

Twenty-nine new operas have been produced in Italy in the course of last year. Of these only five were successes. The others proved sheer rubbish.

Not a drop of rain has fallen in the Crimea for four months; all the surface of the earth is a moveable mass of dust, and no winter wheat is yet sown.

The brewers of Melbourne have been considerably "exercised" by some strictures upon the colonial beer of that city, and they have memorialised the Government to appoint a competent permanent inspector, pledging themselves to pay his salary.

Private letters from America announce that the proprietors of the Great Eastern are engaged discussing a most extraordinary proposal. The great ship, it is said, is to be anchored in Philadelphia harbor during the Centennial Exhibition, and to be made a great floating hotel, where 5000 persons can be comfortably accommodated.

The Charleston 'Herald' complains of the withdrawal of advertisements from that paper by publicans in the township, because the members of the 'Herald's' staff are teetotallers.

AMUSEMENTS.

WITH the close of Easter week came the departure of the caterers for the recreation of the public, and the Princes Theatre was thus left in undisputed possession. It is said that it is an Englishman's privilege to growl, and unless of that nationality and determined to assert his right, we defy a patron of the theatre during the past week be otherwise than pleased. The management had promised that there should be a change of programme nightly, and it must be admitted they have not broken faith, for in the space of six nights four plays were presented. On Friday week Miss Howard appeared as Mercy Merrick in the "New Magdalen." As the piece has been played in Dunedin before, and no doubt will be familiar to most of our readers, it may not be necessary to explain the plot. We are not aware by whom the story, originally written by Wilkie Collins, has been dramatised, but the adapter has been singularly fortunate in placing it before the public in such a form as to awaken an interest which commences with the rising of the curtain and never flags to the concluding scene. The heroine of the piece was of course sustained by Miss Howard, and her representation of the dual characters of Mercy Merrick and Grace Roseberry was a most finished piece of acting, and stamps her as an actress of the very highest order. In the scene between the true Grace Roseberry and herself, when she acknowledges her guilt and offers all the atonement in her power, the anguish from which she suffers had a visible effect upon the audience; but when driven to bay, and goaded to desperation by the sneers and taunts of her torturer, she flings all her good resolutions to the winds, braves her rival, and gives full vent to her outraged feelings, the effect was such as sent a thrill through those present by its almost terrible reality. Again, when she sees the woman whom she has wronged, but who has driven her to desperation, about to be dragged to a felon's cell, the nobler and finer feelings of her nature bursts the bonds by which they have been fettered, and by the sacrifice of herself she protects her enemy. In the "New Magdalen" Miss Howard has achieved the greatest success since her advent, there being elicited in its representation powers of a superior order to those exhibited on former occasions. Perhaps the fact that she was better supported by the company than on previous occasions may have much to do with its success. Mr. Keogh enacted the rôle of the eccentric but noble-minded Julian Grey, and although at times somewhat inclined to be stogy, we confess we have never seen him to such advantage. The intended husband of Grace Roseberry was assumed by Mr. Clinton, and, considering the sighing lover is somewhat out of his line, he deserves credit for his rendering of the character. As Lady Janet Roy, Mrs. Stoneham was most successful, and in the scene where she declares that she preferred being cheated by the assumed Grace Roseberry to possessing the hollow heart of the true one, she was deservedly applauded. In the very trifling part allotted to Mr. Musgrave, as the Prussian Surgeon, he was, as he always is, effective, and the minor characters were taken with care.

On Monday and Tuesday evenings the sensational play of "Lady Audley's Secret" was produced, Miss Howard, of course, representing the beautiful but ambitious Lady Audley. Notwithstanding the popularity of Miss Braddon's novel, and the almost unparalleled success which attended its publication, the dramatised version has never been a favorite with the public, but it is only fair to say that it was put on the stage, and the individual characters sustained in a most creditable manner. On Wednesday Miss Howard appeared as Camille in the play of that name. As this was a character in which she was reported to excel, a very large audience mustered upon the occasion, and although the first act passed off without any sign of approbation, in the succeeding ones she amply proved that rumour had but told the truth. In the scene where she consents to sacrifice her own happiness, at the entreaty of the father of her lover, and resign him for ever, the anguish which the struggle cost her was portrayed in a most effecting manner. Although a finished piece of acting throughout, we scarcely consider the Camille of Miss Howard equal to her personation of Grace Roseberry, but perhaps the fault should be charged rather to the character than the actress. As Armand Duval, Mr. Steele is entitled to the highest praise, his impersonation of the devoted and high-minded admirer of the unfortunate Camille being one of the very best characters in which we have seen him. As the Count, Mr. Clinton deserves a word of praise, in conjunction with the rest of the Company. As Gaston, Mr. Keogh had but little to do, but he was effective in it, and made as much of the character as was possible. The despicable part of Madame Prudence was allotted to Mrs. Stoneham, and the greatest praise which can be accorded her is to say that the character as represented by her was the very quintessence of hollow-heartedness, selfishness, and greed.

SIR GEORGE GREY.

SIR GEORGE GREY is all the rage in Auckland for the present. The press is offering him the flattering incense of praise, or rather of adulation to satiety. Yet it is difficult to see how he is to do us much good. When he was Governor he was not, latterly at all events, in very good favor with the people, and some portion of the press, if my memory serve me right, went so far as to hint that he was a little gone in the head. Such was his obstinacy and self-will. The part he played at the commencement and during the progress of that fatal and unnecessary war with the natives, which cost us so much blood and treasure, is it not written in the history of this province and colony. Does it say much for his sagacity as a politician? It would perhaps have been better for the province or the Maori had Sir George Grey never ruled the colony. He has published an address to the people, the burden of which seems to be that he will follow the multitude whithersoever they may lead. He will bow to a majority. No great merit in that. In accordance with this principle accordingly he will set the seal of his approbation to what is usually called the secular system of Government education. Under a Government like ours the will of the majority must prevail, be their decision just and reasonable or unjust and arbitrary. But there are public men of high principle, like Mr. O'Rorke, who will scorn to sanction an unjust principle or measure merely because it pleases a majority. If I judge Sir George Grey's address aright, he is not a man of that stamp. Our present form of Government seems good enough if it were only wisely and honestly administered. Far be it from me to say our present rulers are wanting in wisdom or honesty. But no form of Government will benefit the people if their rulers are destitute of these qualifications. Can Sir George secure us the right men?

CULT.

SIGNS OF ATHEISM AMONG THE EDUCATED PROTESTANT YOUTH OF AUCKLAND.

THE above heading is rather startling, and I hesitate to write it, as it may possibly convey a wrong and unjust impression. But my authority for doing so is as follows:—At the last meeting of the Diocesan Synod Mr. Boardman remarked that "The Bishops and clergy should turn their attention to the great benefit which might be derived from a series of special sermons in the churches in and around Auckland. At present the young men were mostly led by the literature, a great deal of which was of an ephemeral character. They were now told that miracles were pure fictions and myths, that there was no religion except that supplied by sun, moon, and stars, the rocks, and other physical agencies." The Bishop thought the suggestion of Mr. Boardman a very valuable one. The Bishop and Mr. Boardman have long taken great interest in the now apparently dying Young Men's Christian Association. In a former letter I hinted that possibly the kind of literature furnished to the Auckland Protestant young men by this Society's library was not to their mind, and that this might account for their withdrawing their support from it. The Society's literature might not be sufficiently "ephemeral," nor sufficiently imbued with that form of "modern thought" which encourages the notion that miracles are pure fictions, and that there is no religion except mere "physical agencies;" that the idea of God as our Creator, our present witness and future judge, therefore, is an antiquated superstition—fit only for old wives, Papists, and the like to take up their heads with; but quite unworthy of being entertained by young Protestant philosophers of the period. The code of morals in our modern novels is the code in vogue with our fast philosophic youth of "the party of progress." The morality of the New Testament is out of date, especially as regards motives. Am I justified in saying, then, that the young Protestant men of Auckland are becoming Atheists, or are at least in great danger of becoming so from the kind of literature they now like and are furnished with? Perhaps after all Mr. Boardman and the Bishop may be exaggerating the evil. That the evil or danger exists, however, to some extent can hardly be doubted by any one. That the popular or current literature of the day is, to a large extent, unwholesome, and has an irreligious or demoralizing tendency, is but too apparent, in spite of the many good and unobjectionable works which issue from the Press. The Press is an instrument of tremendous power for evil as well as good, as we all know and see. It can be, and is now being, prostituted in a most shocking manner for money-making purposes. Whatever it will pay to write, print, and publish, will be written, printed and published by some, let the consequences or faith and morals be what they may. We have recently had an able and learned attack on Christianity, published by a first-class London house, and supposed to be written by a clergyman. Protestants laugh and sneer at the idea of any supervision of the printing and publishing of books by Catholic Church authority. With them the *Index Expurgatorius*, or list of prohibited books in Rome under the Papal Government, was long a standing joke. But the present licentious and irreligious state of the Protestant Press with the wide-spread lamentable consequences to the faith and morals of the young may now induce them to moderate their mirth, or to doubt if it be well-timed at all. The evil is but beginning. Like most destructive evils, it will in time cure itself, and bring men to see the false pernicious character of Protestant principles. Happily our Catholic youth have some protection against improper books, in the authority of the Church. Catholic schools, libraries, and publishers' shops, are all under clerical supervision. This protection, it is true, is under present circumstances not anything like so perfect as could be wished. Protestants and Catholics are so mixed in society that it is well nigh impossible to keep objectionable books out of the hands of Catholic youth, let parents do what they will. Almost every Catholic youth of either sex can now read. Books of some kind they must and will have,