

preposterous (except on the condition of a strict monopoly to one company) to have either kept the people waiting more than a month for the "British Queen" and lost the harvest, or forced them to go in a sailing ship and lost the harvest all the same. No cast-iron arrangement would ever work smoothly, success is only possible by forbearance on the part of all concerned, and a willingness to make the best of each trouble as it arises.

The attention of the companies is requested to the last two resolutions of the Joint Committee, and the Agent-General will be glad if they would let him know how far it would be in their power to give effect to the recommendations of the Committee.

With regard to the conditions of tender which were published by the Agent-General at the beginning of this year, he recognizes that in a merely temporary arrangement it would not be reasonable to expect, for every detail, the same stringent stipulations as in a subsidized service. While, therefore, there are many of those conditions which he could not properly dispense with, he is ready to confer with the companies on the subject and meet their views as far as he can.

It is needless, of course, to point out that this minute proceeds on the assumption of the same rate per statute adult being now offered by both companies for the same class of steamer but this may not turn out to be the case. At the time the Joint Committee were sitting the proposed contract rate with the New Zealand Shipping Company was £16, while the Shaw-Savill-Albion Company's offer was £13 10s. Neither of those prices having been finally accepted then, it will be for the companies to make their own proposals for a rate, having due regard to the second resolution of the Joint Committee, and to the assimilation, if possible, of the dietaries of Government emigrants and paying steerage passengers.

With regard to Government freight, the Agent-General hardly thinks it would be desirable to fix definite rates in a merely temporary arrangement, as the varying requirements of ordinary mercantile cargo would be best met for the next few months by settling Government rates as occasion arose. At the same time he is ready to consider any proposal or suggestion the companies may make, if they prefer rates being fixed now.

So far, the Agent-General has only dealt with points which must be settled even for a scheme not extending beyond June, 1884. But the experience of the last twelve months has given very different means of calculation from those which were at the command of either the Government or the companies when tenders were invited for a service. Events have proved the truth of the prediction that if direct steam were once really started a number of paying passengers would be attracted by it. There is, in fact, a natural current of emigration always flowing from the United Kingdom towards outlets that are served by steam, and it was never doubtful that, if a line of direct steamers existed to New Zealand, some of the current would soon flow that way. The extension of the colony's trade, and a steady growth in the number of paying passengers, have passed out of the region of mere speculation—it is all the more necessary, then, to make provision in time for a development that is sure to come, and the Agent-General would be very glad if the companies could see their way to making alternative proposals to the Government of a more permanent kind than the one which is the immediate occasion of this minute. It is amply evident that neither of the companies mean to be driven out of the trade, but that on the contrary both are determined to maintain independent lines of first-class steamers. The manifest interest, therefore, of the colony lies in preserving a healthy competition between them, but that interest would not be served by a kind of competition which, if disastrous to those embarked in it, would threaten the permanency of the enterprise itself. The Government business is but a small part of the volume of trade, and is of course destined to bear a less and less proportion to that volume but it is an appreciable item in these early days of direct steam, and ought to be so arranged as to encourage as many first-class steamers as the trade will support. The colony hopes for the friendly co-operation of both companies, not in makeshifts only for the moment, but in proposals wherein the General Assembly may see the assurance of a really permanent service, and of a just recompense to the enterprise of those who founded it.

F. D. BELL.

Westminster Chambers, 6th November, 1883.

## No. 20.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the Hon. the POSTMASTER-GENERAL.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, London, S.W., 8th November, 1883.

I observe that, in the debate which took place in the House of Representatives when the report of the Joint Committee on the Direct Steam Service was brought up, the recommendation of the Committee respecting unsinkable ships was received with some derision. But the question of building such ships has been seriously considered in this country, as will be seen by the following extract from a paper on the Mercantile Marine of England, which appeared a few days ago in the "Contemporary Review," by Sir Edward Reed, M.P., who (as you are aware) is a famous authority on shipbuilding. "I am satisfied," says Sir Edward Reed, "that it is possible, and compatible with every reasonable commercial requirement, to construct iron and steel steamers of an unsinkable type—unsinkable, that is, by all but the most extreme accidents, and certainly unsinkable by causes which are now continually sending fine and costly ships to the bottom. But this result must be brought about by much longitudinal as well as transverse subdivision, and by the resort to watertight decks, communicated with from above by watertight trunks, to an extent scarcely yet thought of. Nothing would tend more to enlarge ocean traffic, and to enable it to compare and compete with land traffic on more equal conditions than at present, than the general resort to unsinkable ships."

I have called Sir Edward Reed's attention to Mr Isbister's scheme of a "sectional ship," which the Government lately sent me at the request of Mr Macandrew, M.H.R., because its design