

on the 1st April and the 4th April. Yet on the 1st April you do not charge me with deception and dishonour. I was then your "Dear Mr. Fisher." It is true you said you could not in Parliament defend my action in the brewery cases. I have already explained, in my letter of the 6th April, that it could not under any parliamentary formulary become necessary for you to do so; but you still addressed me in a very friendly and kindly way as "Yours sincerely;" and, as to the brewery question being really serious, so far as that was concerned, you wrote, "If you would prefer to resign upon the case, as it now stands, I shall be glad to meet your wishes and withdraw this letter." The brewery cases evidently did not at that date cause you any anguish or mental tumult. Clearly, at that time the dishonour arising out of these cases, not to put too fine a point upon it, was moonshine. The resignation was the thing desired. On the 4th April I am still "Dear Mr. Fisher," and you are still "Yours sincerely." In your letter of that date the resignation is still harped upon, but not a word is said about the brewery cases, or the many moral delinquencies which your vivid imagination now connects with them. As explained in my letter of the 6th April, I objected to your withdrawal of your letter of the 1st April, which asked me to resign. I did not wish to remain a member of the Ministry, but I did wish to place on record my reasons for resigning. I desired also to do certain other things, all of which I will satisfactorily explain; but, because I took upon myself to explain circumstantially in my letter of the 6th April the real reasons which led to my resignation, I am at once regarded by you as a misdemeanant of the first water. I am no longer "Dear Mr. Fisher;" you are no longer "Yours sincerely." Suddenly and stiffly I become "Sir;" equally frigidly you become my "obedient servant." And so we gravitate from the quip modest to the reply churlish.

Your letter of the 23rd April is composed of afterthought and side-issue, as I am about to show, for if the allegations contained in that letter are true, and if you entertained the opinions of my actions which in that letter you profess to entertain, why was not the letter written on the 1st April, not the 23rd? and if my acts were surrounded by so much deception and dishonour, why do you offer to withdraw your letter of the 1st April? Actions such as yours are utterly inconsistent and indefensible, as I think will be apparent to any unbiassed mind.

I now proceed to discuss your letter of the 23rd April. For convenience I have lettered its paragraphs (A), (B), (C), &c.

(A) refers to your having laid my letter and yours before His Excellency the Administrator.

(B) refers to the "Dear Mr. Fisher" period, already referred to above, and to "Yours sincerely."

(C) refers to the beer-duty cases which I have dealt with in paragraph (I).

(D.) This paragraph contains three important statements, with which I will deal in separate order:—

(1.) refers to your unreasonable desire to hasten my retirement from office. You complain that my charge under this head "betrays a complete misapprehension of my motives, which will be sufficiently met by a bare reference to dates. These incidents [connected with the beer cases] occurred during the first week in March, and I can hardly see that I could have been blamed if, in the face of such behaviour on your part, I had acted with greater promptitude. But it was not until the 1st of April, three weeks later, that I wrote the first of the letters of which you complain. An unprejudiced critic would surely admit that the three weeks' delay gave you ample time for consideration." I propose to submit a few facts for the consideration of the "unprejudiced critic" by firstly explaining in what way the three weeks were used. This is how they were used: The Cabinet meeting was held on the 4th March. You returned from Wanganui on the night of the 5th March. I saw you in your office on the morning of the 6th, and briefly touched upon the brewery question with you. You were naturally very busy, as great arrears of work awaited your arrival. In addition to being busy, you were also very pleasant with me, for you had not yet had time to become imbued with the prejudices of Messrs. Hislop and Fergus. On Thursday, the 7th March, a Cabinet meeting was convened to discuss the question of the Canterbury runs, at which meeting the Hon. Mr. Hislop assailed the Hon. Mr. Richardson in his usual unfeeling manner, the consequence of which was that the Hon. Mr. Richardson returned to you after the Cabinet meeting to say that he would no longer tolerate the offensive manner and the offensive language of the Hon. Mr. Hislop. On Friday, the 8th March, I saw you again in your room about the brewery cases, when you informed me that you had referred the papers to the Hon. Sir Frederick Whitaker and the Hon. Mr. Stevens for their opinion; the resident Ministers, you said, being divided, the Hon. Mr. Mitchelson and the Hon. Mr. Richardson being in my favour, and the Hon. Mr. Hislop and the Hon. Mr. Fergus being against me. I asked whether you would have any objection to my seeing the Hon. Sir Frederick Whitaker and the Hon. Mr. Stevens, as, in my opinion, the papers required explanation; and you said you had no objection. You at once wrote a telegram to the Hon. Sir Frederick Whitaker and the Hon. Mr. Stevens to this effect: "Express no opinion on papers till you see Fisher." I knew also that at this time the Hon. Mr. Fergus and the Hon. Mr. Hislop had told you that either they or Mr. Fisher would have to leave the Ministry, and that the Hon. Mr. Hislop, having in Cabinet, in my absence, with his accustomed bitterness, discussed the cases, and the manner in which he chose to assume that I was affected by them, had had the unpardonable presumption to write a letter to the Hon. Mr. Stevens with the view of biassing his opinion upon the question submitted to him. That is to say, behind my back he wrote a letter to the person who was asked to pass judgment upon me. I ought to say that in this respect the conduct of the Hon. Mr. Hislop was not worse than that of other Ministers, who communicated privately with Sir Frederick Whitaker when he was asked to give an unbiassed opinion upon the case. On Sunday morning, the 10th March, I called upon you at your residence to explain my feelings regarding the conduct of the Hon. Mr. Fergus and the Hon. Mr. Hislop, and on that same day left for Christchurch to see the Hon. Mr. Stevens. I saw him on Monday, the 11th, and discussed the matter with him. I explain what I believe to be his view of the case in paragraph I.