

SESS. II.—1879.
NEW ZEALAND.

LETTER FROM SIR JULIUS VOGEL, K.C.M.G., RELATIVE
TO HIS POSITION AS AGENT-GENERAL.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W., 18th April, 1879.

I observe certain statements which have been made in the House of Representatives, which imply that some improper understanding existed between me and the late Government on the subject of my holding the office of Agent-General, or exchanging it for some other appointment.

I feel myself, in consequence, called upon to state in exact terms the position in which I stood to the late Government, in respect to my appointment as Agent-General.

When the news of Dr. Featherston's death reached the colony I was the head of the Government, and, as Premier, I offered the appointment of Agent-General to Mr. Stafford. It is unnecessary for me to vindicate Mr. Stafford's fitness for the appointment. He declined to accept it on the ground, principally, that he did not intend visiting England until after the expiry of at least a year. I left Mr. Stafford with no sort of ulterior understanding. Subsequently the appointment was offered to me by the Government that succeeded mine. There was no secret at the time that when I resigned the office of Premier there was an understanding that I would be offered the office of Agent-General, but no binding arrangement was made, as, indeed, the incoming Government subsequently showed themselves to be sensible of.

That Government, when they offered me the appointment, limited the period to even a shorter one than I contemplated, for reasons which had no place in my mind.

I had supposed that it would not suit me to continue for longer than eighteen months. But when the Government came to discuss the question, it seemed there was an opinion in the Cabinet that after twelve months the office might be altogether abolished, and the offer of the appointment to me was strictly limited to that period, not to suit my convenience, and not to leave the office open for a substitute, but in order to open the way to a change of constitution of the department. This was stated to me in the following words:—"The Government understand that you would not be disposed to accept the appointment for more than a limited time, and this will suit the views of the Government, as they do not wish to make a definite appointment for more than one year, in order that there may be no obstacle to change being made in the constitution of the office, should it be desirable."

After I had acted as Agent-General some little time, I intimated to the Government that it would suit me to hold the position permanently. About the same time I asked permission to act on the Board of a public company, following the precedent set by the late Agent-General, who, when he asked permission, was granted the same. To this I received no definite reply, and as I subsequently recalled my intention of joining the company there was no need of one. On the 8th of August, 1877, I received a telegram from Major Atkinson, which, though marked confidential, I considered official. It appears that Major Atkinson did not so intend it, and it may be a moot point if I am entitled to take my own view of its character. But, at all events, I am justified in saying of it that which has been publicly stated—viz., that it was an invitation to me to state whether I would prefer continuing Agent-General or to have the agency for inscription of stock, with a commission. No reference was made to Mr. Stafford or to any one else. The object of the telegram seemed to be to ascertain my wishes. There is no reason why I should not give you my reply. It was as follows:—"Atkinson, New Zealand. Take agency if include new loans and conversion old loans, my commission not less one-eighth; and immediate consent act as director. Otherwise continue Agent-General, but hope allow me be director. See letter 27th June. Important immediate consent. Reply. If change, hope you announce as promotion like represent colony Paris Exhibition."

I received no reply to this telegram, and my position as Agent-General has never been defined. So that the position is that my appointment is permanent under the Governor's warrant, the Government not having determined at the end of the year to alter the constitution of the office.

From this recital of facts it will be seen that, on being asked I expressed, my preference for the Inscription Agency, on certain conditions. There was no understanding with me beyond what I have stated, and I am at a loss to see that any objection could be taken to my appointment to a position which my knowledge of the business to be dealt with rendered me, I venture to say, capable of filling satisfactorily. Not holding office in the Cabinet, there could be nothing improper in my communicating with the Government on the subject of my appointment.

During the two years I have held my present office I have entirely abstained from any interference in New Zealand politics. It has appeared to me that this abstinence was a duty inseparable from the position I held as Agent-General. After such a period of inaction, the occasion seems to me to be suitable to explicitly declare that, when I resigned the Premiership, I felt I had not sufficient health and strength to discharge its onerous duties, whilst I was impressed with the conviction that I could occupy the position of Agent-General with advantage to New Zealand. I was not willing to bind myself to hold the appointment beyond a period of eighteen months; but I felt that, even if I ceased to be Agent-General, I could be of service to the colony.

As the remarks which have been the occasion of this letter were uttered in Parliament, I have to ask you to be so kind as to cause it to be placed before the Legislature.

I have, &c.,
JULIUS VOGEL,
Agent-General.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary, Wellington.

By Authority: GEORGE DIDSBURY, Government Printer, Wellington.—1879.