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New Zealand Tablet.

FIAT JUSTITIA.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 6, 1875.

WHAT IT AMOUNTS TO.

COLONISTS now know the nature of the measure for the abolition of the Provinces. The Government proposes to go beyond the resolutions of last session, which only affirmed the desirability of putting an end to the Provincial form of Government in the North Island. In the Bill submitted to Parliament last week, provision is made for superseding Provinces in both Islands, and for concentrating the entire Government of the country in Wellington.

The local institutions which the various Provinces of the North Island have been recently unable to maintain out of local revenue, are henceforward to be maintained by the colony at large. This means, of course, that this island shall supply the deficits of the Northern Exchequers. It does not appear, however, to be necessary for this purpose, that we should be deprived of our local legislatures, unless it be thought that the removal of these legislatures will render the process of transferring Southern funds to Northern institutions somewhat less striking, less odious, and less likely to attract public attention and excite public indignation, than would otherwise be the case.

The Bill is very elaborate in reference to the Crown lands. The revenue arising from these is to be entirely localised. The General Government proposes to hand over to local bodies, such as Municipalities, Road Boards, and Shire Councils, all local rates, even licenses, to supplement these from general revenue with £1 for £1; and to pay Provincial debts and other liabilities, to support schools, and to build branch railways, &c., out of the proceeds of land sales. *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.* It is too good to be true. Let such as may be tempted by this bait bear in mind the breach of faith as to the capitation allowance. The promise was made by Government, and indeed enacted into law that this should be forty shillings per head, but the next year saw it reduced to fifteen. The arrangement proposed as to the disposal of the land revenue would not survive two sessions after the passing of the Bill. A year or two at most, and the localising of this revenue would be a thing of the past. In a very short time the patriotic centralisers of Otago and Canterbury would have the satisfaction of seeing magnificent harbours of refuge provided at such places in the North Island, as New Plymouth for example, out of the proceeds of land sales in these Southern Provinces. It may be, too, though we sincerely pray it may not, that these gentlemen would have the consolation of feeling, in a highly patriotic glow of exultation, that their waste lands have fortunately enabled the colony to bear, without much pressure, the expenses of another native war.

This may be all quite right, as it should be. On this point we do not care just now to give an opinion. But nothing is clearer to us than that this is precisely what the Provinces Abolition Bill amounts to. It is a serious matter, however, for the inhabitants of these Provinces. There is not much in common between them and their Northern brethren, their interests, except in a few matters, do not seem to be altogether identical, and there are grounds for fearing that financial arrangements will engender lamentable misunderstanding between them. It would be better, now that a crisis has arisen, to sever the connection of the two Islands, and establish two Provinces united by a slight federal bond, than carry this sweeping and most dangerous measure.

Under such an arrangement as this every cause of bickering and jealousy would be removed, each island would have the entire control of its own resources, would have its own destiny in its own keeping, and shall no longer be at the mercy of men whose interests or prejudices would be a standing menace to its well-being. It may be said that this Island has nothing to fear, inasmuch as its population is greater, and its representatives more numerous than those of the North Island. But what security is there that this relative proportion will continue many years. Then it is not so certain that if an accurate census of the Maoris were taken, the balance of population is in our favour, and that it may not soon be necessary to increase the number of native representatives. Besides, the North Island possesses more than a counterbalance to any superiority in our part in having the Seat of Government at Wellington. Every one capable of judging on such a subject knows what an advantage this possession is already to the other island, but should the Ministerial Bill become law, the influence of Wellington must become enormous. The Legislative Assembly will be in session there for at least six months every year, and when it is borne in mind that Wanganui, Napier, and even Auckland will soon be united with it by railway, and that none of these places are more than two hundred miles apart, it must be evident that Canterbury and Otago, indeed all this island, with the exception of Nelson and Marlborough, would be placed at an immense disadvantage, and unable to exercise a due influence in either legislation or administration. The Government of the colony must practically fall into the hands of the gentlemen in the North, who will not fail to provide handsomely for themselves, unless indeed more be expected from human nature than experience warrants.

History teaches no lesson more emphatically than this: that Islands, no matter how rich in natural resources, or how large, that are deprived of local legislation and government, soon fall into comparative poverty and dependence. Ireland is a striking case in point, so is Sicily, so is Sardinia. In every one of these instances, the loss of independence, has been followed by absenteeism, the decadence of manufactures, decay of agriculture, and dependence on the foreign State and government. These Islands thus deprived of their local Governments, are regarded as mere draw farms where the rich and educated and fashionable are not supposed to reside, so far are they removed from Court, from the centre of political life, and from the stirring current of the events that interest the world. England is a foreign country to Ireland, although at one point they are only a few miles apart. Italy is a foreign country to both Sicily and Sardinia, and if the people of this Island part with local self-government, if they descend to the position of an appenage of the North Island, they will soon find themselves in the position of foreigners, in relation to the Empire Island. Whilst the population is small, the towns comparatively insignificant, and large fortunes not yet realised by many, this may not take place; but it is the inevitable outcome of a state of things, such as the Provinces Abolition Bill contemplates, and may not be delayed as long as some may imagine. What makes caution the more necessary is, that the contemplated change is of such a character, that, once effected, it will be morally impossible to undo it. We have been always convinced that there are too many little Parliaments, but are equally convinced that only one would be a still greater evil. One, however, for each Island, is recommended by nature herself, by policy, history, and statesmanship.

But there is another reason, and a very strong one it is, for our opposition to this Abolition Bill. It is destructive of popular rights, and tricky. Provinces are not, in reality, to be abolished, they are to continue: neither are Superintendents to be abolished: and, in truth, the Bill