

So soon as the limits of Canada were extended westward and British Columbia included in the Dominion, steps were taken to connect the Atlantic seaboard by railway with the Pacific. After fourteen years of arduous labour a train from the Port of Montreal steamed alongside of the tidal waters of the western ocean, on the 8th November, 1885. That train had traversed great Canadian forests and still greater prairies; it had pierced the Rocky Mountains; it had passed from the Atlantic to the Pacific on British soil—it had performed a remarkable achievement pregnant with possibilities which no man then living could foretell.

The arrival of the pioneer transcontinental train in British Columbia was the harbinger of great Imperial developments in future years, and it rendered possible the concluding act of the Imperial Conference a few weeks ago in London. Moreover, it is indisputable that there is no portion of the coast of America from Cape Horn to Behring Straits, other than British Columbia, to which the wise and far-reaching policy inaugurated by the Premiers of the Empire could by any possibility be made applicable.

A leading object of the Ottawa Board of Trade in approaching His Excellency was to seek an opportunity of bringing once more before the attention of the Governments and the people of each self-governing portion of the Empire the desirability of supplementing the Imperial mail-service by the completion of a great circle of Imperial telegraph-cables to form a perfect electrical connection between the oversea dominions and the Mother-country. The proposal was first made nine years ago by a member of the Ottawa Board of Trade, and, as pointed out in the address to His Excellency, in every succeeding year its merits have been confirmed by irrefragable testimony.

Such being the case, the following explanatory paragraphs from the original proposal are reproduced. It is deemed proper, after the lapse of nine years, to reiterate the reasons and arguments then given. They are held to be as instructive to-day as when first written.

The time has arrived when the expediency of establishing a complete telegraph-cable system throughout the Empire may be considered on its merits. The advantages which will inevitably follow the adoption of universal penny postage appear to be generally recognised, and I venture to think the public mind will be prepared to entertain favourably another proposal not less important. It is not necessary in the least to undervalue cheap postage or detract from its immense importance in order to show that a cheap telegraph service on a comprehensive scale is easily attainable, and that it would prove an effective means of speedy communication for an Empire such as ours.

The transmission of letters has always been a function of the Government; indeed, it has been wisely held throughout the civilised world that the postal service should be controlled by the State. The electric telegraph is a comparatively modern introduction. In the Mother-country private companies were the first to establish lines of telegraph, but in 1868 it was found to be in the public interest to have them taken over by the State and placed under the Post Office Department.

The transfer was effected in 1870. Changes and improvements were immediately made; the telegraph service, previously confined to lines connecting great cities where business was lucrative, was extended to many towns and districts previously neglected, and, notwithstanding the fact that the charges on messages were greatly reduced, the business developed to such an extent that the receipts progressively increased. Before the transfer it cost about 6s. to send an ordinary message from London to Scotland or Ireland. The rate was reduced to 1s., and subsequently to 6d. (the rate at present charged), and for that sum a telegram can be sent from any one station to any other station within the limits of the United Kingdom, without regard to distance.

It was early recognised by every country in Europe that so efficient a servant to trade and commerce, so important an aid to the State itself, should become a national institution. France, Austria, Prussia, Russia, Sardinia, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Belgium each established a State telegraph system, and, as in Great Britain, experience has shown that they have done this not only with advantage to the various administrative necessities, but with benefit to the public at large.

Such being the unanimous conclusion, is not the application of the principle of State ownership on a larger scale than hitherto attempted a fit subject for inquiry? Is it not desirable and expedient that the whole British Empire should have a State-controlled telegraph system?

The conditions of the Empire are totally different to what they were some years back. When Her Majesty ascended the throne there was not a single mile of electric telegraph anywhere. There was not an iron ship of any class afloat, and mail steamships were practically unknown. From that period the conditions have been continually changing, and the process of growth and development still goes on. True, change has met with resistance from individuals, companies, and classes, but resist it who may, the law of development follows its steady course, and continually makes demands on science and skill to meet the ever-changing conditions. We are living in an age of transformation; the spirit of discovery and enterprise, of invention and achievement, has extended and expanded the British Empire from the small islands on the coast of Europe to new territories, continental in extent, in both hemispheres. The development of the mercantile marine has carried the flag of our country over every mile of sea to meridians far distant from the Motherland. In these distant territories communities have established themselves under the protection of that flag. They have drawn riches from the forest, the soil, and the mine. They have caused noble cities to spring up, rivalling in the splendour of their streets and buildings the finest cities of the Old World. These young nations, full of hope and vigour, have made progress in every direction; they are imbued with lofty aspirations, and their most ardent desire is to give their energy and strength to the building-up of a greater British Empire on the firm foundation of common interest and common sentiment.

At an earlier period of the world's history it would have been difficult to conceive the possibility of any lasting political union between countries so widely separated by intervening seas. The problem is, however, being solved not by old methods, but by the application of wise prin-