

establishing and maintaining the Pacific Cable. On the 31st October, 1902, this initial and most important link in the globe-encircling chain was completed.

*The Views of Commercial Men.*

Before its completion the establishment of the remaining links in the whole chain was earnestly considered by business men in different parts of the British world. The Ottawa Board of Trade in 1901 opened correspondence with every known organized association of commercial men within the Empire. The correspondence has been continued, and by this means the opinions of British merchants the world over have been gained.

The evidence thus collected makes clear that, while there may be various shades of opinion on Imperial fiscal schemes and Imperial defence schemes and other like questions, there is no divergence of opinion among independent and thoughtful business men respecting the need of the Empire cables and the policy of establishing them. A remarkable consensus of opinion has been presented in favour of the proposal to establish this great Imperial cable service, and all are agreed as to the incalculable advantages likely to spring from it.

There can be no stronger evidence on this point than the resolution adopted at the Fifth Congress of the Chambers of Commerce of the Empire, held in Montreal in August, 1903. The resolution was unanimously passed by representative business men in Congress assembled. The conclusions reached have never been gainsaid. They have, in fact, been indorsed and supported by individual Chambers in all parts of the world.

*The Resolution.*

“That in the opinion of this Congress all the self-governing British communities around the globe should be united by a continuous chain of State-owned telegraphs; that such an inter-Imperial line of communication would, under Government control, put an end to the difficulty which has been caused in Australia by the allied cable companies, and remove all friction which has arisen between the partners in the Pacific cable; that it would lower charges to a minimum on oversea messages passing between New Zealand, Australia, India, South Africa, the West Indies, Newfoundland, Canada, and the Mother-country; that it would provide a double means of communication at low, uniform rates between the Mother-country, or any one British State, and all self-governing British States; that it would constitute the most effective means by which the several governmental units of the Empire may hold communion with each other whenever they desire; and that, while it would be of the highest importance to the commercial and social interests of the British people around the world, it would, by the subtle force of electricity, at once promote the consolidation of the Empire and prove an indispensable factor in Imperial unity.”

If commerce, as universally claimed, be the backbone of the British Empire, such an expression of opinion should carry with it great weight. The resolution adopted with so much unanimity by representative British merchants assembled in what in fact was a near approach to a commercial parliament of the whole Empire is most significant.

*The Eastern Extension Company.*

But the Empire cables are not favoured in one quarter. The public policy of establishing a much-needed Imperial service, demanded by the progress of events, meets with the greatest opposition from a certain influential private company.

The Eastern Extension Telegraph Company, with commendable enterprise, thirty-four years ago laid a branch telegraph-line from Asia to Australia. The Australian Governments granted liberal subsidies. The company exacted high charges for the transmission of messages, and in process of time built up for itself a rich monopoly. This condition was terminated by the establishment of the Pacific cable, the initial link in the chain of Empire cables, and since then the Eastern Extension Company has not spared its reserve funds and its efforts to destroy the business outlook of the Pacific cable. But I shall leave it to others to relate the history of these efforts and the subtle influences employed to harm the State undertaking. All these proceedings, at length, as it now appears, culminated in an attempt, under cover of what has been termed “a pooling agreement,” to secure control of the State-owned cable.

It is perfectly clear that to surrender control of the Pacific cable, in any degree, to the company would be in every sense unwise, and even suicidal. It would be the first step towards resuscitating the old monopoly, and would at once indorse and confirm the maintenance of unnecessarily high oversea telegraph charges. It would put an end to the completion of the Empire cables, and extinguish all hope of securing an adequate Imperial telegraph service, regarded by so many thoughtful men as indispensable to the consolidation of the Empire.

There are few who now doubt that the pooling scheme took its origin with the company in London. Happily, the “antipodes” came to the rescue, and in the spirit, and almost in the words of the Right Hon. H. C. Raikes (Postmaster-General during the term of the Colonial Conference of 1887), have practically declared that the company shall not be allowed to “throttle” the Pacific cable and “preclude” the completion of the “Empire cables.”

“The Britain of the South” discovered a bold invasion of the interests of the public, an insidious attempt to render hopeless the realisation of high Imperial ideals. New Zealand vigorously protested against a pooling partnership, and suggested instead that the colonial cables of the company be “nationalised.” These last-mentioned cables, transferred to the State, would constitute distinct portions of the globe-girdling Empire cables.

The Eastern Extension Company assumes an attitude which is absolutely indefensible. If that company ever regarded itself as too sacred to be interfered with, the illusion was entirely removed a few hours before the present century commenced by the united act of the six Govern-