

subserve, but which require the fostering care of a national legislature and without whose development no agrarian settlement that can be made will be otherwise than imperfect and insufficient. But hope lies in the fact, as we have said, that such resources abound and only require development. Everything is present except the power of good management for which the people are now making their struggle.

AFFAIRS IN
EUROPE.

THE relations between Russia and France which will in all probability be now affected in no light degree by the action of Italy, are described as follows by the *St. James's Gazette*:—"Undoubtedly a change has come over the look of things since the last Three-Emperor conference; especially in one important particular, the relations of Russia and France. We know that an alliance between the two powers has been feared in Germany above all things; but great as the dread may have been and undoubtedly has been, it is not likely that any sudden *rapprochement* was apprehended, France had yet to complete her armament; in Russia, vast as are the Czar's supplies of men and of warlike material, much preparation would be necessary before an alliance with France could be acknowledged; and, therefore, the worst that could be anticipated in Germany were these two things—growth of Russo-French friendship and maintenance meanwhile of the spirit of revenge in France. Now both these things have happened. What the real military strength of France may be is a doubtful matter. The common inference of observers at the recent review of French troops was that the army of the Republic needed much improvement; but the truth is, all the same, that the offensive and defensive power of France has increased. Meanwhile, the Russian Government, by the rapidity and magnitude of its operations in Central Asia, has done much to hold England in check under certain circumstances. And while that has been going on, an increasing disposition to alliance between France and Russia has become manifest, and there has been a distinct revival of the aforesaid spirit of vengeance in the first-named country. In this connection something else has happened which must naturally add to the apprehensions of Germany: General Boulanger's appearance above the horizon. Now this General may be no very tremendous person in himself. He may be a boaster; he may be a mountebank; he may be not much of a soldier; but if, nevertheless, he has created a belief in himself in the French army, if the flare he makes is mistaken by the rank-and-file of that army for another Napoleonic 'star,' then the soldiers of the Republic are supplied with precisely the sort of inspiration which is needed to make them truly formidable. A year ago there was no French general in whom the army had any confidence. Now it possesses such a being, however he may turn out; and the difference is one which the German generals know their business too well to count as nothing. Thus it is that the outlook for Germany has changed for the worse and not for the better since the last Three-Emperors' meeting; and other adverse circumstances come into the reckoning. If the national hostility between the French and the German peoples has increased, so has the national hostility between Russians and Germans. The hatred of the Czar's subjects for the Emperor William's people is at least as deep, though it is not so fierce, as the hatred of the French; and, thanks to M. Katkoff for one, the Russian hatred has been worked upon very considerably of late. Moreover, we have seen the two Governments at loggerheads over the question of expulsion of foreigners from the soil. There is a Russian grievance against Germany (deliberately incurred) in the matter of Russian credit; and altogether it appears certain that whether there has or has not been any approach of Russia to France, there has been repulsion between Russia and Germany." And now, as we have said, there comes in the question of the Italian alliance with Germany, to increase whatever elements of disagreement already existed between that country and France and Russia respectively. Under the circumstances the only thing that seems to point to a hope for the continuance of peace is the fear that a Russo-French alliance would not be strong enough to encounter that now formed. But as to how far the fear of defeat may affect such powers as Russia and France remains to be seen. We confess we have not much faith in the assurance to be derived from it.

AN EXPLANATION. We have received from Hawera two communications relating to the recent election in which Mr. McGuire contested the representation of the district with Major Atkinson. It will be remembered that a week or two ago we made allusion to the contest that had taken place, commenting on a report that was going the rounds of the papers and which attracted a good deal of notice. We did not, however, attribute any particular importance to the matter, and we merely referred to it as a prominent topic that, without being misunderstood, we could hardly allow to pass unnoticed. Our information on the subject was slight, and our reliance on the accuracy of an ordinary report was not particularly strong. We never dreamt of disputing the right of a Catholic priest to advise his people as to how in connection with the education question, which cannot be separated from the

religion whose interests it is the special duty of the priest to promote they should act at the time of an election. Our opinions on this subject are too well known to require any further explanation from us—and if, during the election which has just taken place, we refrained from again repeating and insisting upon them, the reason was not that we had changed them in the slightest degree, but because certain circumstances made us choose for the time a passive part as most conducive to the ends we had in view, and because also we were aware that we had not warned and exhorted the Catholics of the Colony in vain, but that they were as anxious and determined in the matter as we ourselves were, and would not lose sight of their all important object. The report, however, struck us as fair matter for a passing remark or two—and as to anything that was said in the heat of such an encounter we did not look upon it as worthy of serious consideration. Such forgetfulnesses are of constant occurrence and hardly form the subject even of a nine days' wonder. A parliamentary candidate, in fact, may well be allowed some degree of license, and whether he be allowed it or not there is at least abundant precedent to assure us that he will take it. Indeed we could quote some very exalted instances to prove our assertion. Nor are we to suppose that the denunciations of the man whose fortunes hang in the balance really express his mind. We do not believe, for example, that Major Atkinson really considers a large number of his constituents at Hawera to be worse than a lot of dogs. If he did he would be very unfit for the place he now again occupies, and in which, although we cannot say that we have ever regarded him as acting brilliantly, he has always conducted himself respectably. We find, nevertheless, that something more is made of the situation at Hawera than perhaps the circumstances warrant. There are probably misunderstanding and exaggeration, and anything that might serve to increase the prevailing irritation is to be avoided. It is not, therefore, in accordance with prudence that we should throw open our columns to a discussion which is of a somewhat warmer nature than we are accustomed to publish, and more especially it would be out of character with the position we occupy were we to do anything to anticipate the authoritative inquiry which, as we are informed, the people immediately concerned have applied for, and which we are convinced must result in explaining every misunderstanding that may exist and bringing about reconciliation and harmony.

AFROPOS of the attempt that was lately made at Sydney to obtain the release of a prisoner undergoing a life sentence, on the plea that twenty years were supposed to be the period virtually meant by such a condemnation, we learn that a case which

seems deserving of some consideration exists in our own Colony. It appears that there is confined in one or other of our gaols a man named Whitehead, who, twenty-three years ago, was found guilty of murder, but whose sentence was commuted, by the efforts of the late Mr. Bathgate, into one of penal servitude for life. The deed that led to the unfortunate man's conviction was done in a moment of anger, and, so far as such a deed admits of excuse, may possibly be looked upon as excusable. The murdered man had stolen some money that Whitehead, who was his mate, had saved, as the result of years of hard work, and on being discovered threatened the man he had robbed if he dared to complain. A quarrel ensued, and the fatal blow was struck with a tomahawk which the murderer threw violently from him and which took effect in the victim's head. We do not intend to say anything in palliation of murder, and doubtless the case in question received all the consideration demanded by it at the time it was tried. The question, however, arises as to whether, in the long course of years that has passed over, the requirements of justice have not been amply fulfilled, and, more especially, if a understanding exists that a life-sentence, under ordinary circumstances, is to terminate after a certain period has expired. What seems certain is, that cases presenting even worse features than those in which this unhappy man was concerned have been occasionally more leniently dealt with. His punishment has been a heavy one. There are many who, perhaps, would rather choose to die than to drag out such a life. To realise what a man under such circumstances must suffer is more than the imagination can attain to, and we have reason to believe that this unhappy man to whom we allude has not been insensible to the nature of his crime, any more than to the penalties it inflicted on him. There is no reason, again, to believe that the interests of society must be in any way injured by his release. The example given would not be one of a weak or excessive leniency and could produce no ill effects. It is not likely, in fact, extremely unlikely and as certain probably as anything in the life of a human creature can be looked upon beforehand as being—that there would be no repetition of crime on the part of this poor man. What was done by him was done once for all, and arose from no criminal disposition or malignity cherished in cold blood. So far as man is authorised to deal with it, we may claim that it has been dealt with, and the rest lies between the criminal and his God. The case, therefore, is one that recommends itself to merciful considera-