

the importance of which I cannot do other than notice an effort has recently been made by some of our opponents to discount. Every member of the Ministry, myself included, is of one opinion. Considering the transcendent importance of the whole position, brought about by causes known to every one in this country—by causes that have attracted the attention of all parties in the Old Land and in this country, and of all parties in every other portion of the Empire, to the necessity for something out of the ordinary being done—there is but one opinion among the members of the Ministry, and that is—although I lay myself open to the charge, by any one who has the unfairness to use it, of being egotistical in saying so—that the head of the Government in this country ought to be the representative of the people at that Conference, for the purpose of taking part in what is of vital importance to the Empire as a whole. Now, having said this, may I for one moment say a word or two as to why this offer was made by the New Zealand Government? May I also here take the opportunity of referring to a very unfair—and, in fact, in some respect, indecently unfair—accusation made against myself of having sent a telegram to the editors of the Press throughout the country, inviting their opinion or consulting them on this matter, and at the same time ignoring members of Parliament by not sending a telegram to them? I say I have never sent any telegram of the kind to any editors of the Press in this country.

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR.—Read the wire.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—Has the honourable gentleman seen it? I want to say I have got it here.

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR.—I will read it if you will not.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I am very glad; let the honourable gentleman read it. I say so at once. I was going to remark that this telegram is marked "Strictly confidential." It was sent by me to the editors of the Press throughout the country.

Mr. MASSEY.—Is it necessary to refer to it?

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I am going to allude to it, because I am going to put on record why we made the offer.

Mr. MASSEY.—It is altogether beside the question.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I think the position ought to be stated.

Mr. MASSEY.—I am quite willing you should do so: make no mistake about that.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I have no objection to the honourable gentleman holding an opposite view; but my opinion is that the position should be stated. I want to say here that upon the day the offer was made by the New Zealand Government an interview was given by me to the Press. I sent a telegram, marked "Strictly confidential," after the offer was made to the Home Government and after the interview was granted to the Press, and in that I indicated why that course had been taken. It remained for only one editor in the country to do that which it is well known to every honourable member of this House who has had any business to do with myself in confidence I have never done. I have received many hundreds of confidential communications from people in New Zealand—from political opponents as well as supporters—on matters of vital importance to them, and I have never once in my whole history disclosed a confidential communication to anybody. The editors of the papers throughout this country, and the editors of the Opposition Press, I have found without exception to be honourable men. I have had to communicate with many of them confidentially on more than one occasion in my position as a Minister of the Crown, and, to their credit, there has been but one instance of an editor breaking that confidence by publicity in the columns of his paper. I was going to tell the House, if the House accepted the responsibility of removing the "Strictly confidential" from it, what the communication was, if my honourable friend the member for Christchurch North had not undertaken to do so.

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR.—At your invitation.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—Pardon me. It was not at my invitation at all. The honourable member said he would read the telegram, and I replied, "Very well; you can do so."

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR.—Very well; I will.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I do not object to your reading it. It relieves me from the necessity of asking the House to remove the "Strictly confidential" from the telegram. Now, Sir, at the time when that offer was made by the Government it is within the knowledge of every man in this country that the question of party never once came into consideration in this connection, and there is no man but that all through the piece would have recognised that I had steadfastly kept this matter clear of party. I have never once made any allusion to it in New Zealand that in any way introduced a question of party. I have all along refused to criticize remarks which public men and the Press made that I looked upon as approaching anything of a party character. I have refused to be interviewed on this question from any party standpoint. I have declined to discuss the views put on record by other people, because I declared it as my opinion that in a matter of this sort it was our duty as members of the Legislature, in matters where the vital interests of the Empire are concerned, to tower above party, both in the general interests of the Old Country and in our own interests as well. At the time that communication went out confidentially to the editors of the Press we, as members of the Administration, knew of one matter that we regarded as of the most dangerous significance that had not appeared in the Press, and had not been made public. We regarded it as of most vital importance. Later on it came out in the Press, it is true, but at that juncture we knew of a matter that we regarded as of the greatest importance as having a bearing upon the situation connected with the British navy, which we felt it to be our duty not to refer to publicly, and which we considered justified us in arriving at the decision we did; and we believed that it was in the best interests of the country that we should make the offer, and also that I should telegraph the editors of the Press of all classes in the direction in which I did. I should do exactly the same thing under similar circumstances to-morrow; and when honourable members have heard that telegram read I am sure they will say that I was not consulting or asking the opinion of any editor.