

PROGRESS

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EDITORIAL COMMENT.

An Imperial Mail Service.

OF the proposals made by Sir Joseph Ward at the Imperial Conference, it is safe to say that they repaired a situation somewhat damaged by the loss of preferential trade. During the discussion which ensued with something like enthusiasm, two of the subjects of those proposals stood out with particular prominence. They were a fast mail service and cheap cables. To the mercantile community the latter commends itself on the ground that all business is initiated by cable, the mails being used only for the purpose of confirmation. From this point of view a fast service, such as proposed by the Prime Minister of New Zealand, would not be worth its cost. This is the narrow point of view which regards mails and nothing else. The Imperial point of view considers that there are things just as valuable as mails, on board mail steamers, if not far more so; things pertaining to trade in the highest sense of the word, and things touching the various interests of the Empire in peace and war, all requiring certainty and security of rapid despatch. From the Imperial point of view, the holders of which desire above all things to bind the Empire closer together, the advantages are worth all the cost whatever it may be: and those who think Imperially have made up their minds that, however great, that cost must be found by this country out of its annual surplus of three-quarters of a million. The twenty days fast service is one of those things which for Im-

perial reasons we must have. The word "impossible," is not in any vocabulary applicable to it, because the progress of marine engineering has established such services already, and every day tends to make improvements in the direction of both speed and cheapness. What to-day costs a sovereign will in a few years cost no more than a few shillings: especially if the sovereign be expended now to help the development. In the meantime it will be realised that men are not content to learn everything about each other on paper. They will insist upon seeing their neighbours, and studying their customs, desires, opinions, characters, and wants at first hand. The conference of Statesmen just concluded has shown the immense benefit of personal relations. In like manner, a fast steam-boat service must prove the great value of personal intercourse as a bond of Imperial union. Moreover, speed is becoming daily more and more the pivot of human affairs. Why should it be excluded from a service which was from the first intended to annihilate distance?

The Patent Laws.

MR. MILLAR reminded a deputation the other day of his determination to proceed with his Bill for the amendment of the Patent Act. We take the opportunity of reminding him in his turn of some of the anomalies of the Act's working to which we referred in detail in our issues of February and March last. These are, firstly, that applicants and objectors are handicapped by the regulation against the reception of declarations in the Registrar's Court, a regulation contrary to English practice: secondly, the refusal of the complete application in the local branches of the Court which receive the preliminaries: thirdly, the lack of provision for securing technical competence in the Patent Agents of the State: fourthly the continuance of the antiquated practice of requiring the Governors' signature to the Letters Patent. The first two of these anomalies can be removed by amending the regulations, but the amendment of the other two requires an amendment of the law. In this matter there is a good guide in the Bill now before the House of Commons in charge of Mr. Lloyd George, the energetic President of the Board of Trade. One provision of that measure especially deserves the attention of Mr. Millar, who aims at the same object as Mr. Lloyd George, viz., securing the adequate working of patents in the country of their issue. Under the new Bill, any applicant can appeal to the Controller three years after the granting of a patent on the ground that it has not been adequately worked in the United Kingdom. In dealing

with Mr. Millar's similar proposal—which extends the limit to four years—we pointed out that there may be here valid reasons for the non-working of certain patents, reasons which do not apply to the greatly more developed industries of older countries. With a reservation for meeting such cases, Mr. Millar could not do better than adopt the principle of the Bill now before the House of Commons. That would meet all claims of local industry, and would provide also for such cases as are aimed at by the other measure. It has been found that foreign patentees frequently make their specifications vague enough to cover subsequent inventions, and that there is a practice under which those obtaining the privilege of using a patent have to sign a sort of lease for twenty years, debarring them from using any other—a practice which experience has shown to be a serious hardship, amounting in some cases to absolute paralysis of trade. The compulsory working clause is aimed at these cases, and our Bill may do the same with justice and advantage to local industry. In that case the measure would, while securing the just rights of patentees, prevent the restraint of progress.

The Library of the New Zealand Patent Office.

WE make no apology for referring again to the excellent and valuable library of the Patent Office, to which the public has access always in business hours. The library (of 6,000 volumes), is indebted to the heads of various Government Patent Offices for their publications. These all contain abridgments and indexes of the most useful character. The classification of our own records is of course complete, and is very large. A card index, or key, to the classification amounting to some 23,000 items has been compiled to facilitate reference. Any one who wants to see the inventions on a certain subject has only to refer to the key, and, having thus ascertained the class, turn up the volume of specifications containing it. By means of the index in front of the former he can readily refer to the full descriptions and plans of the inventions. In order that all the inventions patented by any individual may be turned up with an equal facility as those relating to any subject an index of names is being added to each class. The number of volumes in all has, we repeat, now reached the respectable figure of 6,000. In this library, inventors can find out all they require to know for their guidance, improvement and protection.

W. Carroll, late of Christchurch, no longer represents this journal in the capacity of canvasser.