

We shall in all probability be told by the representatives of existing cable companies that there can be no continuous sending of messages for twenty-four hours each day as I have assumed, and they will give as a reason that cable business is practically confined to the part of the day corresponding with the business hours of the locality. That is in part true. It is certainly to a large extent the case in such places as New York and London, where many messages are despatched in connection with Stock Exchange operations. It must, however, be borne in mind that, while stockbrokers and others feel that they can afford to pay high rates for telegraphing, there are a very much larger number of people who are more solicitous respecting the expense of messages than their speedy delivery. A large majority of persons would be satisfied to have transatlantic messages delivered within the day on which they may be despatched, provided the cost be reduced to, let us say, one-fifth the rate now charged. In case of urgent messages it would be easy to arrange to give them a preference by requiring for their transmission an extra charge, as in the case of special-delivery letters.

In view of these considerations I can see no reason why the standard rate chargeable for transmission by the State cable should not at once be made 5 cents per word for ordinary messages, and 25 cents for urgent messages. This low tariff would prove a boon to the people who are now debarred from cabling on business or social matters on account of the cost. The reduction to one-fifth the present charge would change all that; it would revolutionise transatlantic correspondence, greatly tend to promote and augment business, and exercise a powerful influence in bringing about closer union.

There is something to be said in favour of a gradual reduction, beginning, let us say, with 10 cents per word; but, as it is quite obvious that one-half the maximum business-capacity of the cable reckoned at 5 cents per word would yield a revenue considerably exceeding all annual charges, and as there is every prospect of obtaining from the three sources mentioned far more than half, we have the strongest reason for at once adopting a 5-cent tariff. I contend that the low tariff would so rapidly develop business that before very long such cables would require to be multiplied, and perhaps a still lower tariff adopted in order that the greatest freedom of intercourse may be promoted between the Mother country, Canada, and the other daughter nations beyond the seas.

Postal Land Telegraphs.

Every European nation has, I believe, nationalised its telegraph service. Before 1870 the telegraph-lines of the United Kingdom were owned by companies, but Parliament caused the whole to be expropriated and placed under the Post Office Department. India, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand have likewise assumed the telegraph service. Canada is the only country within the Empire in which the land telegraph-lines are not State-owned and administered by the Post Office. No doubt here, as elsewhere, there will be some difficulty in effecting a transfer from private companies to the Government, but the transfer would be attended here, as elsewhere, with signal advantages to the public, and therefore the duty falls upon statesmen to devise means of overcoming such difficulties.

If we take the United Kingdom as a model we find that the postal telegraph service is remarkable for its utility and economy. It brings into immediate touch every part of England, Ireland, and Scotland at the smallest conceivable cost. For 6d. communication can be had with any person within three miles of the ten thousand postal telegraph-offices in the three kingdoms. For a few pence one in Cork can hold converse with another in Caithness or Cornwall.

In my open letter to you of this date last year I ventured to point out certain striking peculiarities of the electric telegraph which it is impossible to turn to public advantage while the cables and telegraphs remain in private hands. With a telegraph established and provided with a staff of operators, I contend—(1) that the working-expense is not governed by distance; (2) that a message can be sent a thousand miles at no greater working outlay than one mile; (3) that it does not add to the current expense to transmit many messages instead of a few; and (4) that it is really better to send a continuous stream of business over a telegraph-line than to employ it intermittently.

All that can be said on the other side is that it costs more to establish and maintain a long telegraph than a short one. Admitting that to be the case, it is equally true that to send a single message the line, whatever its length, must be in an efficient condition, and if it be in an efficient condition, with the operators at their posts, it cannot add to the expenditure to send a stream of messages.

Under these circumstances, who can question the wisdom of the policy followed by European nations in taking over the telegraph service and adopting low uniform charges for all distances? If in comparatively small countries, the policy has proved eminently successful, who will deny that, in view of the geographical conditions of the Dominion, there is no country on the face of the globe where the remarkable peculiarities of the electric telegraph can be turned to better account than here in Canada?

Private companies graduate the telegraph charges according to mileage, but this is done for revenue purposes. Revenue is not the only or chief purpose of the Government in establishing the means of communication for the people. It is, of course, desirable that the Post Office should be self-supporting, but to regard a State telegraph service as a source from which the public exchequer is to gain revenue would be to place the charges on messages in the same category as taxation. On this ground, if taxation is to be borne equitably by all, it does not appear quite clear that the inhabitants of the Dominion who are farthest apart should be the most heavily taxed. This points to the absolute fairness, apart from the question of expediency, of having a uniform charge for telegraph messages throughout the Dominion. The Imperial Government found it in the public interest to adopt uniform and low rates over the whole of the United Kingdom. Thirty