tours (1847-1897)



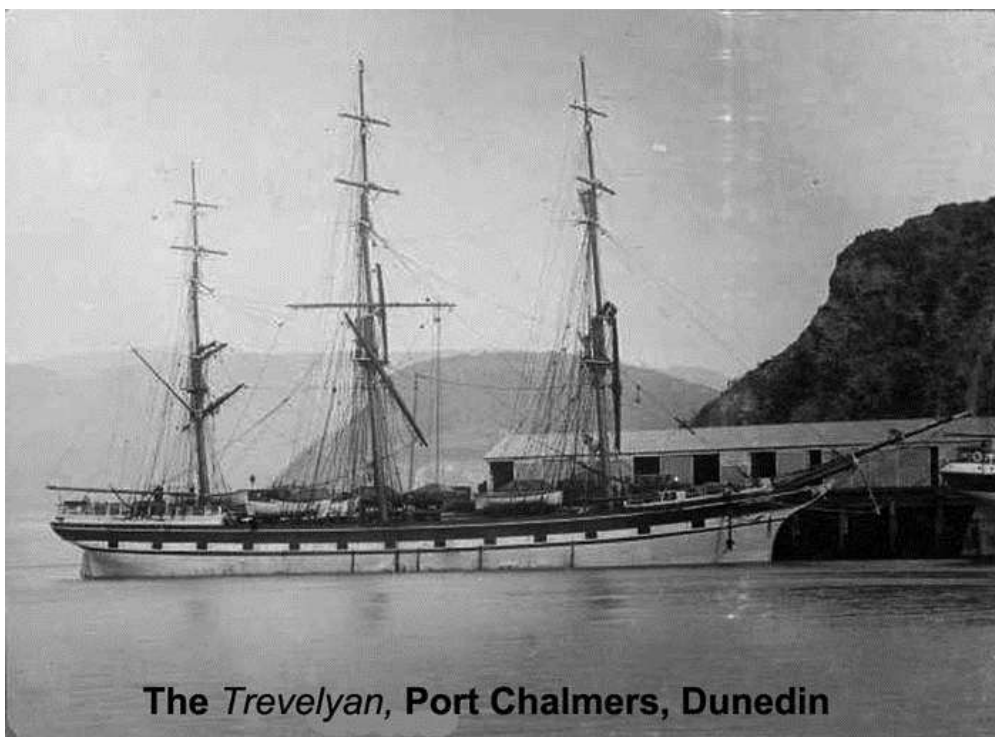
Mr. William Shakespeare



afforded.

Apart from shopping for silverware and attending concerts in London, Arthur also undertook some studies, of harmony, with Bertold Tours, singing with Mr. W. Shakespeare (who was actually human, despite looking like a walrus in a suit), and Tito Mattei, for piano. For some period, he also gave daily organ recitals at the Alexandra Palace (a large public venue in North London), and also took some of the lunchtime services at St.Paul's Cathedral, deputising for Sir John Stainer, under whom he had studied back at St.Michael's College in Tenbury.

During this trip, the family also spent some time in Germany and possibly toured other parts of Europe, before returning to London, where they boarded the *Trevelyan*, at the East India Docks, on February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1880. The ship was then towed by steam tug down to Gravesend, in the Thames Estuary, where a consignment of gunpowder was loaded. This of course, had to be done away from populated areas, just in case a stray spark were to accelerate the ship's passage to New Zealand, via the moon, in millions of tiny pieces. On the following day, the ship was towed closer to the mouth of the Thames, where she lay at anchor for two days, awaiting favourable winds.



**The *Trevelyan*, Port Chalmers, Dunedin**

Joining Arthur, Jessie and the children on this voyage, was Hubert Towsey, Arthur's younger brother, who turned nineteen years of age during the voyage. Hubert was yet another musician in the family. He seems to have studied in England.

The *Trevelyan* arrived at Port Chalmers, Dunedin on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1880, however, not wanting to waste any time in

getting back to work and earning money, Arthur had estimated the date of his arrival and prearranged an advertisement in the local newspaper, on May 6<sup>th</sup>.

The tone of the advertisement is a lot more assured than they had been a decade earlier and whilst the claim to being a Professor of Music may well have been warranted, it could also have been an affectation that Arthur had picked up along the way of his grand European musical tour. The statement that "applications will be entertained according to priority", could indicate that he was so popular that he could afford to pick and choose his students. Then again, this might also have been an advertising ploy.

Arthur's next advertisement, a month later, also tells us the prices that he was charging.

There was an article in the same newspaper a few years later, mentioning the rather miserable lot of so many young ladies who sought to make a living at teaching music, rather than succumbing to the tougher life of a governess. It mentioned that these ladies were offering their services for as little as one pound per term.

By contrast, we see that Arthur is charging between six and eight pounds per term, for piano

**MR ARTHUR J. TOWSEY,**  
PROFESSOR OF MUSIC,  
Teacher of the Pianoforte, Organ, Practical and Theoretical Vocalisation, the Physiology of the Human Voice, Italian School of Singing, Harmony, and Composition, will RESUME the PRACTICE of his PROFESSION shortly-

Intending Pupils are now being enrolled, and applications will be entertained according to priority.

The highest European references can be seen, and particulars for hours and terms obtained, at  
**GEO. R. WEST & CO.'S MUSIC WAREHOUSE,**  
Princes street, Dunedin

**6th May 1880**

**MR ARTHUR J. TOWSEY, Professor**  
of Music, will be glad to meet his pupils between the hours of 11 and 12 a.m. and 4 and 5 p.m., at G. R. West and Co.'s Music Warehouse, to arrange hours for lessons.

**FEES:**

Pianoforte and Singing, 4 and 6 guineas per term.

Harmony (class not less than 12), 2 guineas.

and monium arrangement.

**6th June 1880**



lessons.

This offers a clear explanation of how Arthur and the family could be frequent occupants of first class ship's cabins. Of course, Arthur's appointment as organist and choir master at New Zealand's premier church would have added not just a steady source of income, but would also have enhanced his credibility as a teacher.

## *Otago Daily Times 15 November 1884*

### PRESENTATION

A large number of people, both ladies and gentlemen, attended at the Chamber of Commerce yesterday afternoon, when Mr A. J. Towsey, who is about to leave this city for Christchurch, was presented with a purse containing 100 sovereigns, as an expression of gratitude for the services rendered by him to the cause of music in Dunedin. There were present: Mesdames D. Ross, W. Hislop, R. H. Leary; Misses Christie, Roberts, Leary; Archdeacon Edwards, Rev. W. Ronaldson, Rev. R. A. Kerkham, Dr Hocken, Dr De Zouche; Messrs J. T. Mackerras, H. Houghton, R. B. Martin, Isaacs, G. Buns, R. H. Leary, Franckeiss, C. C. Kettle, W. Hislop, S. Brent, H. Ross, and Captain Baldwin.

Mr E. B. CARGILL said: Mr Towsey, I have been requested to undertake the very pleasing task—in one respect—of being spokesman on this occasion, and presenting you with a small token of the good feeling of many residents and friends in Dunedin who have known you almost from the time you came here, and are now informed with very great regret that you are about to leave the scene of your labours, where you have so long and so well known. I believe it is only 17 years since you came to Dunedin in your professional capacity, and from the time of your arrival here you made your presence felt very greatly in your special department—that of music. At a very early period you took the lead in establishing a choral society, which was of very great benefit to many of the young people of our city in practising choral singing and obtaining a knowledge of music which they had not previously an opportunity of acquiring. Though things have been a good deal changed and opened up in that way since the time I speak of, and opportunities for acquiring a knowledge of music have greatly enlarged in various directions, we can look back with great satisfaction to the very effective aid you rendered in all these matters at that time—a time, as I have said, when there were but few professional music-teachers in existence here. Moreover, you have been well known by a large circle of friends, who have a very kindly feeling towards yourself and Mrs Towsey, and have come to look upon you as being almost a necessary part of the community or society of Dunedin—so much so that your going away is felt to be a considerable loss both to your private friends and in your professional capacity. It is true that the distance you are going is not so very great, and that you will not be so far out of reach that we cannot avail ourselves of your services on any particular occasion; nevertheless your leaving Dunedin and going to a neighbouring province we feel

to be a great loss to us. There has been no time to make any elaborate preparation for this expression which your friends wish to make you, and they think the best shape to put it in, under all the circumstances, is simply to ask your acceptance of this purse in my hands, and which contains 100 sovereigns. In handing it over to you we wish to assure you that you have our best wishes for a successful career in the city to which you are going. We hope you will find opportunities for progressing, and you may be assured that your progress in the future will be watched with great interest: we will take great pleasure in hearing of your welfare and well-doing. I have much pleasure in handing you this purse, Mr Towsey, in which are 100 sovereigns.—(Applause.)

Mr TOWSEY said: Mr Cargill, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you very sincerely for the kind expressions Mr Cargill has made use of with regard to myself. It is, to me, very like leaving home again to leave Dunedin, where I have spent—I will correct Mr Cargill—19 years, which is exactly half my life, and in leaving it it seems I leave almost, as it were, to begin life over again. But with the kind feeling shown to me, not only on the present occasion but throughout my long career in Dunedin, the regret I feel is more than I can express. If I have done anything during my career in Dunedin to advance music I am very glad of it, and only wish I could have done more; but, as Mr Cargill said, I shall not be out of the reach of anyone who may want me in the future, and although in a neighbouring province, if I can assist in any way it will be my utmost endeavour to do so. In thanking you for the handsome present made to me, I can only say that I do not think I deserve it. I have taken in a measure a sort of public position in regard to music in Dunedin, but in most cases I have been well and faithfully paid for it. Therefore this expression of good feeling is more than I think I deserve. I feel, in making this break from Dunedin after such long associations, that I seem to be leaving my own Church and going almost to another creed. I was going to say—but it cannot be that. Still I came out to the Colonies to join the Church here—

to take the position of organist at St. Paul's, and in leaving Dunedin I seem almost to be leaving my home; but I can assure the clergy and Church people of Dunedin that they can rely upon me never to leave the Church of my fathers. And if God wills that I should ever come back to Dunedin, or if I am spared to visit it again, the Church here will always have from me the support that I have hitherto given it. I thank Mr Cargill for his kind expressions towards my wife and myself, and only hope that if we come back to Dunedin we may be welcomed again as citizens, although we come only upon a visit.

The proceedings then terminated.



Compared to the lives of other members of the family, those of Arthur John and Jessie Towsey, after their return from Europe in 1880, were quite uneventful.

Back in Dunedin, Arthur's life was the usual round of concerts, pupils and occasional charity appearances, until he decided to accept a better employment offer in Christchurch.

One gets the impression that having been through all of this goodbye malarkey just five years earlier, that the good citizens of Dunedin might have thought to themselves, "Okay! You can have another purse of one hundred sovereigns, but don't try this lark a third time." It also seems like everyone concerned was running out of flattering superlatives; getting somewhat bound up in trite rhetoric on the way to surreal religious declarations.

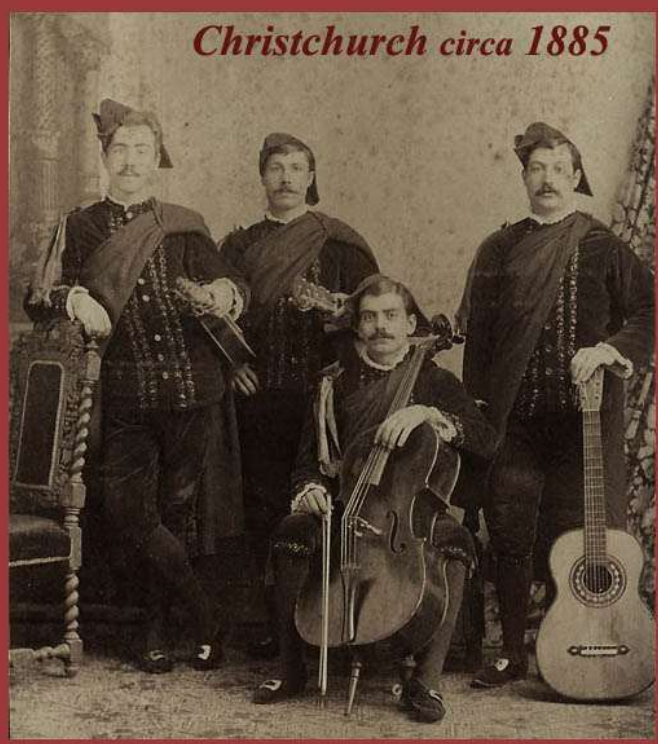
The departure of one of our best known local musicians—Mr A. J. Towsey—for Christchurch will be generally regretted. He has been resident in Dunedin for 18 years, during 16 years of which time he officiated as organist at St. Paul's Church. The post which he has now accepted at St. John's Church, Christchurch, has until lately been filled by Mr Cambridge. The salary offered to Mr Towsey is, I believe, £120 per annum, and there have already been numerous applications for his services as a teacher of music.

**18th October 1884**

*Christchurch N.Z. 1883*



*Christchurch circa 1885*



On 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1885, AJ Towsey was also appointed organist and choirmaster of the Christchurch Choral Association, though he resigned from this post a year later, citing insufficient time to do justice to the job.

Arthur John's youngest sister, Mary Euphrasie Towsey, known as May, arrived in Christchurch from England on 16<sup>th</sup> April, 1886, travelling in 2<sup>nd</sup> class aboard the SS Coptic. You can read about May Towsey on her own Towsey Tale.

The group from Christchurch, above, is probably a Banjo, Guitar and Mandolin Club. Another such club was quite successful in Auckland a decade later.

The photo of Jessy, shows her dressed as a lady of the 18<sup>th</sup> century; a costume in which she attended a ball in Christchurch, raising funds for a particular charity.

Both charity fundraisers and fancy dress balls, were regular features in the life of the Towsey family.



The report below, is of a tourist excursion to the South West coast of the South Island, that had become a regular event each summer. On an earlier trip, Edward Towsey had been the musical director and, in January of 1884, Jessy Towsey had taken the trip, before the family had left Dunedin.

This particular excursion, in January 1888, had amongst the passengers, Arthur John Towsey, his sister May and Arthur's brother William's step-daughter, Elizabeth Jones, who was 20 years old at the time. (see William C Towsey's Towsey Tale for details of her life).

ARRIVED	
Jan. 18—Rotorna, s.s., 576 tons, Neville, from Nelson, Picton and Wellington. Union Steamship Company, agents. Passengers—Misses Wair Gardner, Anderson (2), Neill, Rowan and Stevens, Mesdames Wills, Taylor and Hutson, Rev and Mrs Nightingale, Colonel Bailey, Messrs M'Gowan, Lightband, Turner, Smith, Holmes (2), Hutson, M'Vickar, Harding, Williams, West, Wrightson, Master Grey, and fourteen steerage.	
Jan. 19—Wairarapa, s.s., 1023 tons, Sinclair, from Melbourne, via Hobart and Southern ports. Union Steamship Company, agents. Passengers—Misses Towsey, Ward, Paton, Low, Shewan, Monson, Hall, Mrs Towsey and two boys, Messrs Ross, Rhodes, De Bensson and twenty steerage.	
Jan. 19—Arawa, s.s., 5200 tons, Stewart, from London, via Port Chalmers. National Mortgage and Agency Company, agents.	
SAILED.	
Jan. 19—Elizabeth Graham, barque, 593 tons, Hodge, for London. Jamieson and Malcolmson, agents.	
<b>Lyttleton 19 January 1888</b>	



## EXCURSION TO THE WEST COAST SOUNDS. THE TARAWERA'S FIRST TRIP

The Tarawera, with Captain W. C. Sinclair in command, left Port Chalmers wharf at 5 p.m. on the 11th inst. As she steamed away from the wharf the officers and crew of the R.M.S. Tongariro mustered on the quarter-deck and exchanged three hearty cheers with the excursionists, also firing their guns as a salute. The Bluff was reached at 5 o'clock on the morning of the 12th, and a number of excursionists embarked, the Tarawera taking her departure again at 6.30 a.m. Preservation Inlet was reached at 2.30 p.m., and the vessel steamed slowly up the sound and came to an anchorage in Cattle Cove at 3.30 p.m. The boats were lowered immediately on arrival, and many of the passengers availed themselves of an outing before dinner. The crew gave their first entertainment that evening, and it proved most enjoyable. Friday was wholly spent in pleasure excursions, exploring in steam launch, &c., the weather being all that could be desired, and everyone agreed that a very enjoyable day had been spent. In the evening a dance took place, the poop being tastefully decorated for the occasion. On Saturday morning at 6 o'clock anchor was weighed, and the Tarawera steamed to the head of the sound, returning to Cattle Cove by 9 a.m. Pleasure parties were again organised for the day, the boats being away from the ship by 10 a.m., returning for dinner by 6 p.m. In the evening an excellent concert by the passengers took place, and the amount of talent produced spoke well for future entertainments during the trip. On Sunday morning steam was got up early, and a move made towards Dusky Sound. After reaching the head, she returned to Wet Jacket Arm at 11 a.m. Service was held in the morning by the Rev. Mr. Plant, and in the evening by the Rev. Mr. Francis. On Monday

morning a start was made for Doubtful Sound, but it was found necessary to return to the anchorage at Wet Jacket Arm owing to the bad weather, and she remained there until the following morning. In the evening (Monday) the "Tarawera Minstrels" made their first appearance this year. On Tuesday morning a start was again made for Doubtful Sound, and after steaming through Doubtful and Smith Sounds, the vessel proceeded through Thompson's Sound to George Sound, which was entered at 1.25 p.m. on the 17th. The anchor was let go at 2.35 p.m. All was now excitement on board preparing for the regatta, which took place the same afternoon. The arrangements were carried out by the following gentlemen acting as a committee:—Messrs H. McKenzie, C. F. Taylor, R. Archibald, J. Maloney, Dr Ferguson. Mr H. J. Richardson officiated as starter. The following are the winners of the different events:—

First Race, Passengers v. Officers.—Won by the following crew of officers:—Messrs Anthony, Blanchard, Woods, Arbon, Cunningham (cox).

Second Race, Firemen v. Seamen (Two crews).—Won by sailors. Crew: M'Leanna, M'Kay, Jensen, Nicholson, D. Anderson (cox).

Third Race, Stewards v. Cooks (Three crews).—Won by stewards. Crew: Armstrong, M'Nally, Fitzgerald, Goodward, Swanson (cox).

Fourth Race, Ladies' Race (Three crews).—Winning crew: Misses Rich, Hadfield, Murray, Staples, A. P. Anthony (cox).

Fifth Race, Ship's (Three crews).—Winning crew, sailors: Irvin, Williamson, Charleson, Anderson, Atto (cox).

Sixth Race, Passengers, English v. Australians. Winning crew, English: R. G. Gallop, Viscount Dalrymple, J. H. B. Warner, L. D. Cumiffe, A. F. Anthony (officer, cox).

The Ladies' Race was pulled in grand style, and great excitement prevailed—the three crews finishing within half-a-boat's length of each other. No. 6 race was also very closely contested. On regatta evening (Tuesday) the

regatta ball took place, and during the interval a display of fireworks was given. On Wednesday morning a start was made for Milford Sound, which was entered at 7.45 a.m. In the evening an excellent concert programme was gone through by the passengers, assisted by the crew, and the handsome prizes won at the regatta were distributed by Lady Marsh. At 10 a.m. on the 19th anchor was weighed and the homeward trip commenced. Milford Sound was cleared at 10.55 a.m. and Caswell Sound entered at 2.30 p.m., and after steaming slowly through this sound, the Tarawera passed out to sea at 3.20 p.m., arriving at the Bluff on Friday morning early, where several of the passengers disembarked for the Lakes and Melbourne. Although the weather has not been all that could be wished, the spirits of the passengers were in nowise damped, all entering with great gusto into the amusements provided on board the ship. Milford Sound, owing to the recent rain, was seen at its best; and the Bowen Falls was a sight not easily forgotten.

On Thursday evening Captain Sinclair was presented with an address by the passengers, painted by Mr Madden, of Christchurch; the manuscript work being by Mr Towsey, of Christchurch. The following is a copy of the address:—

To Captain Sinclair, &c., Tarawera.—We the undersigned passengers by the good ship Tarawera during her eleventh excursion to the West Coast Sounds of New Zealand, desire before separating to express our cordial recognition of the continual efforts made by Captain Sinclair and the officers of his ship to promote our comfort and amusement during the voyage. No pains have been spared to render the time which we have passed on board thoroughly enjoyable, and all the arrangements for observing the beautiful scenery have been as complete as possible.

In taking leave of the ship, and while wishing Captain Sinclair and his officers every happiness and prosperity, we hope that circumstances may permit many of us to renew similarly pleasant hours on some future occasion. [Here follow the signatures of the passengers.]

25th January 1888