

At one time the Empire was limited to the British Islands in Europe, known as the United Kingdom, but from various causes the flag now flies over vast territories in the four quarters of the globe. As a matter of exact knowledge, the United Kingdom occupies but a trifle more than 1 per cent. of the whole superficial area under Her Majesty's rule.

An entirely new empire, consisting of many nations, is steadily being evolved, and we cannot fail to recognise the vital importance of providing the best possible means of bringing each member of the British family of nations into the closest possible contact with all other members. But, as wide seas and oceans intervene, the desired end can only be accomplished by means of the electric wire.

Electric cables have to some extent been already employed for a number of years, and they have served a provisional purpose, but they are now wholly inadequate. In the progress of events, since these cables were first established a quarter of a century ago, in some instances circumstances have altered, new conditions have arisen, and new needs have been developed, demanding modification and change. The existing lines of telegraph between distant portions of the Empire pass in part through foreign countries or traverse shallow seas in proximity thereto, where, at a critical moment, they are liable to speedy interruption. Moreover, these lines have been established by private companies, who exact oppressive rates. Not a few Canadians are by painful experience during the past year familiar with the extortionate charges on messages between the Dominion and South Africa. The companies, too, not content with having long received heavy Government subsidies, and having been rewarded for their enterprise by enormous profits, have by force of a combination created a powerful monopoly detrimental to the public interests. Complaints are frequent and well founded. In the *Times* of the 14th November, 1900, there are letters from Sir Edward Sassoon, M.P., and Lord George Hamilton, Secretary for India, on the telegraph rates between India and Europe which corroborate the facts here stated. In one of these letters the effect of the combination is referred to as "mediæval thralldom." The allied companies have taken every means to strengthen their monopoly and, since the Colonial Conference of 1887 have left nothing undone to defeat the project of a Pacific cable. The friends of the Pacific cable have, however, never relaxed their efforts on its behalf, and one reason above all others why they have persisted against adverse influences, and patiently struggled to overcome every obstacle, is the vitally important fact that the Canadian route between England and Australia is absolutely the only route by which the globe can be girdled by an all-British chain of telegraphs.

It is well known that it has fallen to my lot for many years to take an active interest in a Pan-Britannic system of telegraph cables. Last month I addressed the Governor-General of the new Commonwealth of Australia on the subject, and specially directed His Excellency's attention to a striking peculiarity of the electric telegraph which gives it very great advantages over the post as a means of communication between places on the surface of the globe the most separated by distance. I pointed out that, while the cost of carrying letters, as well as the time consumed in conveying them, is in proportion to distance, in the case of the telegraph it is entirely different; that telegraph messages may be sent any distance without appreciable expenditure of time or current outlay; that with a telegraph established and equipped, and maintenance provided for, the actual working-cost of sending a message a thousand miles is no greater than in sending it one mile. Such being the case, we have in the electric wire a means of communication which may be employed to unify and consolidate the widely scattered portions of the Empire. I further pointed out that it was impossible to turn these extraordinary facts to public advantage so long as the cables and telegraphs remained in the control of a combination of private companies.

In the determination to establish a trans-Pacific cable from Canada to Australia the first essential step is now taken. It should be followed by State cables from Australia across the Indian Ocean to India and to Africa, thence through the Atlantic to the West Indies and to England, as set forth in my letter to Mr. Chamberlain of the 28th October, 1898, and in other documents made public. With our whole telegraph system nationalised as suggested, I do not hesitate to say that messages will be transmitted to and from the most distant British possessions at one-eighth or one-tenth the rates now levied by the companies.

A single word in conclusion. Of late we have witnessed great events occurring in rapid succession, and the evolution of the Empire making steady progress. To-day we stand at the opening of a new chapter in our history. If it has been decreed by a wise Providence that there shall be a galaxy of nations under one sovereign, so aptly indicated by the Prime Minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, we have indeed a high purpose before us, and we must be true to our duty and our destiny. The subjects of the Queen must see to it that the rivets of a gigantic monopoly are loosened. There must be no isolation or partial isolation of any of our sister States. British subjects in Canada, in Australia, in New Zealand, in India, in Africa, as well as in the Mother country, must unite in securing complete emancipation from the grasp of the great "cable combine." Thirty years ago it became expedient for Parliament to expropriate the then existing lines and nationalise the telegraph service of the United Kingdom. Experience has proved the wisdom of that policy and furnished irrefragable reasons for its general application.

At the threshold of the twentieth century, high Imperial interests demand the cheapest possible telegraph transmission, and the greatest possible freedom of intercourse between all the subjects of Her Majesty wherever they may be domiciled around the globe. I respectfully submit, therefore, that action cannot be taken a day too soon to nationalise our telegraph system by land and sea throughout the whole Empire.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. William Mulock, Postmaster-General.

SANDFORD FLEMING.

NO. 5.—PROPOSAL TO NATIONALISE THE TELEGRAPH SERVICE OF THE EMPIRE.

(From the Proceedings of the British Empire League in Canada.)

At the annual meeting of the League, 13th February, 1901, the President, Lieut.-Colonel Denison, received the following letter from Sir Sandford Fleming:—