

The chief claim made for the proposal is not so much that it may be regarded as a substitute for other schemes heretofore advanced having for their object the unification of the Empire, but that if any substantial progress is to be made in that direction, as it seems to me, the policy suggested must take precedence of any such schemes; that if it be pre-eminently necessary to have freer intercourse, with fuller and closer political, commercial, and social relations between the different States which go to make up the Empire, there is no conceivable means by which these objects can more easily and more naturally be achieved.

The proposal is not solely in the interests of these islands, vastly important as they are; it is not for the benefit of any one class, or of any one section of the British people; it is projected in the interest of the entire Empire, and its object is to advance the concrete well-being of the British people throughout the world. It is designed for the benefit of every Britain beyond the seas equally with the mother of them all. I cannot therefore be wrong in the conviction that it appeals with special force to the principles, the sympathies, and the traditions of the "Eighty Club."

Discussion and Criticism.

In the discussion which followed my address on the 20th ultimo, some difficulties were raised which in themselves indicated that an interest was awakened in the subject which I had the honour to submit. All the speakers were agreed as to the urgency, in the interests of Imperial unity, for freer and fuller intercourse between each of the oversea British communities and all of them and the United Kingdom. The practical value of the underlying idea of a system of State-owned globe-girdling cables as a means of consummating this object was admitted. It was fully recognised that facilities should be provided for the systematic distribution over the Empire of information on every subject of Imperial interest. Moreover, some of the speakers attached so much importance to the regular and full dissemination of such information that they regarded the cost of accomplishing that purpose as entirely secondary.

The Policy suggested.

The burden of the criticisms by the speakers was the fear that in practice it would be no easy matter to arrange for the selection and transmission of news to be cabled from day to day or from week to week so as to give general satisfaction. As this matter presents itself to my mind, the first thing necessary is the appointment of a proper controlling authority and impartial tribunal. In my view the first consideration is an efficient and responsible Board of Control with headquarters in London, assisted by branch Boards in the several oversea communities which have been referred to. I am satisfied that there would be no difficulty in each Government selecting a sufficient number of representative, independent, public-spirited, moderate-minded men to act in an honorary capacity as members of an Imperial Intelligence Board in each capital city.

The chief duty of these Boards would be to direct the policy to be followed, and to appoint a staff of paid officers, including a chief and assistant editors, to carry out that policy efficiently. The staff would be responsible to each respective Board. The number of such paid officers would depend upon the plan adopted, and this I shall presently allude to. Whatever the number, it would be no more difficult for the Boards of Control to obtain on satisfactory business terms men equally able, equally faithful to their duties, as the editorial staffs employed by the great public journals, and we all know how well the world is served through the Press in this respect.

As the proposal is not an ordinary dividend-seeking project, but a great intelligence union with high Imperial aims, it is undesirable and it is quite unnecessary to maintain high rates for the transmission of messages. Cheap cable telegraphy must be recognised to be a powerful, indeed an indispensable, aid to Imperial consolidation; it is therefore felt that the policy should be adopted of reducing progressively the charges on messages transmitted by the circle of Empire cables to rates which, while still leaving the service self-supporting, would be the lowest possible. It is capable of proof that if this policy be adopted, two results will follow after providing for actual working-expenses. (1.) For several hours daily the Board of Control will be enabled to transmit free Press messages for simultaneous publication in the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, India, South Africa, and elsewhere. (2.) The charges on ordinary paying traffic will steadily be lowered and will gradually approach a minimum. Under this policy we would have public messages transmitted free or at a mere nominal rate, and if we apply the principle of a uniform charge for all distances (as in Imperial penny postage), there are the best reasons for anticipating a wonderful reduction in the rate for the transmission of ordinary paying messages by the route of the great girdle of Imperial cables. I can see no reason why the charge should not eventually be reduced to the uniform rate of 1d. per letter, or 6d. per word, between the Mother-country and each of the countries named, as well as reciprocally between any two of them. The immense advantage of such a possible reduction will be readily appreciated when it is remembered that the present charge between Great Britain and Australia is 3s. per word, and at the time of the Colonial Conference of 1887, when the Pacific cable was first earnestly considered, the common charge was 9s. a word.

The possibility of these results will be made apparent by reference to page 35 and other pages of the papers appended to my letter to Lord Elgin.*

Plans proposed.

With respect to the course to be followed by the controlling Boards in carrying on the intelligence service, omitting details, two general plans suggest themselves for consideration.

* See Canadian parliamentary return (Nos. 67 and 67A, 1906), to be obtained, free of charge, on application to the Secretary of the "Eighty Club," 3 Hare Court, Temple, London, E.C.