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THE ALL-BRITISH TRANS-PACIFIC CABLE.

Now that a Commission has been appointed, not to consider the advisability of a cable across the Pacific, but to determine the best means of carrying out the project, a long-delayed scheme is evidently at last on the point of realisation. In these days, when no mercantile business can be conducted on a large scale without a cheap and efficient means of telegraphic communication, it seems almost incredible that two large English-speaking communities, such as Canada and Australasia, separated by only 90° of longitude, should still be obliged to send their messages round the other 270° through various foreign nationalities, instead of being in direct communication by a British cable across the Pacific. A glance at the history of the project explains why its realisation has been so long deferred.

The originator of the scheme for the first Atlantic cable was also the first to propose a trans-Pacific cable. Mr F. N. Gisborne, Superintendent of the Telegraphs of Canada, who died in 1892, projected in the early "seventies" a cable to Japan *via* Honolulu and the Bonin Islands. This line was chosen as being shorter than the line diagonally across the Pacific to Australia. In 1874 the *Tuscarora* of the United States Navy surveyed the route. The bottom was found to be uniform and not too deep, and the late Cyrus W. Field, whose name is so prominently connected with the first Atlantic cable, having obtained a landing concession from the Government of the Sandwich Islands, paid a visit to England in 1879 with a

view to the realisation of the project.

About this time Mr Sandford Fleming, C.M.G., who has worked harder than any one in connection with the scheme, and may at last hope to see it carried out, was busy, as Engineer-in-Chief, constructing the Canadian-Pacific Railway. Seeing that this line, in conjunction with a Pacific cable, would form a valuable alternative telegraphic route to Asia, he requested Mr Gisborne to report on the matter. Mr Gisborne recommended a line to Japan *via* the Aleutian Islands, which he estimated would cost £800,000 for the two sections of 1650 miles each. No private company, however, came forward with the capital to lay either this or the United States cable *via* Honolulu and Bonin, and the scheme fell through.

Two or three years later, the frequent interruption of telegraphic communication with the East by the existing lines once more brought the Pacific cable project to the front. During the bombardment of Alexandria in 1882 the land-lines connecting the Mediterranean cables with the Red Sea were cut, and from other causes between the years 1872 and 1883 there were no less than 540 days, or eighteen months, during which some portion of the cable route to Australia was unavailable for service. Canada accordingly renewed her efforts to obtain a cable along the alternative route, and in 1884 petitioned the Home Government to send a ship to make the necessary survey. On being told that the Admiralty had no ship to spare for the purpose, a Canadian vessel