

## The Weekly British Colonist

Wednesday, September 28, 1870.

## The New Constitution.

The new, or as he facetiously terms it, "sixty-nine Constitution," has formed the subject of two leading articles in our contemporary's columns in the course of five days, and in both instances the writer has gone after the local Government without gloves. Now, we believe in the severest castigation of official wrong-doing under the present constitution, the pen being really the only weapon in the hands of the people; but it is always well to ascertain first where the blame really lies, as indiscriminate and undeserved attack is calculated to blunt the weapon. In so far as the blame for the inexcusable delay which has taken place in preparing and promulgating the new Constitution is concerned, we are disposed to believe that in its chief, if not wholly, at the door of the Colonial Office. The Bill empowering the Queen, by Order in Council, to confer a new Constitution upon British Columbia only came up for a second reading on the 18th of July, upon which occasion the Colonial Minister was taken to task for the delay which so important a measure had experienced, it having been introduced in May last! From these facts three things must be tolerably clear: Governor Musgrave must have placed the matter in the hands of Her Majesty's Government with considerable promptitude; the Bill could barely have passed through Parliament before prorogation, on the 10th August; and therefore, assuming that Her Majesty in Council gave the subject immediate attention, it is very probable, there has been barely time for the new constitution to reach the Colony. Now, one must assume ignorance of all these facts on the part of our contemporary, in order to justify his repeated attacks upon the local Government thereon. Let us do this for the 24th of August he informed his readers of the fact that the Bill only came up for a second reading on the 18th of July, although it had been introduced in May. Under all the circumstances it is scarcely fair, it is not even honest, on the part of our contemporary to be continually abusing the local Government for the non-appearance of the new constitution. The delay is undoubtedly aggravating, especially to an ardent politician mounted by a feeling of insecurity; but it is, after all, nothing new. It is only one of the ordinary concomitants of Downing-Street rule, and certainly does not possess the character of novelty in this community. So far as the cardinal provisions of the new Constitution are concerned, they have long-since been indicated in these columns, with a considerable degree of clearness, and our contemporary has, himself, been enabled to take its dimensions with a sufficient degree of accuracy to feel justified in christening it the "sixty-nine Constitution." It is rather inconsistent, therefore, to profess such an accurate knowledge of the new Constitution as to warrant unmeasured condemnation of it, and, at the same time, affect so much ignorance of it as to justify his constant abuse of the Government for keeping the country wholly in the dark. But the eccentricities of our contemporary, dealing with the new or sixty-nine Constitution, take a wider and even more pronounced form. In his earlier articles he denounced it as evil and only evil, calculated to deprive the people of the right to manage their own affairs to a great extent as now, and appealed to the colonists to scornfully reject it as an insult to their manhood. No longer ago than Saturday, he alluded to it in similar terms of unqualified condemnation; and yet he concludes his leading article of yesterday by asserting that if registered residential manhood were made the qualification of the electors in the new Constitution, all would be satisfied, and every interest would be represented! What! The "sixty-nine Constitution" satisfies all, and enables every interest to be represented! So our contemporary, after all his abuse of the new Constitution, on account of the smallness of the representation it proposes giving to the people and the predominating and dangerous power it would give the Government, the legislature, now thinks it will satisfy everybody if only the qualification for electors—a matter to which he referred a few days ago, as a trifling detail, a purely stereotyped detail which a pair of scissors and a solicitor could readily supply—is in accordance with his dictum! So this monster grievance has been reduced to a mere matter of stereotyped detail. Well; there is some satisfaction in being assured that all is serene so far. We must, however, be permitted to dissent from this view. That the new Constitu-

tion is such as, in every other respect, will satisfy all and enable every interest to be fairly represented, we utterly and emphatically deny; but that it may answer the purposes of a more transition state, a step from the chrysalis to the full-fledged state, we admit. A word about this franchise, which now forms the sole difficulty, and respecting which our contemporary has so terribly exercised for several weeks. A little examination will show that the colonists have not been left to grope in absolute darkness on this point. The message with which His Excellency opened the last session of the Legislative Council contained a pretty clear intimation that the British residents of the colony would be invited to elect a majority of the members to compose the new Council; and that intimation, taken in conjunction with semi-official utterances made by His Excellency, leaves little or no room to doubt that the very franchise which our contemporary so earnestly recommends in his issue of yesterday will be the qualification for voters at the next election. Nor can we well conceive that he, himself, is really ignorant of these facts—holds any other opinion. To baffle official minding without gloves becomes especially the duty of a public journal under such a system of Government as ours here. A free and independent press constitutes almost the sole channel through which popular sentiment can be made to reach the Executive. The press is a great power when properly directed; but in order to be powerful, it must be conducted with justice, moderation, and decency. This duly balancing about the new Constitution with which the Colony is to be carried into the Dominion is extremely annoying; and no one would be more disposed than the present writer to animadver in the severest terms, upon the conduct of the Governor, were we satisfied that the blame rested with him. But, believing as we do, that the delay is a piece of the ordinary Colonial-Office policy we cannot see that any good end is to be served by calling the Governor and his Executive officers names.

**REPUBLICANISM IN ENGLAND.**—A good deal has lately appeared in our telegraphic reports respecting certain Republican demonstrations in England; but it is a circumstance worthy of remark that these accounts are all traceable to one source—the New York World's special London correspondent, who can estimate, there has been barely time for the new constitution to reach the Colony. Now, one must assume ignorance of all these facts on the part of our contemporary, in order to justify his repeated attacks upon the local Government thereon. Let us do this for the 24th of August he informed his readers of the fact that the Bill only came up for a second reading on the 18th of July, although it had been introduced in May. Under all the circumstances it is scarcely fair, it is not even honest, on the part of our contemporary to be continually abusing the local Government for the non-appearance of the new constitution. The delay is undoubtedly aggravating, especially to an ardent politician mounted by a feeling of insecurity; but it is, after all, nothing new. It is only one of the ordinary concomitants of Downing-Street rule, and certainly does not possess the character of novelty in this community. So far as the cardinal provisions of the new Constitution are concerned, they have long-since been indicated in these columns, with a considerable degree of clearness, and our contemporary has, himself, been enabled to take its dimensions with a sufficient degree of accuracy to feel justified in christening it the "sixty-nine Constitution." It is rather inconsistent, therefore, to profess such an accurate knowledge of the new Constitution as to warrant unmeasured condemnation of it, and, at the same time, affect so much ignorance of it as to justify his constant abuse of the Government for keeping the country wholly in the dark. But the eccentricities of our contemporary, dealing with the new or sixty-nine Constitution, take a wider and even more pronounced form. In his earlier articles he denounced it as evil and only evil, calculated to deprive the people of the right to manage their own affairs to a great extent as now, and appealed to the colonists to scornfully reject it as an insult to their manhood. No longer ago than Saturday, he alluded to it in similar terms of unqualified condemnation; and yet he concludes his leading article of yesterday by asserting that if registered residential manhood were made the qualification of the electors in the new Constitution, all would be satisfied, and every interest would be represented! What!

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