

undertaking has been repeatedly affirmed. It received recognition in the Conference of representative colonial statesmen in London in 1887, in that of Ottawa in 1894, at telegraph and postal conferences in Australasia almost annually, and at various times by chambers of commerce at home and abroad.

The dominant idea with those who have most strongly advocated the establishment of a Pacific cable has been the unity of the Empire. They foresaw the difficulty of effecting any practical union between communities separated by distance so long as they remained without the means of direct and cheap communication. At the same time, it was plain to them that a telegraph across the ocean would foster trade and commerce—the life of an Empire such as ours.

Among the memorable gatherings of representative men not the least important was the Conference of Premiers in London on the occasion of Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee. Before these statesmen met hopes had been entertained that some definite action would be determined for the inauguration of the scheme. Preparations had long been made for joint action. It was one of the chief objects set apart for special consideration at the Conference of the Imperial and Australasian Governments held at Ottawa in 1894. With this view the Canadian Government, agreeably to a resolution of the Conference, obtained much information on the subject, and transmitted it to all the Governments interested in the projected work. Soon afterwards the Secretary of State for the Colonies (Mr. Chamberlain) invited the Canadian and Australasian Governments to send representatives to London for the purpose of taking part in an Imperial Committee to be appointed specially to receive evidence and consider the project in every detail. The Committee first met on the 5th June, 1896, and on the 5th January, 1897, they reported the results of an exhaustive inquiry.

The proceedings of the Committee, and the conclusions which have been formed, have not been made public. They have been repeatedly asked for, but, as nothing transpired respecting the labours of the Committee up to the Jubilee week, the opinion gained ground that when the Conference was concluded full information would be given to the public with the decision arrived at by the Imperial authorities and the colonial Premiers. In many quarters it was expected that action would on that occasion be taken, and that the inauguration of the cable would result as a practical outcome of the Queen's Jubilee.

The old proverb tells us that it is often the unexpected which comes to pass. The proceedings of the Conference of Premiers were first made known to the public by an article purporting to be published by authority in the *London Standard* of the 25th July, and the subject of the Pacific cable is thus alluded to: "The Conference left the Pacific-cable scheme in mid-air, and it is very unlikely that anything more will be heard of it for a considerable time. The position was entirely changed by a proposal by the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company to lay "an all-British" line from Western Australia across the Indian Ocean to Mauritius, thence connecting with the Cape and St. Helena and Ascension. . . . The Eastern Extension Company, it is understood, does not ask for a direct subsidy for the new lines, but seeks other concessions from the Australasian Governments, which, if made, will justify them in proceeding with the work."

In the account of the Conference of Premiers laid before the British Parliament, there is a reference, in two sentences, to the cable. No mention, however, is made of any proposal having been submitted by the Eastern Extension Company. But the Premier of New South Wales (Mr. Reid) returned home from England through Canada, and, being interviewed by reporters in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, confirmed the statement with respect to the proposal of the Eastern Extension Company. The character of the concessions asked by the company has not been made public, but it has been stated that they desire to obtain exclusive rights for Australia on condition that they connect the colonies with the Cape and lay a new cable from the Cape to England *via* St. Helena, Ascension Island, Sierra Leone or Bathurst, and Gibraltar. This scheme is put forward by the company as a substitute for the Pacific cable.

Owing to the fact that telegraphic connection with the Cape is at present extremely defective the proposal of the company is undoubtedly of great importance to South Africa.

There are two telegraphic routes from England to Cape Colony. Both have landing-stations at Lisbon, one passes through the Mediterranean to Alexandria, through Egypt to Suez, through the Red Sea to Aden, and from Aden the cable follows the east coast of Africa, touching, among other points, at Mozambique and Delagoa Bay in foreign territory. The other route leaves the first at Lisbon, and follows the west coast of Africa, touching at some fourteen points, eight of which are under foreign flags, those of Portugal, France, and Spain.

Interruptions are frequent on both routes. There is evidence to establish that during the past four years communication between England and the Cape has been broken many times, and that the aggregate interruptions have averaged in each year seventy-five days on the west coast route, and eighty-seven days on the east coast route, showing that each cable is unavailable from six to seven days per month. While this refers to the average period that the cables have been thrown out of use, the durations of single interruptions have varied from one to thirty or forty days. As both lines are liable to be broken at the same time serious inconveniences have not seldom resulted. Every one will remember this contingency occurring when the Transvaal difficulty was at its height. Intense anxiety was then caused during the cable interruption of eleven days, when South Africa was passing through an acute crisis in her history.

Obviously a new cable to the Cape is much required, and as the frequent interruptions to traffic by the two present routes is to a large extent owing to the fact that the cables are laid in the shallow water which prevails along the African coasts they are in consequence exposed to accidents to which cables in deep waters are not subjected. That part of the proposal to touch at St. Helena and Ascension, where the water is of ample depth, would give to the cable the necessary security and avoid the difficulties experienced on the present routes. It is, however, not so clear that the northern half of the new cable would be so fortunate. By landing at Sierra Leone,