

Ottawa, 13th February, 1901.

I much regret that owing to a long-standing engagement in Kingston I shall be unable to be present at the annual meeting on the 13th instant. I hoped to have had an opportunity of bringing to the further consideration of members a subject which has already engaged the attention of the League. I ask permission to submit some explanations in this form.

#### *State-owned Ocean Cables.*

Those who were present at the last annual meeting will remember that an animated discussion took place, and the opinion was affirmed with the greatest unanimity that a complete system of State-owned ocean cables, touching the British possessions throughout the globe, is a project of the first importance. The following motion was formally submitted by me, seconded by Sir Charles Tupper, and unanimously adopted:—

"1. That the Home and colonial Governments should, as a matter of policy, recognise the principle of State control of all British cables, and apply the principle as opportunity offers, and as speedily as circumstances will admit.

"2. That the Pacific cable should be at once completed as the initial undertaking in such an Imperial system of cables as that indicated.

"3. That in all arrangements for connecting by telegraph the possessions of Her Majesty in any part of the globe provision be made for ultimate State ownership.

"4. That in permitting private companies to lay a cable to or from any British possession landing privileges be granted only on the condition that Her Majesty may at any time assume possession of the cable on specified terms."

These resolutions were sent to the League in England, and means were taken to bring them to the attention of the several Governments concerned. It will be remembered that several of the Canadian Ministers were present at the annual meeting and took part in the discussions.

#### *A Turning-point reached.*

It is satisfactory to know that the action then taken by the League has had its influence, and that a turning-point in the history of the great project was soon afterwards reached. Before last year closed a contract was entered into for the construction of the Pacific cable by the Home Government in conjunction with the Governments of New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, New Zealand, and Canada. Thus, after prolonged and vexatious delays caused by a combination of hostile companies, the first essential step to nationalise the telegraph service of the Empire has been taken. We may regard this outcome of the long struggle to secure the establishment of the Pacific cable as an illustration of the fact that public opinion responds slowly, and yet surely, to a movement in favour of reform, if the reform be founded on public needs.

It is now coming to be recognised that it is of vital importance to bring the British people on all parts of the surface of the globe within telegraph touch, and to provide them with the means of intercourse free from such oppressive charges as have hitherto been imposed.

#### *Effect of Nationalisation.*

In my open letters which have been published in England, Canada, and Australia, addressed to the Right Hon. Joseph Chamberlain, the Right Hon. Lord Hopetoun, and the Hon. Wm. Mulock, it is pointed out that by nationalising our telegraph service by land and sea the charges on messages to and from the most distant parts of the Empire can be reduced to one-eighth or one-tenth the rates at present exacted. This statement has been criticized, and I feel called upon to submit some explanations respecting it.

In the letters referred to I have laid great stress on a remarkable peculiarity of the electric telegraph—viz., that distance does not appreciably add to the cost of operating, and that there is practically no greater outlay incurred in transmitting long- than in transmitting short-distance messages. While postal matter cannot be conveyed by railway or ocean steamer without the consumption of fuel and much other expenditure to keep the train or steamer in motion, there is no similar expenditure in sending telegraph messages. In the one case the expenditure is constant for every hour and continuous for every mile, but in the other it is entirely different. With a telegraph properly established, equipped with instruments, and manned by operators, messages may be transmitted a hundred or a thousand miles with as much ease and at no greater cost than for one mile. There is, in fact, no known means—indeed I may add, no conceivable means—by which communications may be sent any distance; however great, at less actual cost than by electric telegraph.

#### *Criticisms answered.*

The only exception which has been taken to these views may be presented in the words of a correspondent:—

"As it is acknowledged that a cable is only good for so many years, ample provision must be made, averaged over the whole line, for the cost of renewals at stated periods. Then, again, breaks in cables frequently occur, and from these causes the cost of maintenance would, of course, be more over a thousand miles than over a hundred miles."

My answer is: We are safe in assuming that a cable will not always remain in a serviceable condition without repairs and renewals; its life is not so limited, however, as at one time supposed. In fact, the actual life of a cable is unknown. Modern cables seldom break. Once properly manufactured and properly laid, the cables of to-day are not to be compared in this respect with the first-laid cables. The breaking of a cable is coming to be regarded as a preventible evil, and it is believed that many of the cables now being submerged, in deep water at least, will last for an indefinite period. Still, it is no doubt wise and prudent to provide for the perpetual maintenance of cables, and this, I understand, is being done in the case of the Pacific cable.