

its use is limited to business which would suffer by delay. These cables are in the hands of private companies striving chiefly to earn large dividends, and who adopt the policy of charging high rates, in consequence of which trade and commerce are unduly taxed and their free development retarded. Were the cables owned by the State, large profits would not be the main object; and, precisely as in the case of the land lines of the United Kingdom, it would be possible greatly to lower rates and thus remove restrictions and bring the telegraph service within reach of many now debarred from using it.

When the Government assumed control of the inland telegraphs of the United Kingdom it was found possible greatly to reduce charges. In 1869, the year before the transfer, less than seven million messages were carried. At the transfer the rate was reduced to 1s. per message; the traffic immediately increased nearly 50 per cent., and continued increasing until, in the tenth year, twenty-nine million messages were transmitted, with a surplus of revenue over expenditure of £354,060. In another decade the total annual business equalled ninety-four millions, the operations still resulting in a surplus of £251,806, although the charge for a message had been meanwhile reduced from 1s. to 6d. It is indisputable that high charges restrict the utility of sea cables as well as of land lines, while low charges have the opposite effect. A few years ago the tariff of charges between Australia and London was 9s. 4d. per word. The proposal to establish the Pacific cable, and the discussion which followed, led to the cheapening of the rate to 4s. 9d. per word. In 1890, the year before the rates were lowered, the gross business consisted of 827,278 words; last year (1897) it had increased to 2,349,901 words. In 1890, with high charges, the revenue was £331,468; in 1897, with reduced charges, the revenue was £567,852, or £236,384 in excess of 1890, when the highest rates were exacted.

The utility of the telegraph may be measured by the time gained over the post, and the success of the telegraph service of the United Kingdom must be accepted as convincing evidence of its utility and value, for the gain in time is in this case measured by hours only. Its striking success in this instance may be largely owing to State control; but, whatever the cause, it is obvious that if, under similar conditions, weeks were gained instead of hours the utility of the telegraph would be proportionately increased and its value as a means of communication correspondingly enhanced. There is another immense advantage not generally known to the public which can be claimed for telegraphy: it is the fact that within certain limitations the actual cost of transmission is but little affected by distance. While the cost of carrying letters is in proportion to the distance traversed, the same rule does not apply to the electric wire. With a properly equipped telegraph system, the actual expenditure incurred in transmitting a message thousands of miles is practically no greater than in sending it ten miles. Obviously, therefore, the principle of "penny postage"—that is to say, a low uniform charge for all distances—is applicable even more fully to ocean telegraphy than to the Imperial postal service. With these considerations before us, a moment's reflection leads to the conviction that this wonderful agency—the electric wire—places within our reach, if we have the wisdom to accept it, an ideal means of communication for the world-wide British Empire. Thirty years ago the British Parliament, for reasons the soundness of which experience has fully confirmed, determined that the State should assume control of the inland telegraph system of the United Kingdom: to-day there are incomparably stronger reasons for State control being exercised over a cable system for the whole Empire.

The proposal is not altogether new. If the proceedings of the Colonial Conference of 1887 be referred to it will be found that an Imperial telegraph service was foreshadowed in the discussions. To these I would refer, and especially pages 225 to 228, 339 to 341, and 513 to 520. In these discussions the delegates from the Cape of Good Hope, Natal, Australia, New Zealand, Newfoundland, and Canada took part. Again, at the Colonial Conference of 1894 the proposal was set forth in some detail, and the advantages of an all-British system of telegraphy around the globe pointed out. On that point I beg leave to direct attention to the proceedings of the Ottawa Conference, and more particularly to pages 88 to 90, inclusive. Likewise to the proceedings of the second Congress of the Chambers of Commerce of the Empire, and more especially to a letter from the Ottawa delegate (1st July, 1892) to the President, Sir John Lubbock.

The proposal to complete the telegraphic circuit of the globe has no doubt suggested itself to many persons. Among those who have written on the subject may be mentioned Sir Julius Vogel, at one time Postmaster-General of New Zealand; the late Mr. F. N. Gisborne, Superintendent of Telegraphs for the Canadian Government; Sir George Baden-Powell, M.P., London; Mr. J. C. Lockley, of Nhill, Australia; and the veteran postal reformer, Mr. Henniker Heaton. At the Cape Mr. Jan Hendrick Hofmeyer has given the matter his strongest support.

#### *Projected Cable System.*

It may be laid down as an essential condition of an Imperial cable service that none of the lines should touch foreign soil, and that they should be placed so as to avoid shallow seas, more especially those seas in proximity to any country likely at any time to prove unfriendly. In describing generally the route which would best comply with these conditions I shall commence at Vancouver, for the reason that up to this point telegraphic connection with the Imperial centre in London is already assured, without being dependent on any foreign Power. First, we have direct telegraphic connection across the Atlantic by a number of cables, and it is a mere question of cost to lay additional transatlantic cables to be State-controlled whenever they are wanted. Secondly, we have a transcontinental telegraph from the Atlantic coast to Vancouver, extending along the line of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and all practical telegraphers will recognise the great advantage of this position. By having the wires hung within sight of passing trains the telegraph can be frequently inspected with the greatest possible ease, and faults, when they occur, can speedily be repaired.