

The Ottawa Board of Trade, on the 20th June, 1901, addressed the following circular letter to various bodies representing trade and commerce throughout the British world:—

“The President and Council have the honour to submit the following remarks, together with the appendices thereto, on the movement to secure the cheapest, the speediest, the freest, and the most effective means of intercourse between all the King’s subjects throughout his vast Empire.

“Representing trade and commerce in the capital of Canada, the Ottawa Board of Trade feel it a public duty incumbent on them to take this means of expressing the conviction they have reached that the British possessions throughout the world should be directly connected by State-owned telegraph-cables under the control of the Post Office.

“Such a scheme is regarded by members of the Board as an effective means of fostering trade and stimulating commercial activity, at the same time constituting a bond of Imperial unity of inestimable value.

“The proposal requires that not only the connecting transmarine cables should be under Government control, but likewise that the land-telegraphs of the several British possessions should be State-owned. The land-telegraphs of the United Kingdom, New Zealand, the Australian States, India, and South Africa are already nationalised and administered by the Post Office. Canada is the only exception; but the transfer of the Canadian telegraph-lines to the Post Office, together with the laying of a State-owned cable across the Atlantic, is, we are informed, under the consideration of the Government, and it may be assumed that Canada will not long remain the only country within the Empire where the telegraph system is not, in the public interests, controlled by the State.

“More than a year ago the scheme of world-encircling telegraphs was earnestly considered by this Board, and resolutions were then passed pointing out the necessity for establishing the Pacific cable as the initial link in such a system of State-owned cables.

“It is a matter of great gratification to the Board to know that the Pacific cable is now being established under a joint agreement between the Home Government and the Governments of Canada, New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, and New Zealand, and that there is every prospect of Canada being connected with the United Kingdom at an early date by a State-owned transatlantic cable. With these works completed, and the Canadian land-lines nationalised, the whole distance from England to the shores of the Indian Ocean—say, at Perth, the capital of Western Australia—will be covered by a series of cables and land-telegraphs under State control. Perth is near the 116th meridian east, while it is 244 degrees of longitude westerly from London. Reckoning by meridians of longitude, therefore, two-thirds of the globe will be girdled by a State-owned telegraph service, so soon as the Pacific cable and Canadian lines associated therewith are established as national works.

“The necessity for connecting India and other British possessions in Asia with the Imperial system of telegraphy must, however, be recognised. On reference to the papers appended it will be found that the Imperial scheme of cables to traverse the Indian and Atlantic Oceans between Perth and London embraces the following works, viz.:—

“(1.) Cable from Western Australia, *via* Cocos Island and Mauritius to South Africa, with branches to India and Singapore—9,100 miles.

“(2.) Cable from South Africa, *via* Ascension and Barbados, to Bermuda, thence to Canada and the United Kingdom—6,660 miles.

“These two sections together make 15,700 nautical miles, while the distance from London to Perth by the Canadian route is about the same, the actual distance being a few hundred miles less. Thus it will be seen that, taking into account branch cables to connect all the British possessions, half the work is already, or will shortly be, accomplished.

“The papers appended set forth the scheme in detail, and furnish ample explanations on all essential points. These documents contain the matured judgment of Sir Sandford Fleming, a member of the Board, who has given more attention to the subject than any other man, and in whose views this Board entirely concurs. In one of these appendices it is pointed out that it was largely owing to the action and influence of the Chambers of Commerce of the United Kingdom that the postal telegraph service was introduced thirty years ago in the Mother-country. Similarly we believe it to be in the power of the various bodies representing trade and commerce throughout the Empire to influence the universal adoption of the Imperial postal cable service. It is with that object in view that this appeal is made. We respectfully and earnestly invite the aid and co-operation of all such bodies in bringing to completion the crowning development of the British Post Office.”

Since 1901 correspondence has been maintained by the Board, and evidence has year by year been accumulating to make clear beyond all question that the scheme of Empire cables merits general support. Two recent publications on the subject are mentioned in the address to His Excellency—(1) a sessional paper of the Canadian Parliament (No. 67, 1906), of 63 pages, and (2) a pamphlet of 30 pages circulated in England by the Eighty Club. Both deal with the establishment of a great Imperial Intelligence Service in connection with the system of Empire cables as a means of benefiting the British people in all climes. As an agency for the diffusion of mutual knowledge, as an aid to co-operation in matters of joint concern, and as a means of cultivating friendship and mutual sympathy nothing more effective could well be conceived. Both publications dwell on the need of some comprehensive means of dispelling public ignorance and establishing mutual relationship between each separate British community. It is strongly felt that if closer unity of the Empire be the desired object, it can only be obtained with the will of each of the autonomous States, and as these again can only act with the people’s consent, the necessity for rightly enlightening the people must be apparent. Hence the educational value of the proposal should be regarded as of the first importance.