

By the "all-red" route is meant the British highway between Great Britain, New Zealand, and Australia by way of Canada—along which the objective points shall be entirely in British territory or under British control. The proposition now under consideration is to take advantage of that route, and to provide rapid communication, for mails and passengers, between the Motherland and those dominions beyond the seas, utilising in Canada the transcontinental lines, and, on the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, steamers whose speed and accommodation shall be of the best and most up-to-date character.

There are no doubt other "all-red" routes between various parts of the Empire; and the particular one we are to discuss this evening has already been partially developed for Imperial purposes. We recognise the improvement in the Atlantic service to Canada in the last few years, the excellence of the railway facilities across the Dominion, and the fact that there is a regular line of steamers on the Pacific between Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. On the other hand, few will be found to admit that sufficient use is made of the unique opportunities afforded by such a magnificent through route, or that the present services on its Atlantic and Pacific links are in the matter of speed what the countries concerned have a right to expect—when, as we believe is the case, they are prepared to pay for better accommodation in that respect.

Let me say at once that I am not actuated in any way by a spirit of antagonism to the existing services between Great Britain and Australia. The services by way of the Suez Canal has been, and must continue to be, of the utmost value to Australasia. There is nothing in the proposed scheme which will affect it to any extent. Neither can it divert the immense freight traffic which passes by that channel, or by way of the Cape. And it is hardly to be expected, with the rapid advance sure to be witnessed in Canada in the near future, that the present steamship lines to the Dominion will be prejudiced. The utilisation of the all-red route, under Imperial recognition, is being suggested with the view of making the utmost use of an available alternative highway to the East, in such a manner as to afford the greatest benefit to the Empire, from commercial, political, and strategical points of view. Can it be otherwise than that all the countries concerned will share in the additional prosperity that must accrue from the proposed improved means of intercommunication?

There is nothing new in the proposal. It has formed the subject of discussion for the last twenty years or more—indeed, it has been before the public ever since the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885. For all that time there has been on the statute-book of the Dominion an Act of Parliament authorising a large subsidy for an improved Atlantic service; but none has yet been provided of the speed then contemplated. On one or two occasions contracts for such a service have been on the verge of completion, and the financial assistance of the Dominion and Imperial Governments has been conditionally pledged for the purpose, but they never matured. The present service from Vancouver to New Zealand and Australia was organised with the object of forming a link, to be strengthened from time to time, in the chain of through fast communication. That part of the scheme has also hung fire because of the difficulties experienced in other directions. That the matter is still very much in the minds of those responsible for the government of the various parts of the Empire is shown by the discussions which took place at the Imperial Conference last year, when the following resolution was unanimously passed:—

"That, in the opinion of this Conference, the interests of the Empire demand that, in so far as practicable, its different portions should be connected by the best possible means of mail communication, travel, and transportation, and that to this end it is advisable that Great Britain should be connected with Canada, and through Canada with Australia and New Zealand, by the best service available within reasonable cost; that for the purpose of carrying the above project into effect such financial support as may be necessary should be contributed by Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand in equitable proportions."

The whole question is now being examined by a Committee appointed by the Imperial Government. This Committee has not yet made its report, so that it is impossible to say what its recommendations will be. There is no doubt, however, that the Governments of Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, are committed to the principle of improved communication to the Antipodes by way of the Atlantic, the Canadian railways, and the Pacific; and that if it is found to be practicable and financially reasonable efforts will be made to bring it into existence. We are not at present concerned with the details of any organization that may be suggested or proposed; that will be a matter for the countries specially interested, and we may take it for granted that the position of the existing companies will receive every consideration.

Now let us look for a few minutes at the benefits which may be expected from the exploitation on a proper basis of the "all-red" route. If a service can be established to Canada similar in speed to that given to New York by the steamers "Lusitania" and "Mauretania"—which, by the way, owe their existence to a large loan on easy terms, as well as to subsidies from the Imperial Government—nearly two days will be saved in the time now taken to convey mails and passengers to a port in the Dominion.

The distance from Liverpool to New York is 3,026 knots, and the time taken by the "Lusitania" and "Mauretania" is, approximately, 5 days 18 hours. From Liverpool to Halifax is 2,439 knots, and on the basis of twenty-four knots per hour the voyage would require 4 days 10 hours. To Quebec the distance is 2,633 knots by way of Belle Isle, and the duration of the voyage at the same rate of speed would be 4 days 20 hours. From Liverpool to Quebec, *via* Cape Race, is 2,801 knots, and the time would be 5 days 3 hours. The average voyage from Liverpool to Quebec at present by the fastest steamers is in summer under six days and a half, and in winter to Halifax about six days. It will be seen, therefore, that it would be quite within the mark to expect a saving of one and a half days, or indeed rather more, if vessels capable of doing twenty-four knots per hour were plying direct to and from Canada.