

and maintained. It is, of course, evident that Australasia depends greatly for its future progress upon the flow of population from without, as also upon the increase of the number of those who, in one shape or another, introduce capital to, or open business relations with it. Unless the colonies are to be left to depend for the increase of their population and resources on the natural increase of the present small population, and on the labors alone of the present settlers and their descendants, they must look forward to emigration from more numerously peopled countries. The use of the telegraph has become so popular that it is now regarded as almost a necessary adjunct to our daily life; and nothing would more retard the introduction of fresh population and capital to the Australasian colonies than the feeling that those who became connected with these distant countries might find themselves outside the range of telegraphic communication.

It is true that a line of telegraph already exists, but in respect to that part of the route over which there is only a single line of communication there is the danger at any moment of interruption. Whilst such danger exists there is an indisposition to resort to the telegraph to anything like the extent to which it might be depended on, whilst in so far as it is used the loss in case of interrupted communication to those who are in the habit of employing it is most disastrous. The uses and ramifications of the telegraph are so wide-spread and deep-rooted that a suspension of communication becomes a calamity, not merely to individuals but to the State.

A complete duplicate system from end to end can alone, in our opinion, give to Australasia that reasonable security her interests and well-being demand.

The employment of the telegraph is evidently largely affected by the tariff, which to the extent to which the use of a line is placed beyond the reach of all who do not belong to the more affluent classes is equivalent to obstruction to the use of the telegraph. The arguments in favor of the telegraph are arguments in favor of its being placed within the reach of the mass of those who would benefit by it. We do not, as will be seen, urge that those, be they few or many, who do not directly derive benefit from the telegraph should be largely or permanently taxed to save expense to those who immediately employ it; but we consider that the matter is so important that the State may reasonably be expected to do all that can be done to aid those who require the service of the telegraph in procuring that service on the most favorable terms, consistent with the inevitable impediments which may stand in the way.

We incline to think also that the interests at stake, being as they are so large, and so certain to become larger from year to year, ought not to be left in private hands. Much, if not all, that can be said in favor of the Governments working the lines of telegraph within the colonies seems to us to be applicable to the desirability of their working the exterior lines which form the means of communication between the colonies and Europe.

It is impossible to read the report we wrote on our interview with Mr. Thornton and Colonel Thompson, and also to remember all the circumstances of cable communication with Australasia, not to be alive to the fact that the interests of the colonies have been prejudiced already by reason of their having no control over exterior cable lines.

At the late Conference held in Sydney nothing definite was decided as to the mode of duplication, but the representatives unanimously voted in favor of such duplication where necessary, and also considered that any necessary subsidy consequent thereon should be defrayed by the colonies assenting thereto, in proportion to their respective populations. The following is the text of the two resolutions:—

- “1. That it is desirable to extend and improve the means of telegraphic communication between Australia and Europe, by the duplication, where necessary, of the cables or lines connecting the same.
- “2. That any subsidy on ocean cables to connect Australia with Europe shall be borne by the several Australian colonies assenting thereto, in proportion to population.”

The Conference also decided in favor of a subsidy of £20,000 as the proposed consideration for the future reduction of the tariff to six shillings a word. The resolution to this effect was supported by the representatives of the colonies of New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, and Victoria. The representatives of New Zealand, Tasmania, and Western Australia refrained from voting. The text of the resolution was as follows:—

- “6. That the Governments of South Australia and New South Wales be empowered to make arrangements with the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company for a reduction of message tariff to six shillings per word, at a subsidy not exceeding £20,000 per annum, terminable at one year's notice; and that such subsidy be borne by the respective colonies, in proportion to population, any colony to be at liberty to withdraw on like notice.”

From these resolutions it is clear that the Conference contemplated, and its representatives more or less approved, a subsidy for a duplication, as well as of £20,000 for a reduction of the tariff; and we think we may assume that if both these objects, viz., a duplication and reduction, can be procured for a payment of about £20,000 for a limited term that such a result is much more favorable than the Conference expected, and is one to which the members assembled thereat would in all probability have given unanimous and cordial approval.

It is well to observe that the reduction to six shillings meant a reduction to that price, exclusive of the cost of transmission through the Australian Continent.

From what we have already said it will have been understood that the object to which we attach most importance in this communication is, that the Governments should take charge of telegraph cable communication.

Few will dissent from the principle who have observed how admirably the telegraph has been managed by the various Governments of the colonies. They may be said to have set the example, since followed in Great Britain, of cheap telegraph communication under Government control. So popular has this plan become that, notwithstanding the opposition in this country to anything savoring of protection, little objection is made to the telegraph being carried on at an apparent loss, which of course means that the taxpayers who are not immediately benefited by the telegraph are made to contribute to the cost for the benefit of those who directly use it.

Australasia in relation to the cables is somewhat in the position that Great Britain occupied in relation to the land lines when she determined to acquire them. Only in the one case there were numerous interests to deal with, whilst in the case of the cables the Governments would substantially have to deal with one company only.