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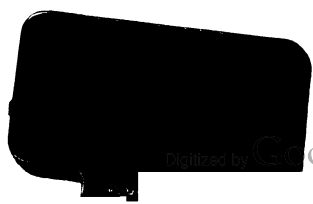
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TELEGRAPHIC REFORM.

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THE POST OFFICE

AND

THE ELECTRIC TELEGRAPH.

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LONDON:  
JACKSON, WALFORD, & HODDER, 27, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1867.





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# TELEGRAPHIC REFORM.

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*Great Britain & Ireland*

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"Attention should be drawn to a very able and exhaustive article on the subject (the Post Office and the Telegraphs), which has just appeared in the new number of the *British Quarterly Review*. The writer, who appears to have excellent information, goes over the entire ground, gives many interesting details of the contemplated measure, and strongly urges that no more time should be lost in bringing the question before the Legislature."—*Morning Star*.



THE

# Post Office and the Electric Telegraph.

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*Twelfth Report of the Postmaster-General on the Post Office.*  
1866.

*Reports of the Administrators of the Belgian Post Office, 1850—1865; and Reports of the Belgian Telegraphic Administration, 1865-66.*

*The Electrician for 1863.*

*The Journal of the Society of Arts.* Vol. XV. No. 745.

*Report of Committee of the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce on the present condition of Telegraphic Communication in the United Kingdom.* October, 1865.

*Petitions to the House of Commons, 1866 and 1867, from the Association of Chambers of Commerce of the United Kingdom in support of a plan for combining the postal and telegraphic systems of the country.*

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AFTER repeated experiments and numerous accessory discoveries of scientific men, both in this country and abroad, the famous invention of electric telegraphy was at length brought to the test of a fair and satisfactory trial on the night of the 25th June, 1837, or just thirty years ago. For the purposes of this experiment, a mile and a quarter of telegraphic wire had been laid down between the two stations of Euston Square and Camden Town, of what was then the new London and Birmingham Railway. Professor Wheatstone, seated in a

small ill-lit room at Euston Station, and surrounded by several men since known to fame, and notably by Robert Stephenson, held anxiously the one end of the mystic wire, whilst his co-adjutor, Mr. Fothergill Cooke, attended at the other extremity in Camden Town. We all know the result. The old inquiry : "Canst thou send lightnings that they may go and say unto thee, Here we are?" had often been asked, and sometimes half-answered ; now, however, a positive reply was made possible. "Never did I feel," says Professor Wheatstone, "such a tumultuous sensation before, as when in that still room I heard the needles click ; and, as I spelled out the words, I felt all the magnitude of the invention now proved to be practicable beyond cavil or dispute." Wheatstone and all concerned might well exult in this triumph ! The telegraph has, from this humble beginning, and within the short space of thirty years, become an indispensable agent of civilized society.

Few inventions have had so much of the curious and the romantic mixed up with their history as we might show has been the case with the history of the telegraph. Our present purpose, however, is not to deal with what may fairly be called the romance of electric telegraphy, but to introduce the subject to our readers in its connection with a striking and important measure of practical reform which is now contemplated. It would have been pleasant to us to have lingered over the past history of the invention, and, knowing now, as we all do, the exact and actual position of electrical science, to have followed its slow development, watching how the "impossible" gradually became the probable, how again the probable became the actual, the actual the world-wide and acknowledged fact, and then, *mirabile dictu* ! how feats, to watch which mankind has fairly held its breath, have been accomplished in its name. To do all this properly would, however, require a long and special article ; and we must here make the shadowy and the romantic wait upon the serviceable and the more substantial.

With the success of the practical experiments at Euston Station, in 1837, all speculations as to the practicability of the

electric telegraph—extending as they had done through the dim mist of two centuries,—may be said to have ended, and the matter to have been definitely advanced a complete stage. But all the difficulties were not ended with the demonstration that had been witnessed; they only entered into a new phase. To show that the electric telegraph was practicable and certain in its operation was one thing; to get it adopted as a medium of intercommunication was another. Professor Wheatstone and Mr. Cooke had at first much of the usual luck of inventors; for many years they held their footing on a very insecure tenure. It is not doubted that the new method of travelling gave a powerful impetus to the telegraph; and yet, contradictory as it seems, because the railway and the telegraph were born together, the sturdy iron-way greatly hindered the development of the little steel wire. Though the invention was shown to be peculiarly adapted to the exigencies of railway service, the directors of the new railways hesitated, and then refused to add to the very weighty responsibilities they had undertaken in connection with the construction of the railways themselves. The directors of the London and Birmingham Railway, for example, though urged by their engineer, the famous Robert Stephenson (who had himself witnessed the action of the telegraph), to give the co-patentees their countenance, could only be prevailed upon to lay down telegraphic lines between London and Birmingham, on condition that the directors of the Grand Junction Railway agreed to continue those lines from Birmingham to Liverpool. This, however, the latter directors positively refused to do; and the consequence was, that the telegraph was driven from the scene of its first successes altogether. At the time that Stephenson was constructing the North-Western, Brunel was engaged in a similar capacity upon the Great Western Railway; and hearing of the adverse decision, the latter, very much to his honour, determined to offer the co-patentees his support, and agreed to adopt the discarded telegraph over the whole extent of his line. The entire proceeding is eminently characteristic of the impulsive character of his genius, and contrasts curiously



enough with the more staid and cautious action of his great rival, Stephenson. Brunel got the telegraph lines laid down, in the first instance, between London and West Drayton, a distance of thirteen miles; but for the rest, he reckoned without his host. When he appealed to his directors to continue the telegraph to Bristol, the proprietors made themselves heard, and the result was, that after one of them had characterized the invention as a "new-fangled scheme," and another had spoken of it as a "dangerous experiment," the agreement which their enterprising engineer had entered into was, much to his chagrin, entirely repudiated. At this turn of affairs, and afraid that they would be again expelled from the railway domain, the copatentees came forward and offered an arrangement for the working of the line already laid down; they agreed to carry it to Slough Junction, or five miles further west; and on the further condition that they should carry all railway messages free of charge, it was agreed that the telegraph should not be disturbed, and that the patentees should seek all possible public support. For a long time that support was of an uncertain and unremunerative nature; for months the receipts barely paid the expenses; but they held on with the assurance of ultimate success. By-and-bye, some of the railway companies, whose lines had got into full play, again turned their attention to the telegraph; and by the year 1845, the patentees had either constructed, or were working with their patents, 500 miles of telegraphic line in this country. Still, however, the general public stood aloof, or were oblivious of the power of the subtle agent, till, by a lucky accident—the part which the telegraph played in the arrest of the Quaker murderer, Tawell, on the 3rd of January, 1845,\*—public attention was universally called to it; and it was not long before the feeling turned unmistakably in the direction of this new and promising method of rapid communication between distant places.

\* Sir Francis Head, in his "Stokers and Pokers—Highways and Byways," gives a most graphic account of all the details of this curious story.

Whether Wheatstone and Cooke ever sought official recognition and support for their successful adaptation has not transpired; there is reason to suppose that they preferred to appeal to the rising railway interest, and directly to the country at large. There is unhappily much reason to doubt whether their success would have been any better secured if they had appealed to Government. Precedents, as all students of the history of English inventions in times past know, were not encouraging. In 1813, and again in 1819, the Government of the day refused its countenance and support to several tentative measures which had for their object the employment of electricity as a medium for the conveyance of intelligence; and even in 1845, after actual experiments had placed the power which the telegraph possessed beyond doubt, the Government still persisted in a policy of non-interference, although every other European government secured from the first the construction and the working of their respective telegraphic systems as a branch of State machinery.

But why, it may reasonably be asked, did not the Government, if it could consider nothing else, consider the bearing of the new measures on its own monopoly of letter-carrying,—a monopoly, all infringements of which, fortunately for the country, have been put down with the strong arm of the law? Telegraphic communication is simply *quicken*ed communication; and if the conveyance of letters is a proper function of Government—and few now doubt this—both modes of forwarding the intelligence of the country seem equally within its province. It is certain that the one mode must influence the other mode. We have it on no mean authority that the telegraph “treads on the heels of the postal service as a mode of epistolary correspondence.” All our readers must at one time or other have heard it predicted that the telegraph would supersede the Post Office! and although this is mere idle talk, and may be classed with the prediction which “Punch” made in 1846, that after the full establishment of the telegraphic system, “all ladies’ letters would be limited to five lines, with no opening for

a postscript,"—yet in some very small sense indeed it may actually do so.

The wonder is, therefore, that the Post Office authorities should have acquiesced so quietly in the telegraph becoming the property of private persons, and that at the outset of the system it was not obtained as an adjunct and worked in the way of a supplement and auxiliary to Post Office operations. We should, however, not lose sight of the fact that great and useful schemes were launched with bewildering quickness just about this period—railways, the telegraph, and the penny-post may almost be said to have come in together; and it must have been exceedingly difficult to compute the bearing of any one of these great schemes upon another. Of this it is certain, that at the very moment when Cooke and Wheatstone were passing their patent under the Great Seal, Rowland Hill was startling the country with his scheme of penny-postage; and during the time the copatentees were struggling, as already hinted, to obtain that footing which they eventually gained, the Post Office may be said to have been in the throes of an internal revolution, and disorganized from its centre to its circumference. We can well imagine, therefore, that during the earlier years of the telegraph, the Post Office authorities had little time, and probably as little inclination, to interfere with the problems that Wheatstone was slowly and satisfactorily working out; and if in subsequent years the indifference to the subject on the part of the Post Office may seem more surprising and less excusable, it must be remembered that many years elapsed before every point involved in penny-postage was gained, and every doubt of the scheme itself being a safe and profitable measure was set at rest.

Now, however, the Post Office is in a vastly different position, and the ground may fairly be said to be cleared for further operations. For the last ten or twelve years many proposals, more or less definite, and some from very competent authorities both inside and outside of the Post Office, have been made, having for their object the amalgamation of the postal and telegraphic systems of the country; and now the time would seem to have

arrived for giving these proposals the attention which their very great importance demands. The experience of the past twenty years has been, in every aspect of the case, favourable not only to the consideration, but the actual development of such a scheme. The success which has followed the establishment of a low and uniform rate of postage, as against the high and arbitrary rates of a prior period, and the adaptability of the new system to the requirements of the country, have been so marked, that public attention has strongly turned in favour of the application of a similar reform to telegraphy. And not only has penny-postage been thoroughly carried out, and our postal arrangements consequently attained to much solidity and efficiency, but measures of the most useful and successful kind have been so easily grafted upon Post Office machinery, that the same organization is pointed to as most likely to afford still further additional service, and on every hand we now hear the Post Office mentioned in close connection with projects of telegraphic reform.

Before we enter further into the proposals which have been made for an amalgamation of the two services, let us briefly glance at the origin, achievements, and present position of the companies which have up to the present time had the control of our telegraphic business; let us see how far it is possible for this agency to adapt itself to the growing requirements of the community, and seek to place in contrast the details of the existing with what we have been able to learn of the details of the scheme about to be presented for the consideration of the country.

After eight years of hard and oftentimes painful exertions on the part of the original co-patentees, the Electric Telegraph Company was incorporated in 1846. This Company employed its capital in buying the patents of Messrs. Cooke and Wheatstone for the sum of £168,000, in arranging for the miles of wire which had been laid down, and in connecting some important localities which had not previously benefited by the more private and unassisted enterprise of the first speculators. The vast advantages which the telegraph was capable of affording

to the working of the railway system in signalling trains, protecting its servants, and generally in economizing its power, had by this time become apparent. Now, instead of looking askance at it, railway boards began to welcome the swift messenger on all hands; and as the changed views of railway authorities had clearly been the cause of the extension of telegraphic lines, the new company naturally looked to the railway as to its present and prospective chief customer. Hence it came about that, in the first instance, the railway station was invariably chosen for the telegraphic station, and the wants of the commercial community were subordinated to those of the railway companies. The result might easily have been forecast. When the railways had employed the telegraph to the maximum extent of their requirements, and when, at the same time, the trading classes awoke to the benefits of the new means of communication, and decided to employ it, not capriciously or only occasionally in great emergencies, but as a regular instrument in furtherance of their interests, fresh provision became necessary. The company laid down new wires alongside the old ones; and in some cases they carried the wires beyond the railway station and into the heart of such large towns as seemed to promise a remunerative business. Then it was that new companies, notably the "European" and the "British" Telegraph Companies, started into existence to meet the increased demand. To a great extent these companies left the railway lines altogether, and sank tubes or carried poles beneath or along our public roads. It would simply be a repetition of familiar stories did we endeavour to show how these and other companies which afterwards came into existence became fused in larger ventures, and indeed it is not necessary, as our concern is not so much with defunct companies as with those in existence as we now know them.\*

\* The "Electric and International" Company is now the principal telegraph company. It has the chief command of the telegraph lines in England and Scotland; it has always been, and now is, in a sound financial position; it has a large capital, and has paid handsome dividends to its proprietors. Its only formidable rival is the company known as the "British and Irish Magnetic," which, like the former,

Meanwhile, however, it will be well to bear in mind the cardinal point, that in the vast majority of instances the *locale* of the telegraph did not proceed further than the railway station; and further, that what healthy competition promised to do in the way of a remedy was arrested by the process of amalgamation; and the consequence followed that large tracts of country which might have been opened out were left entirely unprovided with telegraphic facilities.

That whole districts are still,—notwithstanding considerable additions since the time of which we are more directly speaking—left without facilities, can be easily proved. There are between ten and eleven thousand towns and villages in the United Kingdom which contain a postal station, and of this number only about a thousand have telegraphic facilities. Let any reader be at the trouble to mark off on a map those places which are still without the accommodation of the telegraph, and the full force of our assertion will be at once felt; or, better still, let the reader take up his *Bradshaw*, and, consulting the index of this important, if somewhat mysterious, authority, note the towns of the United Kingdom which are, and those which are not, telegraphic stations, and the extraordinary inequality which has marked the introduction of this wonderful agency will be at once apparent. And when it is remembered that this list of places consists almost solely of places to which railway companies have found it necessary to accord railway station facilities, it cannot fail to surprise the reader to find that not more than ten per cent. of these places have yet had the telegraph assigned to them, although in many of these instances the telegraph lines pass by or near the place.

consists of a fusion of two or more companies in one. The “Magnetic” Company has the chief command of the Irish lines and the Irish traffic between England and Ireland; and it also does a considerable business in England. As these two companies are quite agreed as to the terms upon which the public shall be served, they are both prosperous, the latter likewise paying a good dividend; though for some reason—probably the absence of a good reserve fund—the shares of the “Magnetic” Company are at a discount.

Of course, the towns and districts thus deprived of telegraphic facilities are, generally speaking, only thinly populated, and stations at such places might not at first be remunerative; and with companies which, if they must present their usual dividends, must make every portion of their system pay, it is easy to understand why such places are neglected. The case is, however, a *national* one; and although a national remedy may now be all that is possible to meet it, we cannot help thinking that this need not have been requisite. The very fact of the remoteness of the situation of some towns and districts makes telegraphic communication of special value to the inhabitants of those districts; and it requires no great extent of vision to perceive that the superiority of the telegraph as a method of communication is greatly enhanced by the facts of this distance and this seclusion. It would, we are sure, have been a noble project, and we venture to think it would have produced no less noble fruits, had the projectors of the earlier telegraphs struck out boldly with their wires, and, on the plan of the postal system, which makes one part pay handsomely for the deficiencies of some few portions, had seized every shire and every town in their nervous grasp! This, however, is little better now than an idle and a vain regret. It may yet be accomplished at no distant date, but it seems as if it could only be accomplished under altogether different auspices.

We must, however, return from what is to some extent a digression to survey the whole telegraphic field. The two companies already mentioned, by good and careful management, have made great progress, and have done good service to the country; and by confining their main operations to special localities, have contrived to avoid what companies consider the evils, and the public consider the *benefits*, of competing lines. They extended their sphere of operations where they could do so carefully and securely; and this state of easy security might have continued indefinitely, but for the advent of a new company. In 1861, the "United Kingdom" Company, promoted by Mr. Allan, and which had threatened to enter the field for

several years previously, actually put in an appearance. The undertaking was a praiseworthy one. It had been originated at the instance of the commercial community, who were beginning to rebel against the exorbitant tariff of charges levied against them by the existing companies; and the new comer based its claims for support on the adoption of the principle of a low and uniform rate of charge, irrespective of distance, or a shilling for any message of ordinary length. No sooner, however, was the scheme fairly launched, and the amount of its resources known, than its ultimate failure was predicted. The new company did not, or it could not, command the requisite capital, to strike out largely into new districts; out of 120 places included in the sphere of its operations, not more than 30 were visited by the telegraph for the first time, and few of these towns were places of any considerable size. The older companies having wires to all the principal towns, the "United Kingdom" had to look mainly to their reduced and uniform rate for support; and this failed them at once, inasmuch as the older companies promptly reduced their charges whenever they communicated between the same points. The public, too, either forgetful or regardless of the great claim which the new company had upon its support, forsook the "United Kingdom" whenever it was more convenient to do business with the other companies. The original companies, keeping up at the same time their high charges between fully four-fifths of their stations, —charging, in the words of the chairman of one of their boards, "one shilling to one town, and three shillings to another not six miles distant from it,"—were thus enabled to keep up their dividends whilst they starved out their young and most enterprising rival! Then we have the old story. After a short and ineffectual struggle, the new company came to terms with the old ones; both the latter making a general reduction in their tariff, and the "United Kingdom" raising its charges to the same level. The existence of the latter company, notwithstanding its gallantry, and the fact that its proprietary are understood to be large customers, has always been a most



precarious one. Up to this time it has not, we believe, ever paid a dividend.

It must always be a source of regret that the well-meant efforts of the "United Kingdom" Company were not more successful. The failure of this company to carry out its first intention cannot, however, be held to be any argument against the system of uniformity of charge with which it set out. Almost all the conditions of success were wanting in the case. It was simply impossible for the "United Kingdom," with its limited means and restricted area, to succeed in its attempt, when important and prosperous companies already had the largest share in the principal field, and were able to frown down all competition.

One of the principal grounds of complaint against the present telegraphic system is the high charges for the transmission of messages. In the case of the "United Kingdom" Company, we have the failure of an attempt to introduce a scheme which has operated with advantage in other similar fields of enterprise; and we have seen how this failure was brought about. But there is really nothing in the principle of the electric telegraph to make the scheme of a low and uniform tariff of charges inapplicable. The telegraph is said to annihilate time and space; and this is, in its main sense, true. The price, however, at which it works, has always been regulated by distance, though it is clear that the cost is not anything like proportionally regulated by distance.

When the Post Office started the scheme of uniform penny-postage, it was said by some that the principle was unsound, inasmuch as the expense of conveyance certainly increased with the greater distance mails were conveyed; but it was answered, and answered truly, that the increased expense of the greater distance was so inappreciable as not to warrant any additional charge. But telegraphic companies have not even this amount of argument in their favour. Applying the same rule to telegraphic communication, it must be allowed that, except in the primary expense of construction, there is

even less ground for a larger charge for the longer distance, merely because—and this is the actual case—the distance is longer. The expense of telegraphing a longer distance may not be more, possibly may be less, than for sending a message a short one; while, if the converse were true, it is surely capable of proof that the profit of shorter messages would, in the case of a uniformity of charge, make up for any loss from longer ones. It is only the attitude of the existing companies, and the fact that so many separate interests are involved, that seem to make it at present impossible to give the country what, on the grounds of fair argument, it ought to have—a low and uniform tariff for telegrams as for letters.

The fourth company in existence—the “London District”—was established to remedy another defect in the existing system. We have shown how large districts of the country are without telegraphic facilities at all; how other towns and districts are, by the telegraphic stations being located only at the railway stations, very imperfectly served with these facilities; but we have said nothing of the way in which the outlying districts of our large and densely-populated towns have been attended to. Leaving London out of consideration, and coming to towns like Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow, &c., we find that the telegraph has been carried into the heart of these towns, possibly into the centre of the commercial part of these towns, whilst their several important and wealthy suburbs are comparatively neglected. Now, we all know that, as regards the postal arrangements in these large towns, the revenue of the country has been greatly augmented, as well as the wants of the population considered, by the creation of innumerable minor post offices in each of such districts; letters have been written because they could be easily posted, and business has been developed in the ratio of the facilities afforded. Applying these facts to telegraphic communication, there really seems no reason why facilities should be given in the one case and refused in the other, except that in the one case the service is administered by the Government, which looks to the convenience of the public

as well as to raise a revenue, and is content to wait for results till its system is properly developed ; and in the other case by companies whose sole object is to raise revenue, or, to put it as favourably as possible, which consult the public convenience so long as that is practicable without risking immediate loss.

To a great extent, London had been left in a similar position, as regards its numerous districts, before the establishment of the "London District" Company. The object with which this new enterprise set out was to supply the world of London with equal telegraphic facilities throughout its wide and ever-increasing boundaries, and to do this at a cheap and uniform rate. The "London District" Company seems, though from a greater variety and from altogether different causes, to have been equally unfortunate with the "United Kingdom;" it has already abandoned the low rate of charge with which it started; and it has never yet managed to pay a dividend to its shareholders. Many reasons are assigned for this state of things; but want of enterprise, arising, no doubt, from want of capital on the one hand, and from competition on the other, seems to have been the principal cause. Had the company been able to provide a series of principal telegraph stations, say one in each of the great districts in the metropolis, and had they struck out boldly with their wires, on the plan of the London postal system, it must surely have led to a different result. No one who knows anything of the public and private business of this vast metropolis can doubt that it requires an efficient telegraphic service, in addition to every other means which it at present possesses of communication and conveyance. In Paris, where such a system cannot possibly be required so much as it is in London, a postal district telegraph service has succeeded in a remarkable manner, whilst our London service has signally failed; and, whilst within a recent period the tariff for district messages in Paris has been reduced from a franc to half a franc, and the number of messages has been augmented *tenfold*, in London we have seen a retrograde step taken, and, with an increased tariff, the number of messages continually decreasing. The great drawback to the

success of the "London District" Company is, that it has never been, and is not now, co-extensive with the metropolis. Huge districts of London, as any one may see who will take the trouble to glance at a metropolitan map, still remain unvisited by its wires; and this fact, taken with another—namely, that all the messages of the company have to be passed through the principal office in Cannon Street, thus causing the delays and inconveniences of which all who use the medium are only too familiar—is enough to account for the want of support from which the company is suffering.

Now, it must not be supposed that our facts and inferences are very new; they have often been stated before to illustrate the deficiencies and irregularities of the existing system: and as public attention is likely to continue to be directed to the matter, and it is thought that legislation on the subject cannot be long delayed, it is important to have some of them before us to help in the consideration of a remedy. As we have previously said, the attention of Government has been drawn to this question again and again; distinct propositions have been placed before different Governments, and the propositions have at least indicated the direction, and always one particular direction, which some reform should take, though the proposers may not have been able to devise the exact means for bringing it about. We scarcely need say that past Governments have seldom shown any great alacrity to initiate any remarkable measure of reform without some sort of pressure from without, or some strong indication of public feeling running in the direction of that change which may have been under contemplation. For several years this seems to have been true with regard to telegraphic reform. There had been proposals, it is true, but they did not go weighted with great authority; and there had been complaints, loud enough and numerous enough, in mercantile circles, but they were not sustained by any sufficient combination of force. It is certain that there ensued a considerable change of feeling in commercial circles after the failure of the attempt of the "United Kingdom" Company to introduce a low

and uniform rate of charge in telegraphy. The "United Kingdom," not inaptly called a consumers' company, from the general support it received from large telegraphing firms, may fairly be considered to have expressed in its formation the general feeling in the mercantile world as to the desirability of a thorough change in the system. When the attempt failed, and especially when it was remembered how it had come to fail, the feeling found much more decided expression than before from the representative bodies of merchants in the three kingdoms; and committees were appointed by more than one chamber of commerce to consider and report upon "the condition of telegraphic communication, with a view to its improvement."

As it is not too much to assert that the representations thus made have led the way to a fuller and more specific inquiry into the whole system than had ever been previously attempted, and as the action of these bodies has at length supplied the stimulus which we have described as necessary to secure the attention of the governing powers, it is only fair that we should let the chambers of commerce be heard on this point. A copy of the report presented by a committee of the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, and which was distributed throughout the commercial circles of the country, and a copy of the memorial addressed by the Associated Chambers of Commerce of the United Kingdom to the House of Commons, are now before us; and this report and memorial both complain either directly or by inference:

1st. That the rates for the transmission of messages are excessive, and that the existing high charges directly tend to check the growth of the system.

2nd. That the charge for messages is not only much too high, but the work performed is in many cases very inefficiently done; that messages are delayed most vexatiously, and that they are often inaccurate when received.

3rd. That not only are many large towns very inefficiently served with telegraphic communication, the offices provided being in many cases too far from the centres of trade and population, and opened in many cases for too short a time, but that a large number of towns, and even whole districts, are not provided with these facilities at all.

4th. That the British telegraphic system is decidedly inferior to that of other countries, whilst the postal system of this country is immeasurably superior to that of any other country.

5th. That, under existing circumstances, the evils of the present system are likely to increase rather than to diminish; and that with the growing wants of the commercial community the defects of which they complain will become, in all probability, more serious and vexatious. Further, that desirable improvements cannot be expected whilst the field of telegraphic enterprise is occupied with several independent companies, who, whilst they are all zealously striving to earn dividends for their respective shareholders, are more or less working in antagonism to each other.

Having thus stated their case against the existing system, they make the following recommendation—and it is noteworthy that no other recommendation seems to have been considered, and nothing else is suggested—namely:

“That her Majesty’s Government should assume the management of telegraphic communications in connection with the administration of the Post Office, and extend the lines, so that they might at least include all the more important towns and villages—such, for example, as have money-order offices.”

The memorial to the House of Commons backs this recommendation by a reference to the successful result of the introduction of a low and uniform rate of postage, taken together with a liberal increase of postal facilities; and, after arguing that the analogy between the Post Office and the telegraphic system is sufficiently close to justify the expectation that a like reform would produce the like results, it urgently asks the House to take the matter into its consideration, the memorialists believing that such a plan, if adopted, would not only produce in a few years a large surplus revenue, but would prove an unspeakable boon to the community.

As to the validity of the objections here brought against the existing system, we need not enter further than we have already done. Without going so far as one competent authority, who declares “the English system of telegraphy” to be “the worst organized in the world, and much behind that of almost every European State,” it may, we think, be taken for granted that

in this country great improvements may be made, and that considerable improvements are greatly needed. It is requisite, however, that we should, on the other hand, consider in detail the remedy suggested; and as so much turns on the *practicability* of the improvements which, as all agree, are necessary, and especially on the practicability of annexing the English telegraphs to the English Post Office, it is of the first importance that we should ascertain the results in those countries where the two services have already been combined under one management, and where the plan is at present in full vigour. On this point, it is true, the information given by the papers we have referred to is meagre and vague; but additions have been made to these details in the discussions of the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, and we are fortunately able to supplement this information by the published reports of the Belgian and Swiss Telegraphic Administrations.

The first telegraphic line in Belgium was constructed by Messrs. Cooke and Wheatstone, in 1846, between Brussels and Antwerp. In 1850, the Belgian Government purchased this line, and came to a resolution to construct a complete system of telegraphic lines, which should include all the principal and most of the smaller towns in the country. At the close of 1865, the system had been so extended as to include within its working 2,000 miles of line, and 5,395 miles of wire, with 307 telegraph offices open to the public. Of these 307 offices, 75 were in the centres of towns and villages, and the remaining 232 were at railway stations—the railway station office being used jointly by the Government and the railway companies, after a manner which we need not stay to describe. In addition to these 307 offices, all of which can send and receive messages through the entire extent of the country, there is further accommodation provided, more especially for the less populated districts, in the shape of “offices of deposit,” at which offices the public may pay for and deposit messages, which will then be sent to the nearest telegraphic office, either specially or in course of post. Every post office in Belgium, which is not already a

telegraphic office, is an "office of deposit;" as are likewise a great number of railway stations not included in the 232 stations, which are telegraphic offices proper. It may fairly be said that, in proportion to its size and population, no country can boast of telegraphic facilities equal to those of Belgium; it has no less than one mile of telegraphic line to each five and a half square miles of territory; and, not to speak of the deposit offices, one telegraphic office to every 15,000 inhabitants.

And Belgium is not only well, but cheaply served with these facilities. Up to December, 1862, the charge for a telegraphic message not exceeding twenty words was a franc and a half, or, say, fifteenpence. The charge was subsequently reduced to one franc, or tenpence—a reduction which resulted in an increase of 79 per cent. in the number of messages during the first year of the new tariff, a further increase of 34 per cent. in 1864, and a still further increase of 26 per cent. in the number of messages for the year 1865. In December, 1865, the charge was again reduced to half a franc, or fivepence, for an "ordinary" message, at which it stands at present. It is worthy of remark that this further reduction was planned to bring the telegraph within reach of the poorest, and so to popularize its use; and that one of the last acts of the late King Leopold, whose memory is revered in this country as well as in his own, was to sign a decree giving effect to this beneficent measure. For the sum of fivepence, then, an "ordinary" telegram may be sent from one extremity of Belgium to the other. If the message be written on stamped paper, and delivered in to the nearest telegraph office, it will be at once sent to its destination; and if the addressee resides within the limits of the terminal office—the limit round each office being two kilometres, or a mile and a quarter—it will be delivered free of any further charge. Should, however, the sender not live near a telegraphic office, he uses the deposit office; and by a combination of postal and telegraphic facilities, his message gets sent forward in ordinary course, if payment of the primary charge only has been made; specially, if the sender engages to defray the expense. Thus, if the sender wishes his



message to go express between the deposit office and the nearest telegraphic office, he can arrange to do so; and should the person to whom he is sending his message live beyond the bounds of the terminal telegraph office, the telegram may either be sent free of further charge through the post, or specially, if the sender has arranged for a special messenger.

Besides "ordinary" messages, which form, or did form in 1865, 93 per cent. of the whole number of telegrams, there are others under the Belgian system designated "extraordinary" messages, and for which the old tariff of tenpence for twenty words is charged. "Extraordinary" messages may be re-directed from one telegraphic office to another (though not sent free of any further charge), and so as to follow the addressee from one place to another. The sender of such messages may have copies of any one message delivered to any number of persons at a charge of fivepence per copy; and he can further require, on further payment, an exact copy of the message transmitted, together with a note of the hour when his message was delivered, and the name of the person to whom it was delivered. Senders of "extraordinary," as well as "ordinary" telegrams can have their messages sent by post free of charge, if they do not wish at any point to incur the expense of special messengers. It does not seem to us that senders of extraordinary messages have any great advantage over senders of ordinary telegrams, notwithstanding that the cost of the former is double that of the latter; and judging from the fact that these messages form only 7 per cent. of the whole, the Belgian people would appear, to a great extent, to share this opinion.

It is noteworthy that the administrators of the Belgian system give a security for both the speed at which the telegrams are sent, and the accuracy of their rendering. They engage to return to the sender the whole charge on any message when, through the fault of the office, it does not reach its destination, or when it does not reach its destination as quickly as it would have done if sent by post (and the course of post is expeditious in Belgium), or when after reaching its addressee it be found so

incorrectly rendered as not to answer the purpose for which it was sent. Under such stipulations, it cannot be doubted that great pains will be taken to insure accuracy ; and if the number of claims for restitution of charge—at present one claim to every 5,000 telegrams—be a criterion (and it may be assumed to be so in a great measure), it would seem that the precautions taken have been successful.

It only remains to add that the financial results of the Belgian system are of the most gratifying kind. Not only has the country been vastly benefited by the introduction of a most excellent system of telegraphy for which the people have paid exceptionally low rates, but the whole cost, primary and secondary, of that system had, at the close of 1865, been met, and in addition, a considerable revenue had accrued to the State. From the year 1850 to the year 1864 the Telegraphic Administration had disbursed for purchase of lines, and the construction, working, and maintenance of the system the sum of 5,500,000 francs ; and the administrators had received for messages upwards of 6,700,000 francs, thus realizing a clear profit of 1,200,000 francs, which by this time has no doubt found its way back to the pockets of the Belgian taxpayer. Encouraged, as well they might be, by this result, and in no sense discouraged by the fact that many of their lines and several of their offices had not contributed anything to the gross receipts, the Administrators made, as we have already stated, further considerable concessions at the close of the year 1865, and announced the further reduction in the tariff in the following language :—

“ Our telegraphic reform has a twofold object. We desire to place this mode of communication within the reach of all classes, and to make it serviceable in all the relations of life, and to increase telegraphic correspondence to an extent which cannot yet be defined, but of which we may form some idea if we consider the effects of former reductions ; and at the same time we hope to find in a vast increase of business, spread over all the lines, and comprising those which have hitherto been unproductive, a profit which we could not hope to obtain from the existing tariff.”

This further effort to stimulate telegraphic correspondence promises, it is pleasant to add, to be crowned with complete success.

The Swiss telegraphic system has also for some years been under the same management as the Post Office in that country. Here also the tariff for telegrams is uniform and irrespective of distance. It is higher, however, than in Belgium, owing, no doubt, to the greater cost of construction and maintenance of lines in Switzerland than in Belgium, and which cost is of course increased by the natural characteristics and configuration of the former country. At present a charge of one franc for a telegram of twenty words, with the addition of a quarter of a franc for every addition of ten words or part of ten words, secures the delivery of a telegram in any part of Switzerland, and at the residence of the addressee, if within a quarter of a league, or three-quarters of a mile, from the terminal office, as well as free delivery by post when the residence happens to be beyond that boundary. The sender here, as in Belgium, may direct that his message shall be delivered by express; the charges for which are, if the messenger be on foot, half a franc for a mile and a half; if mounted, a franc for the same distance.

The minor arrangements in Switzerland are almost identical with those in Belgium. There is one feature in the Swiss system, however, which is peculiar to Switzerland. We allude to sending money orders by telegraph. Under this system, which we need not stay to describe, money is here circulated by telegraph in as simple and in as satisfactory a manner as with us it is transmitted through the familiar money-order offices of our own Post Office.

In one respect the Swiss system has been equally successful with the Belgian one; the growth of telegraphic correspondence has been more than proportionate to the growth of correspondence by post; and the growth of correspondence both by post and telegraph has been, year by year, a constantly progressive one. In 1855, for example, 33,936 inland telegrams circulated through the country, and the number of inland letters passing

through the Swiss Post Office was about fourteen millions and a half, or a proportion of one telegram to every 108 letters ; in 1865, on the other hand, the number of inland telegrams had risen to 364,118, and the number of inland letters to over twenty-five millions, giving a proportion of telegrams to letters of one telegram to every sixty-nine letters. Whilst, however, the growth of business had thus been favourable, the financial success of the scheme, so far as producing a direct revenue to the State is concerned, has not been so marked in Switzerland as in Belgium. At the same time, even the Swiss scheme has amply paid all its expenses, and, indeed, produced a trifling revenue ; whilst the indirect results, a beneficial action on the Post Office, on trade and commerce, and the convenience to the population generally, have contributed to make it a great boon to the public. Moreover, it ought to be remembered that the tariff for telegrams is much higher—a franc against half a franc ; and the postal rates\* are somewhat lower in Switzerland than in Belgium.

Judging from the greater extent of the United Kingdom, the greater wealth of all its parts, and the more active commercial relationships which knit together all its provinces, however distant, we should have assumed, in the absence of precise information to the contrary effect, that the proportion of telegrams to letters in this country, which introduced the telegraph, and has furnished by far the greatest amount of improvements in its working, would at any rate, and even in spite of our higher rates, have been something like equal to the proportion shown in Belgium and Switzerland at the present day. But the facts are far otherwise. Whatever may be the reason, the telegraph is not nearly so much used in the country of its birth as in the countries of its adoption. Taking the Post Office and

\* The postal rates in Belgium are one penny for any distance under nineteen miles, and twopence for any greater distance. In Switzerland, they are one halfpenny for any distance under six miles, one penny for distances between six and thirty miles, and threehalfpence for any greater distance.

telegraphic returns of this country for the past four years—and by taking these years the business of all the telegraphic companies now in existence will be taken into account (though no attempt is made to distinguish the large number of messages which must have been counted in the returns of more than one company)—we arrive at the following result:—

Year.	No. of Inland Telegrams.	No. of Inland Letters.	Proportion of Telegrams to Letters.		
1862	2,676,352	593,361,580	One Telegram to 221 Letters		
1863	3,186,724	629,478,126	"	"	197
1864	3,924,855	665,503,126	"	"	169
1865	4,662,687	706,057,667	"	"	151

Although, as appears from the foregoing table, there has been a steady increase in the amount of telegraphic business in this country during the four years—an increase which, though not more than proportionate to the multiplication of companies, and the spread of additional facilities, has had an effect in increasing the proportion of telegrams to letters—we can only arrive at a proper idea of the rate of progress by comparing the results in the United Kingdom with the results shown during the same period under the Belgian and Swiss systems. The following table gives the proportion of telegrams to letters in each of the three countries during the four years in question.

Year.	Belgium.		Switzerland.		United Kingdom.	
	Telegrams.	Letters.	Telegrams.	Letters.	Telegrams.	Letters.
1862	1	187	1	80	1	221
1863	1	114	1	74	1	197
1864	1	88	1	70	1	169
1865	1	73	1	69	1	151

We have thus seen how marked has been the growth of telegraphic business in Belgium and Switzerland, and how manifestly successful the adaptation of telegraphic business to the ordinary business of the Post Office has proved in these countries. We have shown that in Belgium and Switzerland—countries which, as compared with our own, are limited in territory, and poor and unenterprising in character, and which, therefore,

we should have thought, might have been quickly enough served by their excellent postal system—the development of their telegraphic system has been surprisingly rapid and complete; and that owing to this development, to the regularity of the system, and to the low cost of transmitting messages through this medium, the proportion of telegrams to letters is much higher in these countries than it is with us.

Now, no one will affirm that there is *less need* for a complete system of telegraphic communication in this country than in the little compact kingdoms of Switzerland and Belgium. On the contrary, the greater extent of the United Kingdom; the fact that it is made up of detached portions, some of which are not easily reached in course of post, even in these days of quick travelling; and the further fact that the people of all parts alike are actively engaged in business pursuits which give the telegraph a positive advantage that it does not possess elsewhere,—all these facts demonstrate a need for an efficient service here *greater* than can be shown where such a service is actually in full operation. There can be no doubt that this country has outstripped other countries in the race for wealth and commercial precedence; in respect to our postal system, which is described as giving wings to our commerce, we have set an example which is being rapidly followed by all civilized nations: but whilst we have been resting, as it were, in a sense of fancied security and superiority, other nations have been working out problems, the solution of which has much to do with commercial precedence; and it must be allowed that we have at length been surpassed in the extent of our resources for exchanging, in a sure and rapid manner, our thought and information. It seems to us a matter of extreme national importance, considering the bearing of this subject on our commerce, that we should find out exactly how far we are behind other countries in this respect. Now, we have seen that the Belgian and Swiss systems embrace a low and uniform charge for all telegraphic messages, whilst our charges are high, and are regulated by distance. Let us see what amount of accommodation, in

other respects, is afforded in this country as compared with that afforded in Belgium and Switzerland. The following table speaks for itself, and whilst giving the proportion of telegraphic accommodation to territory in the three countries, shows the disadvantages of our own system and its inferiority, in point of accommodation, to that of the systems with which it is here compared :—

	Belgium.	Switzerland.	United Kingdom.
Miles of Telegraphic Line to every 100 square miles of territory . . . . .	17 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles.	13 $\frac{7}{10}$ miles.	11 $\frac{1}{10}$ miles.*
Number of Telegraphic Offices to every 100,000 persons . .	6 $\frac{1}{2}$ offices.	9 $\frac{2}{10}$ offices.	5 $\frac{1}{5}$ offices.*

It may, perhaps, be said that the statistics relating to the English system, at the same time that they exhibit a certain inferiority to the statistics of the other two countries, are not in themselves decisive as to the obvious want of facilities here; and also that a great deal depends upon the *way* in which facilities may be distributed in Switzerland and Belgium. To this, however, we have only to reply, that there are no such arrangements as duplicate and triplicate lines and offices in these countries, but, as follows naturally from a united management, lines and offices are so arranged that a sufficient accommodation is given to all parts without more than a sufficient accommodation being given to any part of these kingdoms. There is no need for us to say that the same cannot be asserted of the English system. A careful calculation has, indeed, been made as to the way in which our English, not to speak of Scotch and Irish, towns, containing a population of 2,000 persons and upwards, are served; and this calculation shows clearly that while 30 per cent. of the whole number of

\* Deductions have here been made for the duplicate and triplicate lines, and duplicate and triplicate offices, which in this country merely divide the business of certain localities, without materially increasing the accommodation in the districts which they serve.

places are well served with telegraphic facilities, 40 per cent. are indifferently served, 12 per cent. are badly served, and 18 per cent., with an aggregate population of half a million persons, *are not served at all*. Taking, therefore, all these facts together, they may be held not only to prove the marked inferiority of our system to that in existence elsewhere, but they may really be said to complete the case against us in this direction.

Furthermore, if we take into consideration the high price which is charged for the work done here—a price which is altogether disproportioned to the cost of providing it (for the total cost of constructing, maintaining, and working each mile of telegraphic wire can be shown to be not more, if, indeed, it is not less, in the United Kingdom than in Belgium, and even in Switzerland)—together with the proved absence of facilities, we have quite enough to account for the state of the English system, which, as compared with those of Belgium and Switzerland, gives far less accommodation for a much higher rate of charge; and we shall have quite enough evidence to show that our system must retard, rather than encourage, the growth of this species of communication, so long as it is conducted on its present narrow and uncertain basis. Like the postal system before postal reform, when there was one post office where now there are ten; when the charge from post office to post office was excessive, and regulated by the distance letters were carried, the telegraphic system has now the self-same difficulties to contend with, and is waiting, ripe in the opinion of many of those who are best able to judge, for an equally sweeping change.

It is surely unnecessary to urge the soundness of the commercial principle, over and over again demonstrated, of the tendency of reduced rates to increase traffic. The experience of the Post Office is quite germane to our present subject. In the early years of electric telegraphy, the tariff was so high as to be absolutely prohibitory; the charges were indeed so heavy, that the new mode of communication, established concurrently with cheap postage, was reserved for those to whom price was no object, and was only employed in cases which demanded extra-



ordinary speed as a vital necessity. So far, moreover, did this hold good, and such were the effects of confining the operations of this agency to cases of extreme haste and urgency, that the general public have not yet dissociated the idea of the one from the other; and the direct and unfortunate result has been to make the bulk of the people look with dread and alarm on the innocent and swift messenger.\* Every reduction in the tariff has, however, brought the telegraph within the range of a wider circle, and, in a proportionate degree, has popularized the agency itself. But reducing the tariff did more than perform this great public service—it increased the revenue. Each reduction in the tariff, notably in the case of the original company in 1851, again in 1853, and again in the case of the principal companies after their contest with the “United Kingdom,” brought vastly increased business, and increased business brought increased receipts and enhanced profits to shareholders.

Why, then, we may well ask, has not this beneficial system been continued, and why not carried further? The periodical reports of the “Electric Telegraph” Company, whilst they have on all occasions expressed an adverse opinion as to the *policy* of a low and uniform rate for messages, have on several occasions spoken of the reductions which have been made from time to time, as tending to produce increased revenue; that thus further accommodation has been given to the public, whilst at the same time the buoyancy of the company’s revenue has continued unimpaired. And even when this company was engaged in competition with the “United Kingdom” with shilling rates, the directors of the “Electric” Company, speaking of the

\* Many people feel a great reluctance to telegraph for the first time; while to receive a telegram is a still greater trial for many others, and produces upon the receiver the same effect as when a deep black-bordered envelope is handed in by the postman. Telegraphic companies have fully acknowledged all this; and when the “London District” Company started, a proposition to throw its offices open to the public *gratis* for a certain time, in order that the agency might become more popular, found considerable favour in telegraphic circles.

districts served by both companies, were enabled to report to their proprietary that "*the number of messages had been very greatly increased*, but the revenue to those places has not been replaced ; that it will be ultimately replaced there can be little doubt, *but that must be a work of time.*" In this passage, we think, lies hid the entire secret. The directors of this company, like the directors in all private and joint-stock enterprises, had to look primarily to one great consideration ; they were elected by their shareholders, in the first instance, to gather the greatest amount of revenue possible without any undue risk ; in the second place, to do what they could for the public interests, if there were any reasonable hope of the company being quickly reimbursed for any outlay that might be undertaken. Acting in this case on some such principle, arrangements were no sooner practicable to return to the old high rates than the opportunity was seized to do so ; and immediate profits were preferred to continuing a huge public benefit, though, as we have already shown from their own report, the directors were not without hopes of the low tariff becoming ultimately remunerative.

It is considered almost hopeless, even in telegraphic circles, to expect that, by any arrangement amongst themselves, the existing boards of management will ever be able to bring about a system at all analogous to that which we have been describing, and which works in Belgium with so much benefit to the public and so much profit to the State. An amalgamation of existing companies, which would economize resources in those districts now served with a surplussage of facilities, and might open the way to such an extension of the system as is required to make it continuous with the entire kingdom, would undoubtedly be a step in the right direction ; but this is a step which the existing companies seem to have no intention of taking. It is certain, however, that the country cannot long be satisfied with anything less than this. With the growing requirements of our commerce, and the example of neighbouring States, it is impossible that the country can look with complacency on the absence of facili-

ties which other nations possess, which they acquired so easily, and which they enjoy so cheaply. If we cannot have such facilities through the existing organizations, then we must procure them in some other way.

It is not doubted that the amalgamation of the existing companies might be beneficial to the country, and probably lead, at some distant date, to a low and uniform charge for messages. Nor can the companies themselves be insensible to the advantages which would result from united management. Indeed, this is so obvious, that amalgamation must have been brought about long before the present time, had the question presented no insuperable obstacle. Supposing, however, the barrier to be removed, let us see if we can calculate results. It is clear that the one great company would, under an amalgamated system, be able to work at a greatly decreased outlay; and it is equally certain that it might be more possible than it seems to be now, to secure an extension of telegraphic facilities, either by the extension of wires into districts not previously visited by the telegraph, or by adopting some plan to serve the suburban districts of our largest towns. The result would certainly be a vastly increased business; and seeing that the *cost* of telegraphic operations has year by year fallen with increased business, and is even now rapidly falling *to an average of a shilling per message*, it is clear that the new company would be, almost at once and in one sense, in a position to lower its tariff. There can be no doubt that the public would have a right to expect this reduction; but they would require to look with a jealous eye lest they lost this advantage—an advantage which makes amalgamation, in the public view, almost alone desirable. Amalgamation, amongst things implied in such a settlement, must mean the taking over of an enormous capital which has been sunk in divided, and in many cases, unremunerative enterprises; and the dividends on this aggregate capital might, for many years at any rate, absorb the lion's share of the expenses saved from a more economical style of working. Then with regard to the extension required to make the uniform system co-extensive

with the population. These extensions would of necessity entail a considerable outlay ; and it is more than questionable whether they would be undertaken any more than they are at present, unless their remunerative nature were guaranteed, and an equally clamorous proprietary were convinced of their absolute safety as business speculations. It is true that, if an amalgamation could be brought about, it would require the sanction of an Act of Parliament ; and that the legislature could here exert its power, and fix a maximum rate of dividend, as well as a maximum tariff ; it could also arrange that the revenue left, after paying the dividend, should be applied to providing capital for the extension of the lines in new districts. But it requires no great amount of foresight to see that these conditions, which may be assumed to be almost indispensable to an act of amalgamation, or, in other words, to the creation of a monopoly, must have a direct deterrent effect upon the principal and only really prosperous company in the kingdom, and, indeed, that they form a sufficient reason, were there none other, for its present independent action.

The commercial world may fairly be excused if it looks upon this matter in a different light from the proprietary of joint-stock companies, and if it bases its demands on higher and more national principles than those which obtain among private boards of management. Convinced that there is now scarcely an available alternative left, commercial representatives have asked, and continue to ask, the more direct intervention of Government, and say that for the legislature to assume the entire control and management of telegraphic communications in the same way that they already control the slower method of communication by post, is now the only way out of the difficulties created by its past action in the matter, and the exceptional arrangements made in this country for carrying on this business. Private enterprise, which has always, and very properly so, been allowed great latitude in this country—and which, with regard to the telegraph, may almost be said to have been left uncontrolled from the first—has now, it is affirmed,

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been fully tried, and has been found wanting ; and that now the opportunity presents itself for the Government to repair the omissions of the past, by taking the telegraph into its own hands, and establishing on a firm and broad basis an economical and systematic service. "I must confess," says a member of the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, who has taken a leading part in the agitation of this question, "that the more I look into the subject, the more convinced I am that our only hope of obtaining a complete and cheap system of telegraphy is in the Government assuming its management."

There cannot be much need to dwell upon the political policy and expediency of a course which is justified at once, did it need any justification, by the mere mention of a precedent. No single argument which could be advanced as a justification of the action of Government in retaining in its own hands the postal business of the country, would be out of place in the way of urging the policy and the propriety of adopting the same course as regards our telegraphic business. If correspondence by post is a matter which ought not to be left to private and irresponsible hands, surely the same argument will apply with equal, if not with greater force to correspondence by telegrams ; and if it be necessary to protect closed letters, so that the public may have all the safeguards of the State as to security and confidence, it is plainly equally necessary, if not more so, that those safeguards should be extended to open telegrams.

Let it be admitted that to deal with the telegraphic service of the country is, equally with the postal system, a function of Government, and that by a transference of the former business to the Government invaluable advantages will be secured and assured, not only to the commercial world, but to the State itself ;—we come, then, to the further and equally important considerations as to how this business must be carried on, and to the nature of the proposals which have been, or will be, made on this head. On all hands the question is narrowed to one point—namely, that if the Government is to take up the scheme at all, it must work it by means of the already existing machinery

of the Post Office. In the fact that all opinion worth considering converges to this one point, we have the clearest indication, not only of the want that is felt, but of the universality of the remedy ; and we scarcely need add that we are much nearer obtaining the remedy when all are pointing in the *same* direction for it, than when, as is too common, all is distraction from the remedy being sought in many different directions. It is not at all difficult to account for the unanimity which prevails on this one point. If Government must take over the concerns of existing telegraphic companies, it must pay a fair price for them ; and this money, whilst it need not form any obstacle to the Government assuming the responsibility, will be a considerable charge on the revenue. Then the country will not unreasonably look to be better supplied with facilities, and to be supplied with them at a cheaper rate than heretofore. Now, all these considerations and stipulations, indispensable to any such plan, will make a great demand upon the economy and resources of the Government ; and were it not for its Post Office organization which, *hic et ubique*, extends throughout the length and breadth of the land, and which is of such a nature that other processes, especially those of a cognate character, can easily be engrafted upon it—and indeed, as in this case, the further process be made to subserve Post Office purposes—the Government would be perfectly justified in shrinking from the task. The Post Office organization, in fact, alone makes it possible for Government now to interfere ; it possesses in this existing machinery just those facilities which are most needed to promote the maximum amount of public convenience at a minimum cost ; and it is not too much to say that the same cannot be asserted either of any other public or private establishment. With its thousands of offices in every part of the country, of a size proportioned to its requirements, and with its tens of thousands of servants—one-half of whom, we may fairly assume, are not fully occupied with their postal duties,—and with a gigantic establishment in the Metropolis which holds a powerful check and wonderful sway over the entire extent of the system, it

is in no sense surprising that the Post Office should have occurred to all who have spoken or written on telegraphic reform.

The sum for which the interests of the existing telegraph companies may be bought has been made the subject of several computations, varying from two to three millions sterling ; but taking the medium amount, for the sake of argument, which will represent an annual charge of about £80,000, and estimating from the earnings of the existing companies, the economy of one system of lines, offices, and staff, worked in conjunction with the Post Office, against the duplicate and triplicate workings and staffs of existing companies, it is not too much to say that the system would not only pay from the commencement, but that ten or twelve years would see the Government in possession of a gigantic network of telegraphic lines, unfettered by debt, and beginning to realize, from their more and more extended use, an ever-increasing profit to the State. We have, then, these facts, three of them beyond dispute, and the other quite capable of proof, to assist us in the consideration of what remains to be said : (1) the Government would need to work the telegraph system economically ; (2) it would be able to work economically through the medium of the Post Office ; (3) the combination must soon pay the primary cost, and ultimately the plan would yield a large revenue ; and (4), the revenue, instead of paying dividends to a joint-stock company, would go to lighten the burdens of the country, finding its way back to the pockets of the customer.

It is now no secret that a plan has actually been drafted for working the telegraph in conjunction with the Post Office. Before we attempt to describe such features of that plan as have been allowed to transpire, and which we have been able to ascertain by dint of persevering inquiry, let us refer for a moment to previous adaptations of other business to the normal work of the Post Office, and by trying to ascertain the result of these adaptations, see if we can form a fair conception of the bearing of the proposed measure on the Post Office itself. It is not by any means to be desired that reform in one direction should be

bought at the expense of confusion and loss in our admirable postal arrangements; but if it be possible to show that both services may gain by the proposed combination, any proof we may produce will be a cogent reason why that combination should be hastened. In one sense, the results which have followed the assimilation of the two systems in Belgium and Switzerland are pertinent enough; and there is every encouragement in the fact, admitted on all hands, that the Post Office has increased in efficiency in both countries. But *we* have had an experience of a different kind. Of late years the Post Office has grafted on its original stock the book-post, the pattern post, the savings' bank system, a government annuity and insurance scheme; and with this result, amongst others, that the oft-repeated objections that the Post Office was taking too much upon itself, that the accumulation would weigh it down, and that its normal business of letter carrying would suffer, have been shown, with an overwhelming amount of evidence, to be perfectly and entirely groundless. Not only has the Post Office Savings' Bank scheme far exceeded in its proportions anything of which the public at first conjectured, but the *peculiar* business of the Post Office has increased far more rapidly since the introduction of the savings' bank scheme than it ever did before. The number of letters passing through the post has, since 1861, increased by 127 millions; the book-post and pattern-post packages have increased in an equal proportion; registered letters have within the same period increased 50 per cent.; and the gross amount of money orders paid has risen from £13,800,000 to over £18,000,000 annually.

It would obviously be difficult to say whether the country regards the work done by the Post Office to be as efficiently done as heretofore; but if the amount of complaints which reaches the public ear on the one hand, and the eulogies bestowed by the press of late years on the other, be any fair criterion, then clearly that efficiency has not diminished, if, indeed, it be not increased. It is, moreover, an undoubted fact that these extensions of the service which the Post Office renders



to the public have of necessity operated in a beneficial manner on that part of its staff whose efficiency is most liable to be questioned, and of whose general qualifications there has been the most complaint. These complaints, it is found, seldom extend to officers who are entirely engaged in the service of the Post Office. There is no reason to suppose that the permanent *employés* of the Post Office are an inferior class of men to those in mercantile houses or connected with great joint-stock concerns. But while this is so, it is undoubtedly true that, from reasonable motives of economy of management, the Post Office is obliged to intrust duties in certain localities to less efficient persons, simply because it has not enough employment to give them to occupy their whole time. Every extension of their duties, however, as in the case of the savings' bank scheme, and as it must be in the case of a combination of the telegraph and Post Office, tends to increase the work in these localities; and increasing the work necessarily implies more payment, and more payment means a greater choice of intelligent and efficient persons to do the amount of work required, whether that work be in connection with the older or the newer duties of the Post Office. Now, it is almost universally known that the principal and primary work in the Post Office in most of our towns, whether large or small, or that work which engages the whole working staff, is accomplished during the earlier part of the day in *receiving mails*, and again in the evening in *despatching mails*; such arrangements, inevitable in our postal system, leave available a most valuable interval of time, during which any extra service which it may be considered desirable to associate with postal work may be performed. Fortunately, it seems to us, it happens that this comparatively unoccupied period is just that when telegraphic communications most press. The public know, that if they should defer sending their messages till *after* the ordinary commercial business hours, they would, in nineteen cases out of twenty, be equally well served by the post. Thus the arrangements of the one service may be admirably made to fit into those of the other; and in this way it is quite easy to show

that additional employment already given, or which may be given, far from operating prejudicially on the principal interests of the Post Office, has reacted, and it is fair to suppose will, if judiciously regulated, continue to react, favourably on all.

It seems that the Post Office authorities have, in deference to oft-repeated representations made to Government, instituted a close and painstaking inquiry into the entire question of telegraphic communications; into the need of reform, the means of obtaining it, the working of the Continental systems of telegraphy, and as to the practicability and expediency of the Government undertaking the service in this country. The subject would seem to have occupied the attention of the late Government in a prominent manner; Lord Stanley of Alderley, the late Postmaster-General—one of the most enterprising of the many noblemen who have held that post, and of whom it is but the barest justice to say that he seems to have lent all his energies to bring about the brilliant measures of Mr. Gladstone, now so prominent and useful a part of the Post Office operations—directed that the inquiry should be proceeded with; and the result seems to be that the *practicability* of instituting such a system here as has been found to work with advantage in other countries has been placed beyond a doubt; and not only so, but the Post Office authorities, exhibiting a spirit in striking contrast to their predecessors in past years, and to that pervading many Government departments even more recently, have declared themselves willing to undertake additional service for the public, should the executive direct that this service must be performed on the responsibility and with the safeguards of the State. A description of so many of the features of the plan proposed by the Post Office as have been allowed to transpire will bring this article to a conclusion.

In brief, the English scheme is believed to be based in most of its principal features on the plan already described to the reader as in full and most satisfactory working in Belgium. Like the Belgian and Swiss systems, it will offer a combination of telegraphic and postal facilities of an unique and most valuable

kind. At the same time, and whilst there is much in common between the two systems just mentioned and the one proposed, there are in the latter other features of detail incident on the nature and peculiarities of our own country; and there are increased facilities, rendered available, and perhaps for the first time possible, by the superior organization of our own Post Office. Of course, the establishment of such a plan means much more in this country than it would mean elsewhere; it means the *reconstruction* of what is even now a gigantic and over-weighted system; the tearing up, as it were, of old landmarks, and the construction of new ones; and, whereas in other countries there were no obstacles of the kind, with us, interests of all sorts, whose name is legion, will require to be consulted. If, however, the Government will undertake the task, herculean as it seems, there can be no doubt it will soon be accomplished; and the public, knowing well how desirable a change is, will be patient until it is fairly realized, and grateful enough to find the transformation brought about.

The existing companies are believed to be not at all unwilling to entertain proposals towards this object, and they will, we imagine, offer no obstacles which cannot be surmounted by a fair and frank arbitrament concerning vested rights. It is clear, indeed, that, so far as some of the companies are concerned, there are many reasons why they should zealously aid the project. A separate system of telegraphic lines for railway purposes, and an abandonment of commercial business on the part of those railway companies which now conduct a trifling and intermittent amount of this business ought by all means to be insisted upon; and this reform, desirable to railway managers and the commercial world alike, will present no insuperable obstacle, though the *variety* of the arrangements under which the different railway companies now transact telegraphic operations may increase the difficulties of a settlement. It would be easy, we should imagine, for the railway companies to assist the Government very materially by taking over for their exclusive use, either to rent or purchase, whichever may be decided upon,

much of the surplus wire running along their respective systems, when, *mutatis mutandis*, existing wires have been re-arranged and redistributed on what we may call postal principles. And the same may be said of instruments. It is greatly to be desired that, under the proposed system, the automatic, or self-recording instrument should be largely used; and if so—for we have no information on this point—the needle instrument, than which none is better adapted for the exigencies of railway service, will be largely available for railway use. But these considerations may well be left to a further stage in the development of the great and promising scheme, which, we feel assured, they can neither hinder nor delay.

Meanwhile, the difficulties which may beset the introduction of this scheme, like the difficulties which have beset every measure of reform worth having, must greatly enhance the value of the changes in the estimation of the public; and the improvements which will result will in like manner be cherished in proportion to the amount of the difficulties which have been surmounted in their attainment. Among these changes and improvements, which may, we believe, be looked for, and which will follow as the result of this important measure, there will be—

*Firstly, a large extension of the field of telegraphic operations.* The contemplated reform will bring the telegraphic system into direct contact with all the great centres of population, and will, in the first instance, and according to our information, include every *post town* in the United Kingdom, and every other town having a population of 2,000 persons and upwards. Besides this, we shall have a gradual absorption of other places, not included in the primary arrangements, till every money-order office and post-office savings' bank in the kingdom is connected in a net-work of telegraphic lines. Further, the arrangements under this head will likewise include the establishment of "deposit offices" on the Belgian plan, at every post office which is not a telegraphic office proper, at which offices messages can be deposited and paid for, and from which offices

telegrams may be sent to the nearest telegraphic offices, at the option of the sender, either by express, or in the ordinary course of post.

*Secondly, a large extension of facilities in the principal towns of the country already supplied with the telegraph.* In London, for example, it is contemplated to form *central* telegraphic offices in each of the ten postal districts, and to open subordinate offices at each receiving-house in those districts. With regard to such towns as Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dublin, Leeds, Bristol, &c., the same general arrangements will be made to serve the important districts and numerous outlying suburbs of these towns, by making the principal sorting offices and receiving-houses in these districts into offices for the receipt and transmission of telegrams. Over and above all this, however, the plan will permit the pillar letter-boxes in our towns to be used for the deposit of messages; and arrangements will be made to secure the transmission of these messages as soon as they have been collected and received at the head office of the district in which the pillar letter-boxes are situated. In connection with these arrangements, it is further contemplated to require payment for messages to be made *in stamps*, or the messages to be written on *stamped paper*, as in Belgium; and in this way the sender will enjoy telegraphic facilities to the utmost at a mere modicum of trouble to himself.

*Thirdly*, the plan will not only extend the field of telegraphic operations, but it is designed to *extend the hours during which these operations may be carried on*. In many cases, five, six, and eight hours will be gained to the public in those towns already supplied with facilities; and these superior facilities will be furnished for the first time to 18 per cent. of all the towns in the United Kingdom with a population of 2,000 persons and upwards. Connected with saving of time, we may note that arrangements will be made, on the Belgian and Swiss plan, for the registration and *redirection* of telegrams, and for the delivery of copies of the same telegram, at a cheap rate, to any number of persons residing in the same locality.

*Fourthly*, facilities will be given for the transmission of money-orders by telegraph; and

*Fifthly*, and most important of all, the scheme is confidently asserted to include the establishment of a low and uniform tariff for messages, irrespective of distance. That tariff will, we understand, not exceed one shilling for a message of twenty words; and in these twenty words the names and addresses of the senders and receivers of messages will not be counted as at present. The charge of one shilling will include free delivery by special messenger at any place within the post-office delivery of the terminal office when that office is a "post town," or within the radius of a mile in the case of any other telegraphic office. In the event of the addressee living beyond these bounds, messages will be sent, either by special messenger at a charge of sixpence per double mile, or by first post, free of any other than the original charge.

Connected with the subject of the tariff for messages, it may here be remarked that a shilling is named as the *maximum* tariff for an ordinary message; how much lower it will be possible to go, time and experience can alone demonstrate. As a proper precautionary measure, a shilling tariff has been adopted in the first instance; and no doubt is entertained by those best able to judge of this reduced and uniform rate amply remunerating the State. It will clearly be the first duty of the Government so to arrange the scheme, that from the commencement there shall be no possibility of loss; but it is no slight consideration to remember that further reductions may at any time be expected,—and may be made earlier than the most sanguine amongst us now anticipate,—when in the course of years the revenue accruing from the growth of telegraphic communication shall have repaid the original outlay. Such a consideration as this is a most important element in the question of Government undertaking a business of this description; and wrapped up in this consideration is the token and earnest of complete success. That success cannot mean the enriching of a certain number of share or bondholders. The accommodation

which such a system will afford must be universally felt; and the financial success to which it may attain must be universally felt also. A merchant will under this scheme not only have increased service rendered at a lower cost to himself, but at the same time, the profits which his custom will assist in making must ultimately find their way back to him either in the shape of a reduced charge, or by easing him as a taxpayer, of some other burden. But this is not by any means all that is involved in a successful State telegraphic service. Like the Post Office operations, an efficient service will not merely bring a revenue of its own to swell the amount on the credit side of the State account, but it must, by still further opening out the resources of our trade and commerce, largely operate in the production of the general revenue, and to that extent must ease the country of its taxation.

Such, then, are some of the principal details of this most useful and promising scheme for combining postal and telegraphic operations in this country; and such are a few—and we must add, a *small* part—of the considerations which make this scheme one of weighty import, and one which the legislature cannot neglect. Opportunities must, as a matter of course, be given for the freest discussion as to its merits and demerits; and nothing can be of more advantage to the scheme than that it should undergo the criticism to which in this country and in the present day all such proposals are uniformly subjected. It is to be hoped that this opportunity will be quickly afforded; that when at length the engrossing subject of Parliamentary Reform is disposed of, this and other important public measures will at once come to the front; and as nothing can in this case be gained by delaying the consideration of it, but on the other hand much may be lost, let the country—the parliament, press, and people—say whether such a scheme is wanted; and if so, whether this plan will meet the case. It is impossible, we imagine, that any doubt should now be felt on the first head; it is very unlikely that any fear will then exist on the second.



Finally, it seems to us that there cannot be two opinions as

to the benefits which would accrue to the country from the telegraphic system being under one management; there can scarcely be two opinions that the same or a similar management which suffices for, and admittedly most ably controls, the postal communications of the country might also suffice to control the telegraphic communications of the country, which are, indeed, nothing but quickened correspondence. That such a system, under the responsible Government of the day, liable to the scrutiny of a vigilant Parliament, at all times and notoriously subject to public opinion, would be preferable to one controlled by the discretion of an independent board of commercial men—not to speak of several boards acting antagonistically, it may be, to each other, which public opinion cannot effectually grapple with, and whose main object is professedly to raise a dividend for a proprietary—seems to us such a thing of course as to be almost beyond argument. The great question as to whether the Government will undertake this additional business, and the trouble, risk, and responsibility connected with it, is the only one which admits of any doubt, and which we need consider here. The answer to the question, if it does not rest altogether with the public, may be greatly influenced by the amount of public pressure which it is possible to bring to bear upon the Executive. It is well known that the late Government, or at any rate some of its principal authorities on such points, were more or less committed to the principle; the leading commercial men in the country, represented by the principal and the Associated Chambers of Commerce in the three kingdoms, have unanimously advocated and supported it on several occasions; some of the existing companies, whose annual balance-sheets have, from a variety of causes, scarcely ever shown a healthy appearance, would welcome it; and the rest, seeking, of course, a full and equitable adjustment in respect to their rights and stock, are by no means averse to it. The Post Office, moreover, not unwilling, as it may have been in former years, to throw open its gigantic and truly ubiquitous machinery of operations, and proposing, as we have shown, to supplement the system by all



the vast resources now within its power, has decided not only that the scheme may be worked with profit to the State and with unexampled facilities to the public, but the authorities have shown, if our information be correct, a praiseworthy readiness to undertake this additional business if it be considered necessary that they should do so. And if anything were needed to show the promise which the whole scheme bears on the face of it, we have only to point to the recent adaptation of savings' bank business to post office operations, and the remarkable success which has followed, in every sense of the word, this beneficent piece of legislation. It is no small matter to find that, stimulated no doubt by this success, the same hands which laid the foundation of the one adaptation are, or have been, diligently at work at this further and still more important adaptation; and it is clear that any scheme which goes to the country weighted with the approval of authorities, who require to look at any matter in all its bearings, and who are cautious almost to a proverb, goes with an authority, *per se*, which the country cannot afford to lightly disregard. May our legislators remember—*Bis dat, qui cito dat!*

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