

Copy of a LETTER from Sir E. B. LYTTON to Governor Sir E. HEAD.

My dear Sir,

Downing Street, September 24, 1858.

FROM the tone taken by the newspapers respecting recent political occurrences in Canada; there can be little doubt that the attention of Parliament will be drawn to them.

Communication between the Secretary of State and the Governor of Canada has been of late years carried on almost exclusively through private correspondence, and, therefore, they are unavailable for Parliamentary defence, if the conduct or motives of the Governor should be impugned. I am quite aware of the opinion entertained by my predecessors respecting the great delicacy of the political relations between England and Canada, which led to this mode of transacting business. But it is only by public despatches that the Governor of Canada can be judged by the public, or supported in the House of Commons.

I have, for instance, no official justification to give of the step which you took of initiating, by your messages, the question of Federal union between the provinces—a question of Imperial and not simply Canadian character.

Again, I can refer to no public documents as to your conduct during the interval between the resignation of the first Ministry and the formation of the present; during which most of the political responsibility, commonly shared with your Ministers, was unavoidably thrown on yourself: such, for instance, as the terms which you thought it necessary to impose on the Brown Ministry as to the conduct of Parliamentary business, and the alleged contrivance to avoid the inconvenience of vacating seats by members of the Ministry now in office; as to both of which exception has been taken in this country to your own conduct as representing the Crown in Canada. You will not suppose that I concur in these criticisms on points of conduct of which neither the facts nor the reasons are fully before me. I am only anxious to point out the difficulty under which I am placed in rebutting them.

On these subjects (relating, namely, to your own conduct as Governor, and not that of your responsible advisers) I am, probably, not going beyond the bounds of necessary official discretion in asking for an explanation in the way of public dispatch.

But I am inclined to think that, generally speaking, it would be better that the political correspondence between us (when not public) should in future be carried on by confidential despatches rather than by letters, which are, as it seems to me, more subject to accident and misunderstanding; while confidential despatches, in case of strong emergency, can be produced either for Parliamentary or other purposes, and, at all events, would be more sure of preservation in the office, for the guidance of successive Secretaries, than mere letters.

Even with regard to the kind of correspondence now usual, I think it would have been as well if you had communicated with me, or with this Department, since my entrance into office, and not assumed (as I suppose you did) that I concurred with my predecessors upon those points of policy to be decided, on which you had been in correspondence with them.

On these points, however, as well as on all others respecting the direction of the political relations between this country and Canada, I am anxious to take no step without having previously had the advantage of your experience and discretion.

I have, &c.

(Signed)

E. B. LYTTON.

Governor Sir E. Head,

&c. &c. &c.