

Topics of the Week.

SOCIETY'S SAYINGS AND DOINGS.

HOWEVER 'Tory' Lord Glasgow may be, he must admit that the Democratic Government's Agent-General is a man who knows his business. The GRAPHIC London special says that the reception arranged by Mr Percival at the Agent-General's offices was a very decided success. Everything was well done, and while His Excellency the new Governor was visibly gratified at the prompt manifestations of goodwill on the part of Colonials and Anglo-Colonials present. The New Zealanders and others were on their side by no means badly impressed with his Lordship. 'He'll do' seemed to be the universal comment, not elegantly expressed perhaps, but eminently practical. The Hon. W. E. Percival introduced those present to the new Governor, who received them in a most cordial manner, entering freely into conversation upon general matters connected with the colony, and producing a favourable impression upon those who, for the first time, had the honour of meeting his Lordship, who, I understand, leaves England for New Zealand the first week in April. Great interest was shown in the late Dr. Dry's masterpiece, 'The Evergreen,' which was placed in one of the rooms, the work being explained by Mr C. W. Reece.

MR PERCIVAL has undoubtedly scored a point in thus getting together those who have an interest in the colony. He believes that an ambassador should not be an ornament only, but useful. An earnest of this is shown by the opening of an information bureau with a reference library, colonial newspapers, land guides, maps, trade circulars, etc., for the use of those having an interest in, and for those seeking a knowledge of the colony. Mr Percival and Mr Kennaway are always ready and cheerfully afford information to those who wish, and with such representatives New Zealand should be well pleased. A list of those present at Lord Glasgow's at home will be found in the Society Letter from London.



GRAND DUKE OF HESSE.

THE 'Frisco' mail brings pictures and particulars about the Grand Duke of Hesse, whose decease was cabled to the colonies a few weeks back. His death is severely felt by the Queen and other members of the Royal Family, with whom, except for the one brief and unfortunate episode in his career, the dead Prince was very popular. He was not, perhaps, a man of very strong character, but he was a gentle, kindly, liberal-minded, and affectionate man, a devoted father to his children, and a fond husband. The one unlucky incident in his career arose out of his passion for a beautiful and gifted woman, whom he ultimately married in a very secret and not especially dignified way in a private room in the palace at a moment when his august mother-in-law was actually staying with him. The Queen, of course, was greatly incensed and shocked by this affront, and the result was that the marriage was dissolved almost as soon as it had been concluded.

THE marriage with Madame Kolenine was dissolved, and there is an end of the matter. Since that period the Duke's amiability and gentleness of character secured a reconciliation with the English royal family. He was a brave soldier, though I do not think he had any special qualities of generalship. In the struggle between Austria and Prussia for the supremacy in the German Confederation the Grand Duke began by taking the weaker side. He fought for Austria in 1866, but very soon made his peace with Prussia, and in the war of 1870 the troops under his command made some of the most brilliant successes of the campaign. He was a liberal Prince, kindly and progressive, and he shared to the full the interests of his devoted wife, the late Princess Alice, in the intellectual movements of the time.

NELSONIANS were greatly aggrieved over the wet Easter. They did not suffer more than others, but the growls over the wet Sunday were loud and deep because the sun shines 300 days out of the 365—or 366 this year. Nelsonites expect every day to be sunshiny. Lately, however, the weather has been atrocious down that way. Three different steamers took away holiday-makers intent on camping out, picnicking, and other strange pleasures peculiar to holiday-makers. As the only object of a picnic is to take one's meals under the most uncomfortable circumstances, the fact that the sea has been rough, the wind high, and the rain heavy will doubtless have only increased the pleasure of those Nelsonians who ventured 'down to the sea in ships.' The photographing party who set forth with their cameras seeking what they might devour, or rather 'take,' must also have had a pleasant time of it. Altogether, in fact, Nelson is rather disgusted with its weather just at present.

LADY AMATEUR NIGGER MINSTRELS are the latest success in smart society. The idea was exploited the other day in Nelson by Mrs Levien, a very enterprising and most excellent hostess and entertainer. The affair was kept a profound secret, and the guests had no suspicion of what was going forward. They were received with rather more than usual gravity by Mrs Levien, and ushered into a room, half of which was curtained off as if for theatricals. When the curtain rose, however, a regulation minstrel show was seen, the only innovation being that a number of the darkies were of the gentler sex. A more comical sight could not be imagined. The girls looked killingly funny with their black faces and short-skirted frocks. It was utterly impossible to recognise the originals. As may be imagined, the effect on the spectators was electrical—in point of fact the audience laughed till tears ran down their cheeks and their sides ached again.

YET this was but the beginning. The performance itself was excellent, and the merriment continuous. The jokes were new, and the songs, etc., given with spirit. 'Ten Little Niggers,' 'In Old Madrid,' and 'Swanee River,' were the most popular items. Amongst those who took prominent parts were: Tambo, Mr T. Bennett; bones, Mr G. Levien; Messrs Johnson and P. Levien performed on combs, as did Miss Johnson, of Wellington, and Miss Worsp, of Auckland, and Miss Broad undertook the drum and Miss Cohen the piano.

THE interlocutrix or chaperon, a most important part, was taken by Miss Johnson. Her make-up as an old negress was excellent indeed. Solos on bottles were given by Master Levien, and were distinctly clever and greatly appreciated.

EVERYONE enjoyed the function immensely. Amongst the audience were Mrs J. Wood, in black merveilleux; Miss Pitt looked very well in a very pretty gown of cream nun's veiling relieved with green velvet; a Sydney girl. Miss Hosking, was very becomingly frocked in a soft black dress relieved with white; a symphony in heliotrope was worn by Miss Fell, Miss L. Fell being faultlessly dressed in pale blue, the effect being heightened by dark blue velvet

fixings' as a man irreverently called them; Miss Jones affected heliotrope, and the Wanganni Miss Morse black, both being admirably suited; Miss Gibbons' frock was pretty—fawn tweed with brown velvet vest; the hostess was handsomely dressed in black satin.

I HAVE devoted considerable space to this affair because it furnishes ideas for other people. There is always a difficulty to find something fresh in the entertainment line for winter evenings. This seems to me an excellent innovation, and Lady Nigger Minstrela will probably divide the honours with progressive enche parties during the winter.

OVER every town in New Zealand the spirit of dulness reigns supreme. Wellington strove to overthrow this guardian of mediocrity a short time ago by instituting a strike among the tramway men, and for a day or two people did rouse up sufficiently to discuss the grievances, real or imaginary, of the strikers. Their interest and animation soon faded, however, before the discovery that no grievances existed but what might easily have been remedied without resorting to so extreme a measure as a strike; and again the city relapsed into its semi-torpid state. When the strikers found that their attempt to amuse a slumbering public was a signal failure, one would imagine that they would have quietly slunk back to work again until they had hit upon some better plan of exciting interest.

NOT so, however. They have actually spent weeks in loafing round town, hoping all the time that charitably-disposed persons would undertake to procure succour for them and their families by means of concerts and the like. Nor have their hopes been vain. Some small amount of money has been raised in this way, which, added to the strike pay meted out by the Trades' Council, has provided them with pocket money. The various Unions, too, have made a levy on their members, and in addition have instituted a system of begging from their respective butchers, bakers, and grocers. These estimable tradesmen have given with more or less liberality, knowing full well that a refusal will carry in its wake loss of custom, so looked at in this light, the amount of their donations is not by any means commensurate with their sympathy. By the way, 'canvassing' is the term employed by the Unions instead of 'begging.' But it is just as well to call a spade a spade, and to bear in mind whilst ruminating on the lofty character of these ex-tram employes, that they are yet sufficiently humble to accept alms.

THREE weeks have elapsed since the men were called out, and though the strike still continues, five men, to the chagrin of the Council have gone back to work. Were the remaining men more affected by home influence, the strike would not continue for another day, for no one knows better than woman what sufferings are entailed by strikes. She is the victim, woman and her children. No wonder she fails to recognise in the members of the Trades Council the reformers of society, especially of the poor man's home, which they set themselves up to be. What she recognises too surely is, that the Council's reforms act inversely on her happiness, and that when her husband merges his identity in that of the Council she speedily loses the solid comforts to which she has been accustomed.

'VERY little enthusiasm is manifested over the little comet which is now visible,' says a Timaruvian correspondent. 'It can be seen about 4 a.m., but I must confess I have not seen it myself. It is cold in the mornings now, and quite hard enough to get up when one has to. It would need a very good comet to make most of us get up at four, and as this is only a small one, we need not excuse ourselves for not turning out in the cold.'

A PICNIC arranged by the Railway Department from Dunedin to Stewart Island appears to have been a great success. Over a hundred set off 'on pleasure bent' by train to Invercargill, and from thence to the Bluff, where they were taken by the tug to Stewart Island, arriving about eight o'clock. Oban House, kept by Mr Goodall, accommodated about fourteen, and other boarding houses put up the rest. After tea an impromptu concert and dance was held at the Goodall's, the music being supplied by Mr M'Fadyen upon bagpipes. Messrs Findlay and Mitchell (Invercargill) assisted at the concert, also Mr George Leighton (Dunedin). Captain Munro, whose vessel was at the Bluff, gave an excellent recitation.

AN account written of the trip says: 'We had the pleasure of being introduced to the local constable, (who carries an umbrella). Although not kept very busy by the