

should strongly object to the lapsing of subsidies, and to the loss of about 50 per cent. of the revenue which they now derive from Australasian traffic, which in 1897 amounted to a total of some £530,000. With this position in view, it is easy to understand the opinion expressed by Sir Sandford Fleming, who, in his very temperate report to the Canadian Government on the evidence given in the Colonial Office before the Pacific Cable Commission at the end of 1896*, expresses himself as follows in reference to this company: "It may indeed be held that the company has always assumed an attitude of hostility to the aspirations of Canada in respect to the proposed cable, and have for years strenuously opposed all efforts to advance her own and Imperial interests on the Pacific in connection with the union of Australasia and British North America telegraphically. Be that as it may, I can only repeat the view I have often expressed, that if the exigencies of the Empire, as a whole, demand the establishment of a national work which will interfere with the operations of this private company, every reasonable consideration should be extended to that company by those upon whom it has just claims. But it cannot be supposed that the public interests must be entirely set aside in order that the company may for ever continue to receive large dividends. I will again refer to the position of the Eastern Extension Company, and suggest a means by which, as it appears to me, the matter can be adjusted in the spirit of justice and fairness."

Sir Sandford Fleming also points out that "All doubt as to the practicability of laying an electric cable from the western coast of Canada to the Australasian Colonies, touching only on islands in the possession of Great Britain, is now entirely set at rest. The best authorities known were examined, and not one of them expressed the least misgiving on this point."

In this report reference is also made to what has been one of the most serious causes of obstruction in the progress of the Pacific-cable project. Sir Sandford Fleming writes: "I have pointed out in what respect there is a general agreement in the views expressed by the several gentlemen examined by the Committee. I shall now refer to an extraordinary diversity of opinion. In this diversity I find ranged on one side the agents, the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company, and two officers of the Post Office Department. On the other side, all the highest authorities on electrical science, together with the managers of two important ocean cables, whose evidence was submitted to the Committee. "The two officers were Mr. J. C. Lamb, secretary, and Mr. W. H. Preece, engineer-in-chief and electrician to the General Post Office, London. Their evidence in the main agrees with that of the gentlemen who appeared on behalf of the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company, whose views are adverse to the establishment of the proposed Pacific cable. The antagonistic evidence is voluminous. If examined, it will be seen that the gentlemen who submitted it are substantially of one mind on many subjects. The tone and substance of their observations leaves the impression that they do not look upon the Pacific cable as a necessary or desirable undertaking, and that if established as designed it would be inadequate in capacity and a heavy burden on the public exchequer. I could not venture here to take up the time necessary to refute the whole evidence."

Apparently these remarks are principally intended to apply to the preposterous estimate which is contained in a report dated 5th July, 1893, published in the "Proceedings" of the Ottawa Conference. Concerning this estimate Sir Sandford Fleming writes: "We have thus presented to us the estimate of the officers of the Post Office Department, amounting in all to £3,264,000. The Canadian Government has a *bond fide* tender to carry out in a complete and satisfactory manner precisely the same work for £1,517,000. What can be said of such a discrepancy as this? I entertain no doubt as to the great ability, the varied information, and the value of the services of these gentlemen. I can only regret that, in my extremely limited knowledge of them, I should be so unfortunate as to be driven to the conclusion that, however important the offices they fill, their importance does not make the occupants of the office infallible. In short, I am constrained to form the opinion that they have made a grave mistake, and that to this mistake, and to the unfortunate letter of Mr. Lamb in which it is contained, may be traced the seeming antagonism to a Pacific cable, which will be found in the evidence recently submitted."

That the adjective which we have used to describe this estimate is quite warranted, will be at once admitted by any one with technical knowledge who reads the report in question. The mere suggestion that the core of the cable mentioned should have *equal* weights of copper and gutta-percha (940 lb. of each) is quite enough, without going further into the matter, to show that the report is utterly valueless. It is obvious that such a report as that above referred to, being officially circulated, must have had a most prejudicial effect as far as the Pacific-cable project is concerned. We also find that, as far back as September, 1888, in a minute on a letter from the Secretary of State for the Colonies (Lord Knutsford) the following occurs, above the signature of Sir Charles Todd, who was then, and still continues to be, Postmaster-General of South Australia: "In face of the known difficulties arising from coral reefs, and the enormous depth of the Pacific along the route proposed, estimated at 12,000 fathoms in some places," &c., &c. After this display of ignorance of a subject, on which his opinion is conveniently accepted by the Government of South Australia, it is not surprising to find in the same minute the following assertion advanced by Sir Charles Todd: "As the Government are aware, I have given this subject very great and careful consideration, more so, perhaps, than any one else." In all probability the reference made by this Postmaster-General to the "enormous depths of the Pacific" can be traced to a blunder in the evidence given by another post-office official before the Colonial Conference of 1897. We cannot but attribute a handsome share of the misunderstandings and false reports to the delay in the survey of

* Return to an address of the House of Commons (Canada), dated 18th April, 1898, for a copy of the Report of the Committee appointed by the Imperial Government in 1896 to consider the question of a telegraph-cable between Canada and Australasia; also of any reports or correspondence to the Canadian Government from the Canadian representatives on said Committee, or Sir Sandford Fleming in regard to the same subject.