

the mother-country saves a very large sum by the change from a subsidy to payment on letters by the ounce. Still it may be contended that whatever the mother-country saves by the change, be it little or much, can confer no right on the colonists to have their letters carried across America for nothing, or at the expense of the mother-country.

But, even if we take this to be conceded on the part of the colonies immediately concerned—viz., New South Wales and New Zealand—it must be apparent that, previously to their being required to meet any claim accruing to the mother-country in this way, some account should be rendered to them on which it might be discovered how large a contribution (if any be claimable at all) should be made by each to meet the loss in equitable proportions.

No such statement of account is even attempted in the letter of Lord John Manners, or in any other letter, so that the colonists are invited to accept a proposal, whilst left utterly in the dark as to the merits of the case on which that proposal purports to be based. The unreasonableness of this course seems also to have struck Sir Michael Hicks Beach, as appears by the communication he has addressed through Mr. Bramston to the Treasury, before even forwarding the Treasury proposals for the consideration of the Agents-General. Howsoever it may be entertained by other colonies, the Agent-General cannot but protest against it on the simple ground that if enforced, as apparently intended, it would work as unjustly as injuriously to the interests of the colony he has the honor to represent. It would be compelling a colony, which is admitted to be in no wise directly or indirectly involved in the alleged deficit, to recoup to the mother-country by far the largest share of that deficit, seeing that the letters which go to Victoria exceed in number by many thousands the number sent from England to any other colony; and it would be doing this, too, against a colony which has made the largest sacrifices for the purpose of securing an efficient postal system for herself and the Empire.

The Agent-General, therefore, very confidently contends, taking all the above considerations into account, that no case has yet been made out by Her Majesty's Postmaster-General, or by the Treasury, to warrant any disturbance of the present postal arrangements, which, as Sir Michael Hicks Beach has justly observed in his letter to the Lords of the Treasury on this subject, "were, after much discussion, agreed upon in 1873," and have remained in operation unquestioned until the present time.

ARCHIBALD MICHIE,

Agent-General for Victoria.

31st July, 1878.

No. 25.

The Hon. J. T. FISHER, to the AGENT-GENERAL.

SIR,—

General Post Office, Wellington, 23rd September, 1878.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt, on Thursday last, of your despatch of the 29th July, with reference to the action taken by you on receipt of a copy of the despatch to His Excellency the Governor of this colony, from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, on the subject of the arrangements to be made after the end of the present year with regard to the postage collected in the United Kingdom for the postal matter despatched to Australia and New Zealand, whereby the Imperial Post Office proposes to retain two-thirds, instead of one-sixth, of the postage on the outward letters. I have also to acknowledge copy of a letter from Mr. Herbert to yourself, forwarding the copy of the despatch in question, and also copy of the telegram sent by Sir A. Michie to the Chief Secretary, Melbourne; also twelve printed copies of your letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, together with copy of the memorandum addressed by Sir A. Michie to the Colonial Office. The copy of the despatch and its enclosures were not, however, received.

I have to convey to you the thanks of the Government for the prompt and decided action you deemed it desirable to take in the interests of the colony. Your able letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies puts forward the claims of the colonies for more favourable consideration in a forcible and clear manner; and I entirely agree with you that the proposed change is both "arbitrary and excessive, and is not justified by any change in the circumstances under which the existing agreement was entered into."

You had already, by wire, been requested to protest against the proposals of the Imperial Government; and, as your letter to the Secretary of State so ably urges the claims of the colony, I do not propose to further discuss the proposed new arrangement in this letter. I will by the San Francisco mail again refer to the matter. In the meantime, I venture to express the hope that the Imperial Government may be prevailed upon to continue existing arrangements, if not for an indefinite period, at least until the San Francisco Service expires in 1883.

From the enclosed copies of telegrams which I forward for your information, you will learn that the first intimation the department had of the determination of the Imperial Government, in the matter of the postages, was gathered from the newspapers. Sir A. Michie's telegram was not repeated to this colony, nor was any intimation sent this Government from the Chief Secretary, Melbourne; but I took the very earliest opportunity for urging upon the Postmaster-General for New South Wales the necessity for prompt and joint action on the part of the Agents-General. Although Mr. Forster appears, at the outset, to have adopted an entirely independent course, I trust that he is ere now cordially co-operating with yourself and the other Agents-General in the endeavour to obtain justice for the colonies in the matter of the ocean mail services.

In conclusion, I may add that the Secretary of State's despatch only reached this department on the 5th instant, during the short parliamentary recess, and when I was absent from Wellington.

I have, &c.,

J. T. FISHER.

Sir Julius Vogel, K.C.M.G.,

Agent-General for New Zealand, London.