

which I find quoted as if from my letter, but which I beg to say I never used; and also that I have said or insinuated that your letter should be treated with either suspicion of your motives or doubt of your capacity. What I did say was this, as you will find if you will refer again to the concluding sentences of my letter:—"I have little doubt that if I were to raise such a frivolous plea in one of the Courts of this city, in the event of my being called upon to show cause for not fulfilling my duty under the Act in the case of an emigrant who happened to be father-in-law of any person whatsoever in the colony, that I could only expect it to be treated with either suspicion of my motives or doubt of my capacity." I need hardly say it is impossible to imagine that such a sentence could have the very remotest reference to you.

I have, &c.,

I. E. FEATHERSTON,

Agent-General.

The Hon. the Premier.

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No. 141.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the Hon. the PREMIER.

7, Westminster Chambers, Victoria Street, Westminster, S.W.,

12th May, 1875.

SIR,—

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 4th instant, in reply to mine of the 28th April.

2. I have carefully re-considered the whole subject, and I adhere to my declaration that it is absolutely impossible I could have been guilty of addressing a communication of an intolerably disrespectful nature to the Government without having the least intention or consciousness of exhibiting disrespect. I also repeat my positive disclaimer of having entertained any such sentiment towards the Government.

3. In order to justify the terms of a telegram, sent from Wellington last month, which imputes the offence of intolerable disrespect towards the Government to me, you refer to a marginal note on the copy of the original despatch addressed to me, and now in my office, which, at your own request, I unhesitatingly placed in your hands, in order to enable you to consider the terms of your reply to my letter defending myself against that charge. I do not presume to characterize your conduct in referring in an official despatch to my private memoranda on an official document addressed to myself, and placed by me with full and honourable confidence in your hands, except by saying that I believe it would be difficult to find a precedent for such a proceeding in official intercourse. I might have erased the original memorandum you refer to before placing the document in your hands, for it formed no part of its official substance. I might have sent you a copy of the despatch, and such would certainly have been the more strictly correct course in regard to a paper duly recorded in my office. But, having placed the paper as it stood in your hands, I could not have conceived that you would look among my first crude impressions, jotted down as I read the despatch, for material to justify the judgment of the Government, communicated in such an unusual manner, on the character of my reply to that despatch. It may be that the course of making such memoranda on official papers is open to objection. It is, however, for Ministers and heads of departments, through whose hands a multiplicity of papers on very various business, sometimes with great rapidity, passes, far from unusual. When you once casually spoke to me on this point, you may remember I told you I had just received a despatch from Wellington, in which the somewhat scathing epithet "nonsense" was no less than five times written opposite the suggestions of one particular report, in the handwriting, as I believe, of the Minister; and with the intention no doubt of giving me a broad hint that I was not expected by the department to pay any very particular attention to the recommendations in question.

4. On referring to your original despatch, I find that the words "absolutely absurd" are written opposite a sentence quoted by you from the report of Messrs. Bathgate, Strode, and Hocken, on the ship "Scimitar." This sentence, which you insert in inverted commas, is, "The children should be messed together by themselves." Therefore the phrase cannot be said even to colour the charge of intolerable disrespect to the Government. It was not applied to anything the Government had said or done. In your own remarks upon this suggestion of the Commission, you say that you doubt whether such an arrangement would prove to be "in all cases practicable." But you leave it to my consideration whether "such an arrangement might not be made at all events in ships conveying a large number of children." My belief was, and is, that the arrangement would prove to be impracticable, or, if practicable at all, most costly; and I set forth my reasons with that degree of detail which it seemed to me your recommendation of the subject to my consideration required. In your letter now under reply you return to the topic, and say that "The practice of having a separate mess for children, so far as first-class passengers are concerned, exists in the best steam lines; and both in respect of the nature of the food and the means of cooking it, the plan is at once a boon to the children and a convenience to the parents." I do not doubt that in a Cunard, or in a Peninsular and Oriental steamer with first-class passengers, whose children are attended by their own nurses or other servants, and where there is besides a large staff of attendants on board, a children's mess may be all that you describe it. But I think that you will find that it has not been found practicable to make such an arrangement for the steerage passengers, even with the spacious accommodation and ample stewards' staff of the great Atlantic steamers. You must remember, besides, that the reason why you commended the suggestion to my consideration was, that it had frequently been brought under your notice "that the children suffer from the ignorance of the parents in improperly cooking the food, or in diverting to their own purposes the farinaceous articles of diet." Now amongst the most deserving emigrants to New Zealand are young married couples with two or three small children. I did not believe that women of that class, accustomed to nurse their own children, could with advantage be replaced in their charge; and I believe that the greater the number of children, the greater would be the difficulty and expense of organising such a system, especially if I am to take into account your illustration of what