

complained of by Mr. Fisher had not been said or done. As the latter gentleman had five Ministers against him, a large number of people naturally concluded that the majority were right, the minority wrong. "The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small," and bit by bit it begins to appear that Mr. Fisher was sometimes right in his assertions, and his cocksure comrades were and are sometimes wrong. There is one late instance of this, if not more. If the curious will turn to pages 397 to 403, Vol. VII., of *Hansard*, Sess. 1889, they will find some interesting particulars relative to the Gasparini correspondence. The matter in dispute between Sir Harry Atkinson and Mr. George Fisher was the printing of that correspondence which the Premier declared (page 379) "was printed on the authority of the honourable gentleman [Fisher] and on that of no one else." This Mr. Fisher strenuously denied. He read the following extract from the ill-advised letter written by the Governor of a great colony to a comparatively insignificant official holding the status of a French Vice-Consul: "It appears, however, that the papers in question have been printed without the knowledge or sanction of the Officer Administering the Government, and apparently on the authority only of Mr. Fisher, at that time Minister of Education, without consulting his colleagues" (pp. 398-99.) After reading to the House the foregoing extract, the following colloquy ensued (p. 389): "Sir H. Atkinson.—We were never consulted. Mr. Fisher.—May I ask the honourable gentleman whether he was consulted? Sir H. Atkinson.—No; you did not. You never said a word about it. Mr. Fisher.—About the printing of the papers? Sir H. Atkinson.—Never a word. Mr. Fisher.—Is it true, or is it not true, that the honourable gentleman, at New Plymouth, received from me the correspondence complete in print? Sir H. Atkinson.—Absolutely untrue!" If these words of the Premier did not distinctly imply that he did not even know the papers were printed, that he had never seen them, and that they were printed without his knowledge and consent; and if they do not bear out and were not intended to bear out before the House the allegations we have just quoted, contained in His Excellency's letter to the French Vice-Consul, then language ceases to have any meaning. This is one of the cases in which Mr. Fisher's colleagues replied to him by the simple method of giving him the lie direct. The question now is, was the foregone denial of the Premier, given in cold-blood and emphatically reiterated, a truthful statement of facts? With great regret—for there is nothing pleasing to us in the idea that the word of the Prime Minister of this colony is not his bond—we have to declare our opinion that they were not truthful words. Our reason for this opinion is simple: We have lately seen in print the original Gasparini correspondence which was sent by Mr. Fisher to Sir Harry at New Plymouth, with alterations and interlineations in the handwriting of Sir Harry Atkinson. Here at least there is one instance in which the denial of the Ministry counts for nothing—may there not be others?

No. 13.

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WE presume that there is no qualification more essential in a Prime Minister than unimpeachable veracity. The deliberately-made statements of a gentleman occupying the high position of Chief Minister ought to be at all times thoroughly reliable. We regret, for the sake of New Zealand's credit, that Sir Harry Atkinson seems to have been guilty of either a surprising lapse of memory or else a wilful misstatement in connection with the Gasparini correspondence. It will be remembered that the Hon. Mr. Fisher was taken sharply to task for having, whilst Minister of Education, got this correspondence printed without the other members of the Cabinet knowing anything about it. Mr. Fisher replied that the Premier was not only cognizant of the fact that the correspondence had been printed, but had sanctioned the printing. This was utterly denied by Sir Harry Atkinson in a most emphatic manner. We quote from *Hansard* the following report of the discussion, which took place in the House on the subject: "Mr. Fisher.—Did you receive, at New Plymouth a copy of the printed papers? Sir H. Atkinson.—No. I received a copy of your memorandum; but that is not printing 'the papers' at all. Mr. Fisher.—I am so staggered, I cannot believe my ears. With your permission, Sir, I will put that question to the honourable gentleman again. Is it true, or is it not true, that the honourable gentleman, at New Plymouth, received from me the correspondence complete in print? Sir H. A. Atkinson.—Absolutely untrue." Nothing could be clearer than the Premier's language here. Yet, marvellous to relate, the Hon. Mr. Fisher, on Thursday last, produced in the House the Gasparini papers complete in print, as they were sent to Sir H. Atkinson at New Plymouth. The papers produced by Mr. Fisher in print were corrected in the Premier's own handwriting, and returned in that form to Mr. Fisher. It must be patent to every unbiassed mind that Sir H. Atkinson has permitted his rancorous antipathy to his late colleague to cloud his usually clear judgment and to rush him into conduct wholly unworthy of him. People will now have a good reason to suspect that Mr. Fisher was treated with the same gross unfairness in the beer-duty business. In fact, unless the Premier should thoroughly clear up the Gasparini mystery his reputation will be permanently damaged. Had not Mr. Fisher been fortunate enough to discover the printed correspondence, with the Premier's own annotations upon it, people would have believed that he had been guilty of a serious breach of his duty as a Cabinet Minister. As it is, he has completely vindicated himself, and proved that he has been the victim of gross misrepresentation at the hands of his former chief. This matter has already occupied a good deal of attention in the House, but it should not be permitted to rest here. The House should call upon the Premier to clear himself if he can, and if he cannot, the House should pass such a resolution as will unmistakably show its condemnation of such conduct on the part of its leader.