

4. Since your appeal to the people of New Zealand, I feel myself justified in saying that I believe the general opinion in the colony is, that the Government have displayed great forbearance; and it is well known that personally I have endeavoured to stand between you and much indignation which has been expressed.

5. It is needless for me to remark upon the disrespectful tone of the letter to which I am now replying; and I hope you will not consider it necessary to continue this correspondence.

I have, &c.,

The Agent-General for New Zealand.

JULIUS VOGEL.

No. 14.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the Hon. the MINISTER for IMMIGRATION.

(No. 369.)

7, Westminster Chambers, Victoria Street, Westminster, S.W.,
10th June, 1875.

SIR,—

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of 16th March, No. 87, transmitting copies of the Immigration Commissioners' report, and certified list of births and deaths on the voyage of the ship "Oamaru," which arrived at Port Chalmers on the 17th February.

2. Having regard to the several occasions, during the past year, in which the outbreak of infectious diseases among children on board ship has been attributed to negligent inspection before embarkation, or has been connected with inadequate dietary or defective sanitary arrangements, I think it my duty to submit a few observations on the report of the Immigration Commissioners concerning the cases of scarlet fever which occurred on board this ship.

3. The Commissioners report that two cases of scarlet fever, both being in one family, occurred on the 5th February, only twelve days before the ship arrived at Port Chalmers, and after it had been no less than sixty-six days at sea. They further state that they "found everything on board in first-rate order, the several compartments being well fitted and scrupulously clean;" the ship, "on her first voyage," "expressly built for the New Zealand trade, furnished with every improvement calculated to promote the health and comfort of passengers, her 'tween-decks being lofty and well ventilated." They say "the energy and skill" of the captain and surgeon-superintendent "cannot be too highly commended," in regard to the measures which "they at once took to stamp out the disease on board." I recapitulate all these circumstances in the words of the report, because I think, when considered collectively, they amount to proof positive that no possible precaution, no care in previous inspection, no completeness of sanitary arrangements and appliances, can be absolutely relied upon to prevent an outbreak of this terrible malady among the children on board an emigrant ship any more than among the children in a country village. I do not doubt that if these cases of scarlatina had appeared within twelve days after the ship sailed from England, instead of within twelve days before she anchored off New Zealand, you would, and not at all unnaturally, have thought it your duty to draw my attention to the circumstance, and to express a doubt whether sufficient precaution had been taken in the way of previous medical inspection to prevent a family, in which were evidently the seeds of this terrible infection, from being embarked. The period of incubation of scarlet fever is ordinarily reckoned off fourteen days, and, taking even the hypothesis of its outbreak twelve days after the ship left England, I venture to say that no medical inspection, however minute, could detect the germs of the disease in so early a stage. But on what hypothesis can its outbreak after nearly seventy days at sea be accounted for? One hypothesis occurs to me as barely possible—that clothing not worn by the children until that stage of the voyage may have contained the seeds of infection; but I must say, in stating it, that I think this hypothesis highly improbable. I think, if the origin of the malady could possibly be traced in this way, that the Commissioners and surgeon-superintendent would not have failed to notify their opinion that such was the result of their inquiry into the immediate history of the case. On the other hand, if, as I prefer to believe, the disease was spontaneously generated, in a way for which the present state of scientific knowledge does not enable us to account, it must be admitted, I think, that all the arrangements and appointments of the ship were most carefully calculated to avert, humanly speaking, the very possibility of such a misfortune. I do not remember to have ever read a report in which such unreserved and unqualified praise was given to all the *materiel* and *personnel* of a ship, considered from a sanitary point of view. I think, when you consider all the circumstances of this case, in connection especially with your predecessor's letter concerning the outbreak of the same malady on board the ships "Scimitar" and "Mongol" last year, you will recognize the fact that, although no doubt previous medical inspection cannot be too vigilant, yet that no human care or skill can have more than a limited operation in coping with a danger so extraordinarily subtle. The "Oamaru" is not indeed the only case among our ships in which an outbreak of infectious disease has occurred during the voyage at a distance of time, after the sailing of the ship, such as to render it impossible to believe that even the most remote initial stage of the malady had commenced on shore. In Dr. Eccles's reply to the charges made against him in connection with the case of the "Scimitar" (appended to my letter of 23rd December, No. 2002, on that subject), he mentions such an epidemic as having arisen in the course of one of the voyages of the "Atrato." "She lay at Plymouth," he says, "several weeks, was carefully inspected, and no disease found in any of her people. Yet, thirty days after she sailed from Plymouth, and had doubled the Cape of Good Hope, an epidemic of contagious disease broke out, and there were thirty-six deaths." I would, in conclusion, very earnestly submit for your consideration that it should be an urgent instruction to the Immigration Commissioners, in any such cases as may in future arise, to make the history of the origin of the contagion a subject of minute and exhaustive inquiry. I believe that such inquiry might lead to scientific results of great public value.

I have, &c.,

I. E. FEATHERSTON,

The Hon. the Minister for Immigration, Wellington.

Agent-General.