

New Zealand Tablet.

FIAT JUSTITIA.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 1874.

SIR GEORGE GREY'S PETITION.

At last, the question of the destruction of Provincial Institutions in the North Island, is beginning to engage the attention of earnest and able politicians. It may be, indeed, that from the first the Premier's project had received very attentive consideration; but until lately the public had no proof that those best qualified to judge of the policy of the proposed measure, had interested themselves about it. For some time it appeared as if colonists generally had already made up their minds on the subject, and were prepared to acquiesce in the proposals of the Government. An overwhelming majority of the House of Representatives, after a debate remarkable for neither earnestness, ability, nor exhaustive discussion, approved of the principle of Mr. VOGEL's project. The Colonial Press, with but few exceptions, applauded the proposition; and it appeared that the public supported the action of the members of Parliament who constituted the majority, and that the Press very faithfully echoed the sentiments of the people. Nor as yet does there appear to be any change of public opinion on the subject. Still, notwithstanding all this, it was evident that all concerned, with the exception of Mr. VOGEL himself and a few enthusiastic centralists, were not moved by fiery zeal in the cause of the destruction of some of our old and familiar Institutions. In fact, there did not appear to be any strong feeling or even conviction on the subject, or much care how it fared with Provincial Governments. People, it seemed, were well enough content to endure the present arrangement, and at the same time not at all adverse to a change in the direction proposed by Government. There was a great deal of indifference and not a little apathy.

Sir GEORGE GREY's petition has changed all that. An expression of opinion from such a quarter, particularly when it is surrounded, as in the present instance, by circumstances which show the depth of his conviction, cannot but arrest public attention, move it powerfully, and concentrate it on the consideration of this question. Sir GEORGE has been twice Governor of this Colony, once of South Australia, and once of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope; and his administration of these Colonies has been marked by great ability and success, and afforded abundant proof that he possesses the statesman's talent in a very high degree. His Petition has, consequently, fallen like a bomb in our midst, and roused thinking men, qualified to discuss the question of Provincial Institutions, to study it more earnestly than heretofore. The question may be said to have entered on a new phase. Indifference is at an end, and apathy is no longer possible.

That portion of the Press which belongs to the party in power, or is under its influence, has already sounded the note of alarm; and is busily engaged in endeavouring to weaken the force of Sir GEORGE's strongly pronounced opinion, by not only insinuating but actually saying that his opposition to the Government Scheme arises from the fact, that our political system acknowledges him for its parent. It is his work, it is said, and he is naturally prepossessed in favour of his own work. This is not the way to deal with Sir GEORGE GREY's petition. In this document Sir GEORGE argues the question, and sensible men, whilst rejecting as impertinent the suggestion that one of his age, experience, character, and known ability, would take the solemn and responsible course of forwarding to the proper quarter and publishing this petition, will weigh well his reasons, and will, although they had already resolved to support Mr. VOGEL's project, readily make up their minds to reconsider the question. Nor can it be doubted that the independent Press will follow such good example. There is a conflict of arguments, there are strong reasons for and against, and nothing we think would tend more to help to a safe conclusion than a conflict of dispassionate argumentation in the newspapers. The question is a very important one for the Colony, and prejudice, partizanship, and predilection should be discarded.

We don't know if we can contribute much, if indeed anything, calculated to give much light on the point. It has always appeared to us, and indeed it does so still, as

something akin to the absurd to have nine or ten Parliaments and Executives, for three hundred thousand people. Still, we must admit there is another side of the picture well worth looking at. Local self-government is a matter of the very greatest importance, and it is a question whether if the country be parcelled out into counties, or groups of counties, local self-government, considering our population and circumstances, can be secured at all without multiplying and aggravating the evils at present arising from Provincial Governments. At all events it is unwise to take a leap in the dark, and colonists ought to have sound reasons for the proposed change, before exchanging the evils they know for others that may not unlikely be very much greater. The experiment made of a County in Westland, does not afford much encouragement in this direction. Then again, Provincial Institutions should not be regarded as intended merely for our day, and the management of the affairs of three hundred thousand people; the Colony is growing rapidly in everything that goes to make a great nation, and those who may come after us, will, not improbably, bestow on us scant thanks, should we give up local self-government, for squandering their inheritance at a time when the efforts of other peoples to obtain this great blessing should have been a warning to us to cling the more to such a desirable and necessary possession.

There is to be considered also the legal and constitutional question raised by Sir GEORGE GREY. The destruction of Provincial Institutions is *ultra vires*. It is a question which cannot be decided at Wellington; the Imperial Parliament alone can cause Provincial Governments to cease to exist; and ultimately the battle will have to be fought in St. Stephen's. No doubt an expression of opinion by the Parliament of this Colony will not be without its weight in the Parliament of the Empire; but as Sir GEORGE GREY suggests, our own little Parliament ought not to pronounce an opinion in favour of repealing any part of the law which gave New Zealand its present constitution without first appealing to the constituencies. This has been our opinion from the first, and we are glad to find ourselves in accord on this point with so high an authority as Sir GEORGE GREY.

STILL BADLY IN WANT OF A MASON.

THE 'Otago Guardian' is in a sad state of mind about the POPE; and should our contemporary fail to persuade its New Zealand friends that His Holiness is or has been a Freemason, it is to be feared that its Editor will lose his senses. In its issue of the 30th ult., this journal endeavours to rehabilitate itself, and establish by newspaper evidence, and reasoning! a statement made by it some time ago, to the effect that PRUS IX., was a Freemason, a statement which we then proved to be a calumny. At the time, we laughed at the folly and credulity of our sapient contemporary, and pointed out the mistake into which it fell, even in reference to the POPE's Christian name. In last Saturday's issue, the 'Guardian' returns to the charge, and names several European newspapers which have given currency to the stupid story.

Our contemporary says "Home papers now to hand confirm the statement that MASTAI FERETTI, alias POPE PRUS IX., has been expelled from the Order of Freemasons. In the 'Bath Express,' 'County Herald,' and 'North Wilts Guardian,' of August 1st, there appears the following paragraph: 'The grand lodge of Palermo has expelled Brother JOHN MASTAI FERETTI from all the rights and privileges of Freemasonry, for unmasonic conduct to the extent of perjury, and breach of his Masonic obligations.'" The 'Belfast Weekly News' is also quoted to the same effect, and the official Masonic paper at Cologne, the 'Guardian' tells us, without however giving the name of this official paper, "says that 'A man named MASTAI FERETTI &c. * * * * has now cursed his former brethren, and excommunicated all members of the order of Freemasons. * * * The charge against him was first preferred in his lodge at Palermo, in 1865, * * * but not pressed until he urged the Bishops of Brazil to act aggressively against the Freemasons.'"

What an absurd story all this is! In the first place the statements of these newspapers are worth no more than that of the 'Guardian' itself, which is utterly valueless. It is one newspaper repeating the gratuitous statements of another, just as in the case of the forged speech attributed to Bishop STROSSMAYER, which went the round