

ciples of government, aided in a wonderful way by the highest resources of modern science. Steam has made the separating oceans no longer barriers, but the general medium of union. Electricity has furnished the means by which the British people in all parts of the globe may exchange thought as freely as those within speaking distance. These twin agencies of civilisation are pregnant with stupendous possibilities. Already the one, as the prime factor in sea-carriage, has rendered universal penny postage possible. The other has made it equally possible to bring the British people, so widely sundered geographically, within the same neighbourhood telegraphically.

Imperial penny postage will have far-reaching consequences; it is undoubtedly a great onward movement in the career of civilisation, and in the development of wider national sympathy and sentiment. But, great as are the benefits to follow the adoption of universal cheap postage, the first result and not the least will be to make plain that a postal service, however cheap and comprehensive, is in itself insufficient for the increasing daily needs of the now widely distributed British peoples. It will be seen that, in addition to an ocean penny postal service, the circumstances of our worldwide Empire demand a cheap ocean cable service, extending to every self-governing British possession.

The carriage of letters at any known speed consumes time, and the length of time consumed depends on the distance traversed. The telegraph, on the other hand, practically annihilates space, and in this one respect has immeasurably the advantage over the ordinary postal service, especially in the case of correspondents who are separated by the greatest distances.

We can as yet but faintly appreciate the extent to which the telegraph may be employed, because its use heretofore has been restricted, on long-distance messages, by almost prohibitory charges. If messages be exchanged between places not far apart—let us say between London and Edinburgh, or Toronto and Montreal—the gain in time by the use of the telegraph is inconsiderable. But if the points of connection be far separated, such as London and Melbourne, or Ottawa and Cape Town, the comparison between a postal and a telegraph service brings out the distinct value of the latter. In either of the cases last mentioned, while it would require the lapse of eight or ten weeks to obtain an answer to a letter by post, if the telegraph be employed a reply may be returned the next day, or even the same day.

Existing long-distance cables are little used by the general public—it may be said not at all—except in emergencies. They are used in connection with commerce, the growing needs of which demand more and more the employment of the telegraph, but owing to the high charges exacted its use is limited to business which would suffer by delay. These cables are in the hands of private companies, striving chiefly to earn large dividends, and who adopt the policy of charging high rates, in consequence of which trade and commerce are unduly taxed, and their free development retarded. Were the cables owned by the State large profits would not be the main object, and precisely as in the case of the land-lines of the United Kingdom, it would be possible greatly to lower rates, and thus remove restrictions, and bring the telegraph service within reach of many now debarred from using it.

When the Government assumed control of the inland telegraphs of the United Kingdom it was found possible greatly to reduce charges. In 1869, the year before the transfer, less than seven million messages were carried. At the transfer the rate was reduced to 1s. per message: the traffic immediately increased nearly 50 per cent., and continued increasing until in the tenth year 29,000,000 messages were transmitted, with a surplus of revenue over expenditure of £354,060. In another decade the total annual business equalled 94,000,000, the operations still resulting in a surplus of £251,800, although the charge for a message had been meanwhile reduced from 1s. to 6d. It is indisputable that high charges restrict the utility of sea-cables as well as land-lines, while low charges have the opposite effect. A few years ago the tariff of charges between Australia and London was 9s. 4d. per word. The proposal to establish the Pacific cable, and the discussion which followed, led to the cheapening of the rate to 4s. 9d. per word. In 1890, the year before the rates were lowered, the gross business consisted of 827,278 words. In 1897 it had increased to 2,349,901 words. In 1890, with high charges, the revenue was £331,468. In 1897, with reduced charges, the revenue was £567,852, or £236,384 in excess of 1890, when the highest rates were exacted.

The utility of the telegraph may be measured by the time gained over the post, and the success of the telegraph service of the United Kingdom must be accepted as convincing evidence of its utility and value, for the gain in time is, in this case, measured by hours only. Its striking success in this instance may be largely owing to State control, but whatever the cause, it is obvious that if, under similar conditions, weeks were gained instead of hours, the utility of the telegraph would be proportionately increased, and its value as a means of communication correspondingly enhanced. There is another immense advantage not generally known to the public, which can be claimed for telegraphy; it is the fact that, within certain limitations, the actual cost of transmission is but little affected by distance. While the cost of carrying letters is in proportion to the distance traversed, the same rule does not apply to the electric wire. With a properly equipped telegraph system the actual expenditure incurred in transmitting a message a thousand miles is practically no greater than sending it ten miles. Obviously, therefore, the principle of "penny postage"—that is to say, a low uniform charge for all distances—is applicable more fully to ocean telegraphy than to the Imperial postal service. With these considerations before us, a moment's reflection leads to the conviction that this wonderful agency—the electric wire—places within our reach, if we have the wisdom to accept it, an ideal means of communication for the worldwide British Empire.

Thirty years ago the British Parliament, for reasons the soundness of which experience has fully confirmed, determined that the State should assume control of the inland telegraph system of the United Kingdom. To-day there are incomparably stronger reasons for State control being exercised over a cable system for the whole Empire.