

SESS. II.—1884.
NEW ZEALAND.

SIR F. DILLON BELL AND THE AGENT-GENERALSHIP.

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

No. 1.

The PREMIER to the AGENT-GENERAL.

SIR,—

Premier's Office, Wellington, September 29, 1884.

I send herewith extract from "Hansard," showing what passed recently in the House of Representatives, relative to your position as Agent-General. You will see that the Government consider it unnecessary to confirm your appointment; as, in their opinion, that appointment is perfectly valid, and requires no confirmation. Sept. 25th.

In case, however, you may consider it desirable that some official notification should be given to you, I desire now to state, that we confirm the arrangement offered to you by the Premier, in his letter of May 24th.

Sir F. Dillon Bell, K.C.M.G. &c.

I have, &c.

ROBERT STOUT.

No. 2.

The AGENT-GENERAL for NEW ZEALAND to the Hon. the PREMIER.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W. 8th September, 1884.

I received a few days ago, by the San Francisco mail, the *Hansard* containing the debate in the House of Representatives on the 23rd of June, respecting the Agent-Generalship. It is so manifestly undesirable, as a rule, for the Agent-General to comment on a debate in Parliament, that I only ask permission to do so in this instance, because I wish to dispose, once for all, of the merely personal question.

If Major Atkinson's letter to me of 24th May had been laid on the table before, instead of after, the debate, the House would have seen that his offer was one which had to be submitted for the sanction of Parliament. My answer of 17th July showed that I understood it so; and my cipher telegram, "Solidarity," will of course have been read by the light of that answer. I have no wish to be Agent-General for an hour, unless I possess the confidence of Parliament; and I must take leave to add that, if the House is pleased to cancel Major Atkinson's offer, it is free to do so without any fear that I should ever dream of asking for compensation.

I pass over the suggestion of one honourable member, that the Government should retain my services from month to month: that is the sort of thing which is done to a footman. But Sir George Grey can hardly have seriously believed there was any danger that, even supposing me not to be in political accord with the Ministry of the day, I should "actively undermine the influence of that Ministry" in this country. I was a party man while I was in Parliament, and it is in the nature of things that any one who is at all fit to be Agent-General should have been so; but I am quite sure there is not one of our public men who, leaving the sphere of party politics and coming to England to represent the whole Colony, would dream of such odious treachery as Sir George Grey seems to have imagined possible. At any rate, speaking for myself, one thing is quite certain: whoever might be the Ministers, if the day ever came when I could not give fair and full effect to their desires, I should not keep them waiting an hour for my resignation.

The debate was one which could only lead, as it has led, to the impression here, that I no longer possessed the confidence of the House. I may perhaps be permitted to say that, with such large financial operations as are still pending, it is hardly for the advantage of the Colony that the Agent-General, whoever he may be, should be discredited in England. I say nothing of any political things in which he may be engaged, because these can always be carried on by any one who has a moderate experience in affairs. But it is quite another thing when large financial operations are at stake. Confidence is not given by the City in a day, nor is it transferable at the pleasure of our politicians. The long series of financial despatches which I have sent to the Treasury, are necessarily of too confidential a character to allow of their being presented to Parliament. If they could have been, they would have shown that the recent conversion operations were only part of a scheme devised by me on lines essentially differing from those which had been recommended by the former Stock Agents; and, although I have not been accustomed to parade any poor services of mine before the country, the House will hardly have thought it just to me to forget that these

operations have already effected a yearly saving of nearly forty times the Agent-General's salary, or that they have paved the way to others destined to produce even larger savings to the Colony. But not one of the many financial operations in which I have been engaged could ever have been made, without the personal trust and confidence of the Governors of the Bank of England: plants of a slow growth there, not at the command of every one who can call himself Agent-General for New Zealand.

I am not saying this on account of any change in my old opinion, that the Agent-Generalship should only be held for a term. On the contrary, that opinion has been strengthened by my stay in England. An Agent-General with a permanent tenure of office naturally makes his home in this country; he is insensibly drawn in by the allurements of English society, and politics, and speculation; he loses touch of the colonial sentiment, and ceases to think as a colonist thinks. His independence fades under hesitation to offend the great; above all, he dreads responsibility, and will do nothing without "instructions." If I were to-day in my old place in Parliament, I should be as strenuous as ever against making the Agent-General a permanent officer. Nor am I for a moment contesting the right of every Government to recall the Agent-General at any time, if that step is deemed necessary in the interests of the Colony. But it is quite another thing to say that he should be liable to be removed for purely party reasons, at every change of Ministry. Such a rule might easily be disastrous to our finance, and I do not hesitate to say that it would sap the very foundations of the confidence by which alone any success in large operations is possible for him here. Moreover, if the Agent-General is liable to be removed at any moment for purely party reasons, there must surely be some mutuality, and he too must be free to leave at pleasure, and to accept other positions. I have had plenty of such offers: they are at the command of a man here if he has once come to be trusted, and is supposed to know what he is about in finance. Such a rule as I am speaking of might easily open the door to the grave danger that an Agent-General, ceasing to devote himself in singleness of heart to the Colony, should seek to ingratiate himself with powerful people here, and become immersed in schemes and objects of his own. That I have not been tempted, is because my home is in the country I helped to found, and because I shall account the day happy when I return to it.

I am writing this in perfect ignorance of whether the new Parliament wishes me to stay or not: nor would it signify that there should be an early decision, if there were not things to be done for which the Government has little spare time. This letter will not reach you before late in October, when my present term of office expires. If the third million of the loan is to be raised in January, and if I am again to be one of the Loan Agents, the Orders in Council ought certainly not to arrive here later than the middle of December, on account of the legal formalities that have to be gone through. Again, if there is to be any change in the Stock Agents, the new warrants must also be here in December at latest, on account of the stock that has to be created for the Bank of England, under the last 5-30 conversion. It is necessary, therefore, if only for purely financial reasons, that the question of the Agent-Generalship should be decided in time to send me a telegram by the end of October. But I trust the House will be pleased to extend its consideration to me so far as to let me adduce another reason personal to myself. The late Government might have made my re-appointment an Executive act, as my original appointment was in 1880. They preferred, and I was glad they did prefer, only to say that, if I was prepared to stay, they would announce to Parliament that they proposed to appoint me for two years longer; and Major Atkinson explained in the debate, that Parliament was in no way committed. But when the announcement was made, the sanction of the House was neither given nor withheld. That is hardly just to me; and I must therefore ask the House, with the greatest respect, either to sanction my re-appointment, or relieve me from a position which I could neither hold with advantage to the Colony nor with regard for my own honour or self-respect.

I pray you to do me the favour of laying this letter before Parliament.

The Hon. the Premier, Wellington.

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

No. 3.

The PREMIER to the AGENT-GENERAL.

Your letter Sept. 8th received. Present Government announced House, considered Atkinson entitled renew your appointment, and that special ratification Parliament not necessary. Particulars were sent by last mail.

ROBERT SROUT.

Wellington, Oct. 22.