

You are aware that, owing to the postponement of the dispatch of the Homeward mail-steamers from Adelaide from Monday till Wednesday in every week, at the urgent instance of the colonies, the arrival of all the eastern mails in this country takes place two days later than heretofore.

Instead of the mails being due in London on Sunday or Monday, as was formerly the case, they are now due on Tuesday or Wednesday, according to the season of the year, and even this is achieved only by the use of the special train-service from Brindisi. If the Australian mails were left for conveyance by the ordinary train-service they would occupy at least ten hours' longer in transit, and, unless they happened to reach Brindisi in time for the 5 p.m. train (the only through train in the day), they would be subject to a delay of perhaps as much as twenty-four hours before starting, so that, in an extreme case, the mails might not reach London until Thursday evening, and many parts of the country would be cut off from reply by the Friday night's outgoing mail.

It is not unlikely that these results might be still further aggravated by irregularities of service in Italy and France, arising from the transfer of the heavy Australian mails to the ordinary services of those countries. The ordinary service from Naples, by which the mails brought to that port by Orient steamers are at present, as a rule, carried forward to Calais, is by no means as uniform in regard to duration of transit as the special service from Brindisi, and it is thought that the conditions of traffic on the Adriatic system are somewhat less favourable than those on the Mediterranean system to the punctual transmission of these abnormally heavy mails.

If the proposed change should, in practice, result, as it well might, in so late an arrival as to preclude reply by the outgoing mail of Friday, the colonial public would be at the serious disadvantage of having one week added to the time which would be occupied in sending a letter to England and getting a reply in the colony.

But there are other difficulties. The French and Italian Governments are under no positive obligation to carry mails from Australia by the ordinary train-services of those countries.

There is an understanding with the French and Italian post-offices that if this department sees fit to disconnect the Homeward Australian packet-service from the Indian, it shall have the right to use the ordinary train-services for the Australian mails, at Postal Union transit rates, always provided that their use is possible under the general traffic regulations of the Continental railways.

The present situation is not strictly covered by the understanding referred to above, because the mails are still to arrive in one steamer, and, although France and Italy might not eventually refuse to separate the Australian mails in the circumstances now under consideration, the point would, at the best, be one for negotiation.

Moreover, the public in this country, and probably in the colonies also, would criticize severely postal arrangements under which the mails from Australia were left behind at Brindisi for conveyance by ordinary train to Calais, while those from India and China brought to Brindisi by the same packet were sent on by special train; and such a course would be extremely difficult to defend.

The delegates at the Adelaide Conference have doubtless inferred that, because the mails brought by the Orient packets to Naples usually come on by ordinary train to Calais, the mails landed at Brindisi can, without difficulty, be treated in the same way. But the cases are quite dissimilar; the Orient steamers bring Australian mails only, so that no question arises of bringing on one portion of the mail and leaving another behind. Moreover, there are no connections to be arranged at Colombo or Aden, as in the case of the Peninsular and Orient steamers from India, China, and Australia; consequently the Orient steamers generally arrive at Naples well in advance of their contract time; and the slower railway-journey is not so material, although, as a matter of fact, the transit is really longer by nearly a day than by special train from Brindisi, and it remains to be seen what the effect will be under the arrangements for a later arrival, which have hardly yet come into practical operation.

It is estimated that if the mails were sent from Brindisi by ordinary train at union rates, instead of as at present, the whole of the Australian Colonies would save in the aggregate some £3,800 a year, a sum which, when divided between the several Governments, would doubtless seem far too small to justify a measure which could not but put those colonies at a grave postal disadvantage when compared with other parts of Her Majesty's dominions in the East.

I am therefore to request that you will be so kind as to bring the circumstances to the notice of your Government, and to support with your influence the Postmaster-General's earnest desire that the proposal as to the train-service should be withdrawn, as opposed alike to the best interests of the colonies and of this country.

The Agent-General.

I am, &c.,

S. A. BLACKWOOD.

APPENDIX E.

SIR,—

Downing Street, 21st November, 1890.

I have the honour to transmit to you a copy of a letter from the Science and Art Department forwarding a copy of Mr. Sandford Fleming's memorandum on time-reckoning, together with the map which accompanies it.

I have, &c.,

The Officer Administering the Government of ————

KNUTSFORD.

The DEPARTMENT of SCIENCE and ART to the COLONIAL OFFICE.

SIR,—

Department of Science and Art, London, S.W., 26th July, 1890.

Referring to the letter from the Colonial Office of the 15th February last, transmitting a copy of a despatch from the Governor-General of Canada, enclosing certain papers relating to the reform in time-reckoning which the Canadian Institute was desirous should be communicated to this department, I am directed by the Lords of the Committee of Council on Education to inform you that these papers were submitted to the Committee appointed to advise my Lords with reference to this question.