

would require the Australasian Colonies to continue the existing subsidy of £32,400 per annum for another twenty years, or ten years longer than the period named in the original proposal." That these land-lines are very long and very bad no one but an interested colonial Postmaster-General would venture to deny. We have on a previous occasion pointed out that a telegram sent over the land-line from Roebuck Bay to Burketown, in Queensland, would, assuming that it ever reached its destination, have to travel over a length of land-line greater than the distance between London and Calcutta, or several hundreds of miles more than the distance intervening between London and Vancouver. The admission made by Mr. Pender as to the land-line from Roebuck Bay being "more or less unreliable," is only in accordance with the statement made by Mr. Playford, the Agent-General of South Australia, at the Conference held in Ottawa. This unsatisfactory condition of affairs proves that the cable which was laid from Java to Roebuck Bay in 1889 cannot be looked upon as an alternative to the two cables which run from the same point in Java to Port Darwin, although it was laid with the intention of assuring communication with Australasia when the Port Darwin cables were broken down.

The Australian Colonies, however, do not see the position in the same light as the associated companies, and at the Postal and Telegraphic Conference held in Tasmania in March-April last, at which all the colonies were represented, when the original scheme of the allied companies was discussed, the two following resolutions were passed:—

"That, in the absence of any satisfactory proposal from the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company, and of any proposal at all except on the basis of an alternate cable *via* Africa, this Conference is unable to make any fresh arrangements with that company." Also, "That this Conference reaffirms the opinion that in the interests of Australasia the Pacific-cable project should be consummated as speedily as practicable, and that the Governments of the various Australasian Colonies be requested to represent to the Imperial and Dominion Governments the foregoing opinion, together with the proposal of the Premiers, as agreed to at their recent Conference held in Melbourne—viz., 'That if Great Britain and Canada would each contribute one-third of the cost the colonies would be prepared to contribute the remaining one-third.'"

In the course of this discussion much dissatisfaction was expressed at the unwillingness of the above-mentioned company to meet the colonies, even to the extent of replying to the plain questions put to them as to arrangements consequent on the approaching expiry of the annual subsidy of £32,400 at present paid to the company by the colonies. In the course of his remarks, the Hon. Mr. J. Gavan Duffy said that "they had spoon-fed the company, and the more they fed it the more spoon-fed it wanted to be." A strong feeling in favour of an alternative cable *via* the Pacific to Canada was also shown, and in reference to this Mr. Gavan Duffy said: "The project was entertained very fairly, and at one time it seemed as though the line would be immediately constructed. But for some reason or other a blight had come over it, and they did not now hear of it." The cause of this "blight" will bear some examination.

In the first place, it is only right to give the allied companies credit for the manner in which they have so long, and heretofore so successfully, managed to delay the establishment of a competing cable across the Pacific. It is no more than natural that the Eastern Extension Company should strongly object to the lapsing of subsidies, and to the loss of about 50 per cent. of the revenue which they now derive from Australasian traffic, which in 1897 amounted to a total of some £530,000. With this position in view, it is easy to understand the opinion expressed by Sir Sandford Fleming, who, in his very temperate report to the Canadian Government on the evidence given in the Colonial Office before the Pacific Cable Commission at the end of 1896*, expresses himself as follows in reference to this company: "It may indeed be held that the company has always assumed an attitude of hostility to the aspirations of Canada in respect to the proposed cable, and have for years strenuously opposed all efforts to advance her own and Imperial interests on the Pacific in connection with the union of Australasia and British North America telegraphically. Be that as it may, I can only repeat the view I have often expressed, that if the exigencies of the Empire, as a whole, demand the establishment of a national work which will interfere with the operations of this private company, every reasonable consideration should be extended to that company by those upon whom it has just claims. But it cannot be supposed that the public interests must be entirely set aside in order that the company may for ever continue to receive large dividends. I will again refer to the position of the Eastern Extension Company, and suggest a means by which, as it appears to me, the matter can be adjusted in the spirit of justice and fairness."

Sir Sandford Fleming also points out that "All doubt as to the practicability of laying an electric cable from the western coast of Canada to the Australasian Colonies, touching only on islands in the possession of Great Britain, is now entirely set at rest. The best authorities known were examined, and not one of them expressed the least misgiving on this point."

In this report reference is also made to what has been one of the most serious causes of obstruction in the progress of the Pacific-cable project. Sir Sandford Fleming writes: "I have pointed out in what respect there is a general agreement in the views expressed by the several gentleman examined by the Committee. I shall now refer to an extraordinary diversity of opinion. In this diversity I find ranged on one side the agents, the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company, and two officers of the Post Office Department. On the other side, all the highest authorities on electrical science, together with the managers of two important ocean cables, whose evidence was submitted to the Committee. The two officers were Mr. J. C. Lamb, secretary, and Mr. W. H. Preece, engineer-in-chief and electrician to the General Post Office, London. Their evidence

* Return to an address of the House of Commons (Canada), dated 18th April, 1898, for a copy of the Report of the Committee appointed by the Imperial Government in 1896 to consider the question of a telegraph cable between Canada and Australasia; also of any reports or correspondence to the Canadian Government from the Canadian representatives on said Committee, or Sir Sandford Fleming, in regard to the same subject.