

REPORT OF THE DEBATES.

FRIDAY, 27TH FEBRUARY, 1891.

1. *President's Address on Order of Business.*

THE President said he returned his most sincere thanks for the great compliment they had paid him in electing him to the position of President of the Conference. He was fully aware of the importance of the position, and the duties appertaining to it, and he was also aware of the intelligence, generosity, and patriotism of his colleagues, who would enable him to discharge his duties and relieve him of a great deal of the importance, so far as personal effort was concerned. He appreciated the kindly spirit of the gentlemen present, and thanked Sir John Bray and Mr. Ward for their kind remarks. On behalf of New South Wales he offered them a very hearty and cordial welcome to the colony. He could say most sincerely that they were proud to see them present, and the pride was intensified for many reasons on this occasion. They had assembled in the City of Sydney, and the old Colony of New South Wales, familiarly called the Mother Colony, for a great purpose, and the pride that belonged to the mother he felt certain was felt in this colony in seeing the splendid strides made by their prosperous children all over Australia. That feeling was held in the bosom of every man, woman, and child in this colony. The prosperity of each of the surrounding colonies was viewed with pride and admiration by the people residing here. There had been many Conferences from time to time in the various colonies; but, although the work done in South Australia was good and of a very important character, they were present that day to perfect it, and to carry out more fully what was then done. There was, however, an additional importance in the present gathering. In the course of a few days the trusted representatives of Australasia would meet in this capital to engage in a noble work and lay the foundation-stone of a noble building—that of a great nation—and he knew nothing that would be so conducive to that as the satisfactory results of their Conference. They were living in a most remarkable age and in remarkable times. They were living in a time when abuses had been removed and misunderstandings had been cleared away, and he knew nothing that could do that better than a proper and efficient system of postal and telegraphic communication. They were assembled for high practical purposes. They were there to provide facilities throughout the whole of Australasia so that people might be able to live more closely with one another and understand one another better. There were no prejudices amongst them, and he hoped that the result of their Conference would be satisfactory to all the colonies. There were some of them to whom at one time the possibility of telegraphic communication appeared little more than a dream; but now they were in connection with the great capitals and remote parts of the world. What could do more to bring about a better understanding than an efficient system of postal and telegraphic communication? He was glad to see that every colony was represented for the one object. He would draw attention to what had been done in relation to the late Conference in Adelaide, so that they would understand where they had left off and where they had to begin. He had before him a copy of the report of the Conference held at Adelaide in May last, and to summarise the position, the action taken in the resolutions had been as follows: Postal service: The reduction of the postal rate to 2½d. had been carried out as regards Great Britain, but, at the request of the Imperial Government, the question of reducing to other places outside the colonies had been deferred until after the Vienna Congress, to be held in May next, the reason given being that certain existing conventions stood in the way of an immediate general reduction. The reduction of ocean post-cards to 2d. had also been carried out as regards Great Britain. In the matter of post-cards between India and Australasia, the Adelaide Government was understood to be still negotiating, and the delegate from that colony, Sir J. C. Bray, would probably inform the Conference as to the position of this question. The terms of the Australasian Postal Convention had been settled, and it only awaited the necessary legislation on the part of New South Wales and some of the other colonies to give effect to it. In reference to future Pacific mail-service contracts, so far as the service *via* San Francisco was concerned, this had been arranged on the terms agreed to at the Adelaide Conference, New Zealand having renewed the contract for a year, other colonies paying poundage rates as proposed. The question of a service *via* Canada would possibly engage their attention on the present occasion. The Postal Convention with the United States of America, so far as New South Wales was concerned—as adopted at Adelaide, and, with some modifications, agreed to at the suggestion of the United States Post Office—had been completed and executed. The proposed increase of the money-order limit from £10 to £20, so far as New South Wales was concerned, awaited fresh legislation. In connection with the telegraph service, the position was as follows: The matter of the reduction of the cable tariff to 4s. a word, 3s. 6d. for Government messages, and 1s. 10d. for Press messages, had been arranged on the terms proposed at the Conference, so far as regards the Colonies of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, and Western Australia, which had hitherto contributed to the cable subsidy. It was understood that the carrying-out of these reduced rates had awaited the receipt from London of the revision of the draft agreement with the company, also the result of further negotiations with the non-contributing colonies—viz., Queensland and New Zealand—conducted with a view of persuading those colonies to join, not only (on the basis of population) in the existing subsidy of £32,400, but in the guarantee to the company of one-half of any loss which might be sustained owing to the reduced rates, the company bearing the other half. Should those colonies still see fit to hold out, he apprehended that this Conference would have then to consider as to the terms on which the messages of those colonies would be transmitted. The reduction of the intercolonial telegraph rates was understood to be awaiting final settlement, as some of the colonies had declined to act on the recommendations of the Adelaide Conference. Some of the other colonies had already adopted the system of the trans-