

ence. There is one letter—to my mind, an exceedingly important one—which has been omitted from the speech the honourable gentleman has just made. It was referred to the other day in the Australian Parliament, and I will quote a reference to it: “A cable received by the Secretary of State for the Colonies stated that the New Zealand Government earnestly desire to attend the Conference, but pointed out the impossibility for its Minister to be present until the new Parliament had been convened and voted supplies.” Now, I can hardly think that the letter there referred to should be considered confidential. It has reference to the business of Parliament and—

An Hon. MEMBER.—It was read.

Mr. MASSEY.—No.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—Pardon me, I read it. It is not a letter, but a telegram. I read it, and it is among the correspondence printed and circulated to honourable members.

Mr. MASSEY.—I watched for it very closely, and I failed to notice that particular cablegram when the honourable gentleman was reading it. Let me make the position perfectly clear. It is a communication from the New Zealand Government to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, pointing out that New Zealand desired earnestly to attend the Conference, but that it was impossible for its Ministers to be present unless the new Parliament had been convened and voted supplies. If the communication referred to—whether in the shape of a letter or a cablegram—was read by the honourable gentleman it must have been very short, and I do not think I am asking too much in desiring that it should be read again.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I read it.

Mr. MASSEY.—And the suggestion I have to make is this: I presume that this meeting will adjourn at half past five. I suggest that the discussion should be continued when we meet again at half past seven, or at whatever hour is agreed upon. And it is only right to say that, like Mr. Duncan, I had not the very faintest idea of the course that was to be taken or of the proposals that it was intended to submit.

Mr. FISHER (Wellington Central).—Before you reply, I was going to suggest that you should give members of the conference a copy of the telegram sent to the newspaper Press. I, for my part, see no reason why an interjection from Mr. T. E. Taylor should deprive the members of this assemblage of that information, and I would suggest that the telegram should be printed with the other correspondence. A mere little passage-at-arms between the Prime Minister and the honourable member for Christchurch North ought not to deprive us of access to the information to which I think we are entitled.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I read the telegram that has been referred to. It is dated the 6th May. Regarding the suggestion of the member for Wellington Central that I should remove “Confidential” from any confidential communication, I say that no person could hold the position I occupy if he started that sort of business. If I did so, there are lots of people in this country who would not be very safe. It is only right to say that, because I receive communications from people of all classes of politics, and from all over the country—communications of a very confidential nature, and which are sent to me by them only because the senders know that they are safe in intrusting me with their confidence. And I have some communications in my possession from people in New Zealand and elsewhere that are not marked “Confidential”; but where I think they are intended to be of a confidential nature, and I think I ought not to make use of them, I do not do so. I am not going to take “Confidential” off any communication, and I should be surprised if any one seriously intended I should do so.

Mr. FISHER.—The only reason I raised the point was this: that the honourable gentleman raised the question of the removal of the word “Confidential” from the telegram, and that was said upon an interjection of the member for Christchurch North.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—No, I did not.

Mr. FISHER.—You said you were going to ask the House to allow you to divulge the nature of that confidential telegram, and that was after the interjection of the member for Christchurch North.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—No; I said “No.”

Mr. FISHER.—Those were the words that floated up here.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I want to make the position clear. I do not want to put the position wrongly either in regard to the member for Christchurch North or myself. I was referring to a telegram that I had sent to the editors of the papers throughout the country which was marked “Strictly confidential” and in connection with the action of one newspaper in the country and Mr. Taylor said, “Read the wire.” The honourable member for Christchurch North said that he would read it if I would not. There is nothing in that telegram that I am afraid of.

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR.—Why did you make it strictly confidential?

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—I had good reason for making it confidential.

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR.—Oh!

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—The honourable gentleman may assume it was not so, but I had good reasons. All my colleagues saw the telegram before it was sent, and knew its contents; and we all have ordinary common-sense, and we believed it was right, otherwise it would not have been sent. There is no doubt about that. As a matter of fact, what is wrong is the fact that one man should have referred to it in public when it was addressed to him and marked “Strictly confidential.”

An Hon. MEMBER.—What was wrong was in making it confidential.

The Right Hon. Sir J. G. WARD.—Not at all.

Mr. T. E. TAYLOR (Christchurch North).—May I ask the Premier whether any of the confidential despatches or documents which he admits have been received, but which he has not placed before members, refer to the Naval Conference, or whether they refer to that special matter that the Prime Minister told us the Government knew of when they made the Dreadnought offer? The