

1879.

NEW ZEALAND.

EMIGRATION.

FURTHER CORRESPONDENCE RELATIVE TO THE BURNING OF THE SHIP "PIAKO."
In continuation of D.-2., 1879.

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

Mr. H. S. SMITH to the Hon. the MINISTER for IMMIGRATION.

SIR,—

The New Zealand Shipping Company, Christchurch, 11th April, 1879.

Although I have from time to time afforded you, both verbally and by wire, such information as we received respecting the accident to the ship "Piako," my directors deem it right that I should furnish you with a detail narrative of the voyage and its incidents, and of the steps taken, as well by the Company as by the master of the ship, Captain Boyd; and I have deferred doing this until the arrival of the vessel, because I am able now to speak on the full authority of the master, with whom I have conferred, and I have the honor to report for your further information.

The ship "Piako" left Plymouth on the morning of the 11th October, 1878, having on board, besides a cargo of general merchandise, 4 saloon passengers, and 281 Government emigrants. The ship was under the command of Captain William B. Boyd; the emigrants under care of Mr. Beaufoy Green, Surgeon-superintendent. The ship was bound to call and land some immigrants at Timaru, and thence to come on to the Port of Lyttelton with the remainder and with her cargo. The voyage was propitious, but uneventful, until the morning of the 11th of November, when the vessel was discovered to be on fire, and, on search, the locality of the fire was found to be about 20 feet abaft the foremast, on the starboard side.

I annex hereto a cutting from the *Lyttelton Times*, of the 21st January, giving an account of the occurrence, which I may state was written by me, almost in the words of Captain Boyd's letter reporting the disaster.

The moment Captain Boyd knew the ship was on fire he put the vessel before the wind, and, being then in lat. 7° S. and long. 32° W., he laid his course for the nearest port, Pernambuco, in the Empire of the Brazils, distant about 200 miles. He sent a man aloft to keep a look-out for ships passing, hoisted his ensign of distress, got out all the boats, beat to fire-drill and deluged the main and orlop decks with water to keep the fire under. I am fully aware that this bald description of the proceedings conveys a very inadequate impression or idea of the critical position in which all on board were placed, and of the cool, calm judgment of the master, who was ably seconded by his officers in preserving order, and in his active and intelligent conduct under the most trying circumstances in which he found himself. Most providentially the barque "Loch Doon" hove in sight, and rounded to the burning ship, whence all the passengers were safely transferred without accident of any kind, and were most kindly received and cared for by the captain of the barque, and the best arrangements possible were most effectually made by Mr. Surgeon-superintendent Green, who accompanied the emigrants. Captain Boyd and the whole of the crew remained on board the "Piako," and continued the course for Pernambuco, followed by the "Loch Doon," and the vessels reached the port on the 14th November. Captain Boyd's first anxiety on landing was the care of the emigrants, and he at once waited on H.B.M. Consul-General Walker, to invoke his aid and advice, and, ultimately, with the full concurrence of the Consul, he arranged with Visconde do Leiramento, the proprietor of the Ilbra Nogueira, to land and house the people on that island, and they were all removed and made as comfortable as circumstances would permit. Captain Boyd was aided in all his arrangements by the Company's agents, Messrs. Johnston, Pater and Co.

Intimation was made to the Consul-General that the people were destitute of clothing, and instructions were sought by wire to our London office, whence Captain Boyd received authority to provide clothing necessary. And here I may refer you to the telegrams and correspondence which occurred and passed between our London Manager and the Agent-General in and about this matter in November and December, and my Directors claim from the Government an acknowledgment that we did most promptly all that was necessary without any coercion. There was no desire to escape such just responsibility as the circumstances imposed on the Company; and Captain Boyd naturally relied with full confidence on the advice, assistance, co-operation, and support of Mr. Walker in discharging his duty to all the interests involved in his trying circumstances; and he was quite unprepared for the course threatened by the Consul-General on receiving his first telegraphic acknowledgment from England.

Our London Manager, immediately he heard of the disaster, telegraphed instructions to Captain Boyd entirely in the interest and protection of the emigrants.

Simultaneously, the Foreign Office wired to the Consul-General, at the instance of the Agent-General, in such terms as were calculated to, and did, create distrust in Mr. Walker's mind, and he was, for a time at least, doubtful of Captain Boyd or our agents doing the duty imposed on them, and threatened to take the management of the whole matter out of our representatives' hands, and only withdrew from the position he assumed of right to do so after reflection and advice of the grave responsibility he was perchance unnecessarily taking on himself.

And it was owing to Captain Boyd's tact, and to our London Manager's directions, that in this new phase of matters complications did not arise, which would have been most detrimental to the interests of the Government.

The conduct of the Consul-General was entirely influenced by the instructions received in pursuance of the Agent-General's wishes, and I am very deferentially to submit that, whatever the motive was which prompted Sir Julius Vogel to call on the Marquis of Salisbury, the effect of the message sent was naturally received by the recipient as an evidence of the Government's mistrust of this Company.

There was no hesitation on Captain Boyd's or our agents' part to make any and every necessary disbursement and arrangement for the comfort, health, and necessities of the emigrants; and when all the accounts are in I shall probably have to ask you to recoup all our advances for bedding, clothing, &c., and, possibly, of a part cost of maintaining.

The repairs of the ship were rapidly and substantially executed, and as they were approaching completion Captain Boyd was surprised to learn that the Consul-General, under further instructions from Sir Julius Vogel, proposed to send all the emigrants back to England by one of the Pacific Mail Company's steamboats. On this, instructions were sought by wire both from London and from my Directors here; and you will recollect that I consulted you, and you approved of the telegram my Directors sent instructing Captain Boyd, if the ship passed survey, to inform the Consul and give notice to every emigrant of his readiness to bring the people on to the colony.

Up to the receipt of the message referred to, the Consul-General had actually gone so far as to visit Ilbra Nogueira, and to intimate to the emigrants that he would send them back to England in spite of their desire to proceed to New Zealand, and that, if necessary, he would call in the aid of the soldiers of the province to enforce their obedience. Here, again, Captain Boyd's prudence and firmness was of great service. He explained to the people *our* duty to take them on; *their* right to elect whether they would go or not; and to resist any coercion contrary to their wishes. And, with but few exceptions, the people determined to and did resume their voyage to this country.

The "Piako" left Pernambuco again on the 29th December, and reached Lyttelton "all well" on the 5th day of March. Owing to the excellent and liberal arrangement made for the people, and the untiring care of Dr. Green, all the emigrants enjoyed good health while on the island, and so continued up to their arrival in Lyttelton.

A naval Court of Inquiry was held under the presidency of the Consul-General, prior to the ship leaving Pernambuco, and though the origin of the fire could not be accounted for, the result of the inquiry was honorable and gratifying in every respect to the officers of the vessel, who were complimented on their prudence, skill, and bravery.

I need not comment on the second inquiry held here on the ship's arrival. We were satisfied there were no new facts to be elicited and that there was no occasion for the proceedings, but no objection was offered to them.

I send you also extract from the *Lyttelton Times*, of the proceedings on board the ship on her arrival, in the perusal of which you may take interest.

The Directors were so satisfied with the conduct of their servants that they awarded to Captain Boyd one hundred guineas, and to every officer and man an extra month's pay.

I have, &c.,

H. SELWYN SMITH,

General Manager.

The Hon. the Minister for Immigration, Wellington.