

steamer of 1878 could not have gone into Port Chalmers, as she had a load draft of twenty-four feet; and I need hardly bring to your recollection how the "Staatd Haarlem" was not allowed to be taken into that port, though it had been fully intended she should go there, and though she only drew a little over nineteen feet.

Second only to this question of whether the ships of a direct line must be capable of entering a given port is the one of what the ports of call are to be, and which is to be the port of first arrival and last departure. Assuming the service to be decided upon at all, one of the points which contractors would want to know for certain would be exactly what the colony would insist upon in the matter of ports, and how far (if at all) a discretion would be left to themselves, according to the considerations of trade and freight at each port, of which they would be allowed to judge.

I mention these points early because Parliament had not made up its mind upon them, whereas the decision of them lies at the threshold of any action. It is of course unnecessary to point out the special difference there is between a steam line to Australia and one to New Zealand. When a steamer goes to Adelaide, she serves the whole of South Australia; to Melbourne, the whole of Victoria; to Sydney, the whole of New South Wales: whereas nothing of the sort is possible with us. Nor is it necessary to remind any one to whom so great a subsidy may seem hard for a fast postal line direct, that a line to Australia can rely on passage-money such as we cannot approach. The 12,000 passengers, for instance, who went by the Peninsular and Oriental and Orient ships in 1881 could not have paid far short of £400,000 passage-money, to say nothing of the 100,000 tons of cargo, which must have added at least a quarter of a million more. It is considerations such as these which touch most nearly the question of profit, and it is these which would really govern any responsible people disposed to entertain a scheme for a direct line to New Zealand.

The Hon. the Premier, Wellington.

I have, &c.,
F. D. BELL.