

It has fallen to my lot during these twenty years unceasingly to take more or less active interest in the telegraphic connection of Australia with the Mother country by way of Canada. The evidence shows that it has been a long chapter of difficulties and disappointments, that a series of obstructions raised by strong opposing influences have been encountered, but that owing to unrelaxed, persistent efforts and the steady adhesion of friends of the enterprise they have one by one been overcome. The dominant reason for desiring to see every obstacle removed and the connection by telegraph effected by the Canadian route is explained by the vitally important fact that the Canadian route is absolutely the only route by which the globe may be girdled by a series of all-British cables. Prolonged delays have been caused, but at length success is assured. An arrangement has now been reached under which the several Governments immediately concerned shall, without further loss of time, establish a Pacific cable as a State undertaking. The first part of the problem may therefore be regarded as solved, and the way is opened for entering fully into the consideration of the main proposal—viz., the establishment of a complete system of inter-Imperial cables which will put each part of the realm of Her Majesty in touch with every other part; the whole under State control, so that it can be utilised for the highest good of the Empire.

At the close of the nineteenth century it is impossible to form a narrow conception of the British Empire. It has long since ceased to be confined to the group of islands on the west coast of Europe. The Empire has undergone an extraordinary expansion, and now embraces vast territories in the four quarters of the globe. The subjects of the Queen are in possession of an immense extent of the earth's surface. The European home of the British people occupies but a fraction over 1 per cent. of the superficial area of the whole Empire.

The great Ruler of the kingdoms of the world has brought many lands under one sovereignty. He has granted to our Queen length of days, and placed Her Majesty over great multitudes of the human race, comprising various nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues. We may regard this as evidence of beneficent design, and we are called upon as human agencies to take every means at our disposal to perfect the union of the mother of nations with the daughter States, in order that, united, they may fulfil their higher destiny.

The countries occupied by the family of British nations are widely sundered geographically; their shores are washed by the great oceans; although for purposes of commerce intercommunication is effected by fleets of steamships and sailing-vessels, more adequate means of intercourse is needed. For general security, for great State purposes, no less than for the operations of trade and for ordinary social requirements, all the different parts of this widely scattered Empire demand the freest use of the most perfect means of communication known to us.

We are familiar with the electric telegraph and its employment by land and sea. This marvellous agency is at our command, and it only requires to be properly applied in order that it may best serve the highest interests of the people of the Empire. Already it is employed in part, but as at present established and administered it is open to grave objections. It is wanting in essentials to our daily needs, and we are debarred from enjoying all the advantages which, if properly applied, it can confer.

There are lines of telegraph established across parts of Europe, Africa, and Asia, connecting Australia with the Mother country, but these lines at certain points pass through foreign territories or touch foreign ports. At many places on their way they traverse shallow seas in proximity to foreign States, where they are liable at a critical moment to speedy interruption. Moreover, these telegraph-lines are owned and controlled by private companies, and charges are exacted for the transmission of messages which are felt by all to be exorbitant, and by most people absolutely prohibitory.

In my letter to Mr. Chamberlain of the 28th October, 1898 [p. 8, F.—8., 1899], a revised copy of which is appended, I have set forth the outlines of a scheme of arrangement for cables and land telegraphs by which the most wonderful product of science of the age may be adapted to the peculiar conditions of our Empire. The proposal is to establish electric cables to and from each British possession; these cables to be connected with local land lines in Canada, Australia, South Africa, India, and elsewhere; in this manner linking together the whole Empire by a chain of telegraphs without touching the territory of other nations, at the same time avoiding shallow waters adjacent thereto. Moreover, it is designed that the whole system of telegraphs, by land as well as by sea, be brought under State control, in order that the fullest benefit to the British people everywhere, and to the Empire, be attained.

In my letter to Mr. Chamberlain a peculiarity of the electric telegraph of far-reaching importance is pointed out. It is a peculiarity which, however, cannot be turned to public advantage so long as the cables of the Empire remain in the hands of private companies. The cost of sending a message by telegraph is not, as is generally supposed, governed by distance. It is true that the companies charge according to distance; but this is simply an expedient for obtaining from the telegraphing public larger profits. As a matter of fact, there is practically no more current outlay incurred in transmitting long- than in transmitting short-distance messages. It may be contrary to practice, it may not agree with preconceived ideas, but it is a fact, nevertheless, that there is no known means by which communications can be sent at less actual cost than by telegraph. A mail or letter cannot be conveyed by railway or ocean steamer without expenditure on coal, machinery, oil, wages, and other things to keep the train or ship in motion. The expenditure is constant for every hour, and continuous for every mile. The circumstances are entirely different in the case of the telegraph; when once 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 actual cost than one mile.

This remarkable anomaly, added to the equally remarkable although better-known fact that transmissions by the electric wire are instantaneous, point to a system of State-owned cables and telegraphs as the ideal means of communication for an empire under such conditions as ours. If