

were in private hands, are we not warranted in the conclusion that in the larger field like results would follow a like cause? If the application of the principle of State control in the United Kingdom has lowered charges on messages to $\frac{1}{4}$ d. per word for all distances, under the same conditions may we not look forward in the near future to the charge on ocean telegrams throughout the Empire being reduced to 1s. per word, or even less? This I conceive is by no means too sanguine a view to take. I have given the matter much consideration, and I am perfectly satisfied that if at this juncture the Australasian Colonies follow a wise course, they will be instrumental in conferring on the British people throughout the world the inestimable blessing of a State-owned cable system, by which eventually the very lowest tariff on messages will be obtainable. I much hesitate to express my full and deliberate views on this point less I be regarded as a visionary. If, happily, the present difficulty be overcome, the Pacific cable proceeded with, and the larger scheme followed up, I am satisfied that one of the chief objects to look forward to in a few years will be a uniform 6d. tariff the world over for ocean cables: precisely on the principle of Imperial penny postage. (For reasons and explanations, see my letter to Mr. Chamberlain, 28th October, 1898.—Pacific-cable documents printed by Canadian Parliament, 1899, page 22.) [Enclosure in No. 28, F.—8, 1899.]

I now venture to ask my fellow-colonists in Australia, is such a purpose as I have pictured worthy of some sacrifice on their part? Is an all-British comprehensive cable system worth having? Should their answer be in the affirmative, I desire specially to point out to them the remarkable fact that the Pacific cable is the only key to such a new bond of Imperial unity. This fact certainly gives to the Pacific cable an importance which intensifies the calamity pointed out by Mr. Mulock as the inevitable result of failure in establishing that undertaking. These considerations will, I think, appeal to the good sense and the patriotism of Australians, with whom now rests the responsibility of determining whether or not the long-projected Pacific cable shall become an accomplished fact.

A single word respecting the proposed cable from Australia to the Cape, which for some time has been advocated as a substitute for the Pacific cable. The company proposing to lay that cable offer to lower rates on messages between Australia and England from 4s. 9d. to 4s. per word, on conditions that certain concessions be granted them. The offer may be tempting, but the small immediate gain is not to be compared with the loss which Australia would suffer if the Pacific cable, and together with it the great Imperial scheme, be *per force* abandoned. Has not Æsop many centuries ago spoken to countless generations of mankind, and told them that in grasping at a shadow the substance may be lost? Speaking for myself, I hold that nothing can take the place of the Pacific cable, and I feel it to be in the interests of the British Empire that no new obstacle should be raised to obstruct the immediate accomplishment of that undertaking. While I firmly hold to that opinion, at the same time I recognise that we cannot have too many cables, if they be judiciously established, to meet public needs. I am therefore unable to see any great reason for objecting to the Cape-Australian cable, provided full provision be made for bringing it at any time when required under State control. Under State control it would, in conjunction with the Pacific cable, constitute the major portion of the great Imperial telegraph system.

Having thus briefly expressed my views, the two points which, in conclusion, I would strongly urge are these: (1.) That nothing be done or left undone to further retard the establishment of the Pacific cable. (2.) That in any agreement for laying a cable between Australia and the Cape ultimate State ownership be kept in view, and strictly provided for.

I have, &c.,

SANDFORD FLEMING.

Enclosure in No. 130.

REMARKS ON AN ALL-BRITISH CABLE SYSTEM, submitted at the Annual Meeting of the British Empire League in Canada, 14th March, 1900, by Sir SANDFORD FLEMING.

I ASK permission to submit some remarks bearing on a public question which concerns the whole British people. The people of the British Empire are of all origins; they occupy a collection of States in every region on the surface of the globe, and, as the prime object of this League is to unite these peoples, I am satisfied that there is no subject which can more appropriately be considered here to-day than the one to which I propose to invite your attention.

There are already telegraph cables laid from the centre of the Empire to the great colonies in the Southern Hemisphere, but these cables are in the hands of private companies; on their way from the shores of England to Australia, to South Africa, and to India these cables touch at foreign ports, or pass over the lands of foreign States, or are laid in shallow seas bordering the shores of foreign nations; they are therefore liable to interruption at a critical moment. Moreover, the charges for the transmission of ordinary messages which are exacted by the companies are so high that the use of the cables is practically forbidden to all but a few persons. In the interests of commerce, of social and political intercourse, and of general public safety, it is felt that a much freer means of communication than now exists is indispensable.

The British people throughout the globe own one flag—they pay homage to one Sovereign—they, indeed, have many interests in common—they now, or soon will, have one cheap postage, and it is with no little pride and satisfaction we can point to the fact that it is our present Postmaster-General, Mr. Mulock, to whom the British people everywhere, to a large extent, will be indebted for that boon.

The principle of penny postage being adopted and in part put in practice, we are naturally led to consider if it be possible to make a corresponding advance in the matter of telegraphy. We ask ourselves the question, Is it practicable to link the Empire together by a comprehensive cable system, and, if it be practicable, should we take means to enjoy the advantages which it would bring? For my own part, I am unable, on the one hand, to perceive any insuperable obstacle in the way, and on the other I can see nothing that would more tend to unite our people in every longitude than a globe-encircling cable system under State control.