

Enclosure in No. 51.

CHEAP TELEGRAPH RATES.

Address delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Press Association, 28th February, 1902, by Sir Sandford Fleming.

MR. PRESIDENT,—

You have been good enough to invite me to address this meeting on cheaper telegraph rates, for the reason that my name for some years back has been identified with the subject. I regard it as a high privilege to be allowed to address a body of men representing the recognised organs of public opinion. You have paid me a great compliment, and my satisfaction is enhanced by the fact that I have been asked to speak on a subject to which I have long and earnestly devoted my attention.

Ruskin tells us that "the weakest among us has a gift, however seemingly trivial, which is peculiar to him, and which, worthily used, will be a gift to his race." Whether Ruskin be right or wrong, I have indulged the thought and acted on the belief that, however feeble the force, persistency of effort will in the long-run make up for lack of power. Imbued with this idea, I have for over twenty years imposed upon myself a task closely associated with the subject which you have given me—a task which has led me, without hope of personal reward, to visit five continents and traverse all the great oceans, one of them, the Atlantic, many times. In this self-imposed duty I can at least say that, however poor and inadequate the services, they have been given willingly and without stint. Such being the case, I rejoice to have the opportunity, which you have given me, to throw some light on a problem of great public importance which I have been doing my share in trying to work out.

I shall commence by expressing the satisfaction which I feel that this association is deeply interested in the same problem, and that at the last annual meeting you took important action respecting it. I am very proud to rank myself as a co-worker with you, inasmuch as I have the most exalted opinion of the power and mission of the Press. I feel that anything that I have done, or anything that I can do, is as nothing compared with what you can accomplish.

Examining your records, it appears that resolutions were unanimously passed at your last annual meeting in favour of the Government taking steps to establish a State-owned cable between Canada and Great Britain, and to nationalise the land telegraphs of the Dominion, the charges for the transmission of messages in both cases to be reduced to the actual operating-cost. Perhaps I may mention that on every suitable occasion during the past year I gave my advocacy and support to the policy and principles laid down in your resolution. Moreover, the present year had barely commenced when I made public a letter on postal telegraph service by sea and land, addressed to the Postmaster-General, the Hon. Wm. Mulock. It is dated the 1st January, 1902, and in the remarks I am about to submit I shall regard the contents as known to you. In that letter I pointed out the immediate advantages to the people of the Dominion which would result from carrying into effect the resolution which you passed. I desire on this occasion to go a little farther and indicate that, beyond the direct benefits to Canada, there is a great ulterior purpose to be served by the adoption by Parliament of the policy laid down by you. This ulterior purpose I shall with your kind permission endeavour to explain. Let me first, however, say a word respecting the marvellous system of telegraphy introduced by Marconi.

The Marconi System.

The distinguished inventor, before visiting Ottawa a few weeks ago, startled the world by his successful efforts to transmit electric wave-signals across the Atlantic. I had the great satisfaction to have several interviews with Signor Marconi, who is of opinion that only a few months will be required to develop and fully reveal the possibilities of his system. He confidently expects to be able to send telegraph messages between the two continents without the intervention of submarine cables, and that, in consequence of the comparatively small initial cost of apparatus, the charge for the transmission of messages will be very low compared with the present rates. If this proves to be the case we may certainly regard the Marconi system not as an opponent of, but as an ally of, cheap telegraphy. Negotiations opened by the Government resulted, as stated in the Speech from the Throne at the opening of Parliament, "in an arrangement through which, should the project prove a successful one, as is hoped for, the Government and people of Canada will enjoy the benefits of the invention on very favourable terms, including rates for transatlantic messages very much below those now existing."

While it is greatly to be wished that the highest expectations will be realised, we must recognise that doubts have been raised, and, notwithstanding the splendid results already achieved by the inventor of wireless telegraphy, some of the leading English authorities on electrical science—such as Professor Oliver Lodge, Sir William Preece, Dr. Muirhead, Lord Kelvin, and others—are of opinion that the system will be found to have its limitations, and that the greatest success possible for it will not suffice to render submarine cables unnecessary. Marconi himself, when on this side of the Atlantic, entertained no fear of failure; he was full of hope that he would prove his invention to be a complete commercial success, and he expressed the belief that he would be able to transmit messages across the Atlantic, with ample profit, at 1 or 2 cents per word. The impression formed in my own mind was that of admiration for the great inventor, who had already done marvellous things in wireless telegraphy, and whose hoped-for success in spanning the ocean, if realised, would pass his name on to future generations as that of a world-benefactor.

It appears, however, that there is a Marconi company to be reckoned with, and that in financial matters the distinguished inventor has not, I fear, all his own way. I would infer from what has come to light that the overruling company in this case, like other companies, is more bent on dividends and profits than on benefiting the public, and that it has adopted the policy of charging