

A CANADIAN CABLE SERVICE.



MERELY sentimental reasons are not sufficient, I know, for advocating a radical alteration in the system of supplying cable news to the daily press of Canada. The system is dear to the hearts of the business department. It is cheap. On occasions it is efficient. But its chief merit is its cheapness. Before you approach the awful majesty of the Publisher with a proposition to increase expenses, you must be prepared to show practical benefits to follow, or you simply court

annihilation. To meet this emergency I am prepared to state, and in a measure prove, that a good cable service means increased circulation to the Canadian daily. Cable news, next to local news, is the best news a daily can print. For papers which have a large outside circulation, like the press of our large cities, it is equal to, or superior to, local news in value. The editor who wants to sell the paper will put into it what people want. And in Canada they read cable news. I know of a large daily which lost a dozen subscribers in one place because its cable service was inferior to that of the rival daily. The editor admits to-day that, from this incident and from others, he believes the publication of good cable news pays.

Of course, publishers are not in the newspaper business solely for the good of their health. They want a return on the investment. But I believe publishers are also fully alive to the value of the newspaper as an educative, civilizing force; they know that much of their enterprise redounds to the public good; that many expenditures only return indirectly, and sometimes very remotely, to the pocket. An appeal, therefore, may fairly be made to their regard for the public interest in this matter. Cable news is high-class news. Europe is still the centre of political, economic and constitutional movements. Great Britain is distinctly first in all that pertains to the civilization of our time. We ought to be well posted daily upon what passes there. To ignore, or to skeletonize, or, worse still, to misrepresent the records of certain events there, is a failure to recognize the value of the best news of the day.

But this question is often put: why do you not draw up your scheme and tell us how much it will cost? The answer is pat: because the cost depends entirely upon how many of, and to what extent, the Canadian dailies will co-operate. No service is possible unless the patronage of all the large dailies, with a "pony" service for most of the smaller ones, is assured. Another objection: if we all get the same news, where are our opportunities for exclusive items? That is an objection, and not a light one. But the establishment of a service common to all does not preclude the enterprise of the individual publisher who wants specials in addition. Rather will his chances for getting exclusive cable news be facilitated.

But—one can hear the business department say—you are talking of an expensive class of news, which costs 10 cents a word: such a rate absolutely forbids the ordering of specials as if they came over the wires at 20 cents or 25 cents per hundred words. Well, the tendency of cable rates is down, not up. Canada is on the point of voting a heavy subsidy to a Pacific cable. Has it ever occurred to you that Governments, in voting away the national money, might be forced to put in a stipulation

that the cable business intended for the nation—that is, the news of the day—should pass under the ocean at an exceptionally favorable rate? The Pacific cable, you say, will not give us a lever to work better Atlantic rates. Yes, it will. The Commercial Cable Co.'s line, to cite one case, across the Atlantic will reap a handsome advantage from the extension of a cable to Australia. It ought to be possible to effect a good working arrangement on Atlantic rates for newspapers out of the Pacific cable agreement.

At present the interest of Canadian readers in cable news is measured by the interest of United States readers in that news. Yet the two countries are wide apart in this respect. A political revolution in Kentucky, or a riot in Kalamazoo may be of greater importance to New York or Chicago readers than the whole column of cable news; and properly so. The republic is a vast community by itself with interests entirely and peculiarly its own. Canadian papers, rightly, put into a dozen lines what the great dailies of the States devote a page to. But, now, we are simply the tail of the American dog. When he barks angrily at the dismal prospects of bimetallism, the tail (that's us) trembles with rage; when he gambols joyously over the log-book of the Mayflower, the tail (that's us again) wags enthusiastically; when effete monarchy is sniffed at, the tail is responsively upright with scorn. It is one of the funniest spectacles now afforded to the reflective person, who listens to the defiant assertions of the daily press that Britons never, no never, will be slaves while they obediently circulate, in the news of Europe, exactly what the prejudices, exigencies, and interests of the United States press agencies say shall be circulated.

When the question was brought before the Canadian Press Association in 1896, Mr. J. S. Willison, editor of *The Globe*, made a moderate defence of the service then in existence, and pointed out, what was true, that no practicable scheme had yet been presented to replace it. Since then, the service has not improved; in fact, it has shrunk from the double service then supplied by the United Press and Associated Press agencies to the despatches of the latter only. I doubt if Mr. Willison would to-day be in a position to advance even the temperate defence then made. Before complaining of the apathy of the daily press in arranging a Canadian cable service, it is proper to acknowledge the enterprise of two publishers. Mr. Hugh Graham, of *The Montreal Star*, maintains, no doubt at considerable cost, a London correspondent who cables frequently and sometimes at length. Mr. John Ross Robertson, of *The Toronto Telegram*, also has a correspondent in London. The cabling of Kipling's poem the other day was a genuine piece of enterprise, and showed an exact appreciation of the demands of the Canadian reader.

But it is a complete and not a partial service for the Canadian public that is wanted. We should have an absolutely impartial and accurate service; it ought to measure the news of the day by the Canadian, not the British, standard; it would necessarily be quite distinct from the views which govern the present United States service. And until we have this, surely it is no exaggeration to say that we are neglecting a department of news which, from its direct relation to our political system, our commercial interests and the efficiency of the press as the recorder of current events, ought to claim the first attention.

A. H. U. COLQUHOUR.