

2nd Prize
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Improved communications as a factor of
Imperial History.

The British Empire is often contrasted with Empires of former times. The constitution of our Empire and our ideas of freedom as shown by this constitution are contrasted with those of empires that have long since passed away, but one of the chief differences that exists between these empires and the British Empire is frequently overlooked. The Roman Empire of the Caesars, Alexander's Greek Empire and Napoleon Buonaparte's French Empire were all primarily land empires, for an infantry soldier of Caesar's, Alexander's or Napoleon's army could march from one part of the empire to another, unimpeded by sea-crossings. Julius Caesar had no need of a navy, roads and bridges were all he required in the way of communications to keep his empire together. How different is the case of our own empire! Comprising as it does thirteen million square miles, that is about one quarter of the total land surface of the globe, and supporting a population of four thousand million people, that is over a quarter of the total population of the world, divided by such great oceans as the Atlantic and the Pacific, the problem of central control and government of these scattered territories is indeed difficult. Thus the British Empire is decidedly a sea-empire,

linked together not by Caesar's roads but by the British Navy.

Ever since the days of Queen Elizabeth when Drake and his fellow seamen singed the King of Spain's beard and with the help of a furious storm annihilated the Great Armada, England has, with the exception of a ~~few~~ few brief periods, maintained her supremacy on the sea. Although many factors have helped to build our Empire as we see it to-day, sea-power has been, is, and in all probability will be for many years to come, the factor on which the unity and stability of the Empire depends. The earliest foundations of the British Empire were laid by the seamen of the sixteenth century. How the English navy came to hold such an important position is worth a few moments thought. When the genius of our Scandinavian forefathers ~~was~~ suddenly sprang into life again as the result of the Reformation, and when this seafaring genius after defeating the Armada, was fostered by astronomical discoveries, the more general use of maps and the invention of the mariner's compass, then did English sea-power begin to exert that predominance which it has since maintained. In the eighteenth century with many colonies already in existence numerous suggestions were made for the formation of an Oceanic Empire and for colonial representation in the

English Parliament. Burke's criticism of this was "Opposuit Natura. I cannot remove the eternal barriers of creation." These words were spoken in the year 1769 and it was in the very same year that James Watt took out the patent for his first steam engine. If England had been in closer and quicker touch with her American colonies in the eighteenth century, our differences with the colonists would probably have been smoothed over and the breaking away of the United States avoided. As it was in those days space and time seemed quite prohibitive to closer union between England and the daughter states. During the nineteenth century when steam power was applied to ships and telegraphic cables were constructed there did the idea of Empire loom large in the statesman's eye. In the days of Burke the time taken to cross the Atlantic by the fastest ships was six weeks, whilst the voyage to the Cape took three months and six months were required to make the eastern shores of Australia. A modern liner takes as long to cross the Atlantic as was spent in travelling from London to Edinburgh in those days. The significance of this slow transport is clearly seen in the case of the American colonies. It would take an election writ six weeks to reach Virginia, the prospective M.P. would then have to

secure his election and reach the Imperial Parliament at Westminster — about four months after the writ was issued. Again in our fight with the colonists during the War of Independence, the English forces were seriously handicapped owing firstly to the lack of supplies, caused by the temporary loss of the control of the sea, and secondly owing to the stupidity and procrastination of the authorities which made the bad communications worse. To-day all this is changed. The supreme test of our capabilities on the high seas was made during the years 1914-1919, and the results show that whatever else may fail the British Navy can still be relied upon to hold its own and act as the arteries of that great body the British Empire, ~~young~~ joining its various members to the heart at London.

The primary idea behind the word communication is that of linking up two or more places. Before actually dealing with the ways in which improved communications have linked up our Empire, a word should be said concerning the scientists and inventors who have made these improved communications possible. Although statesmen often take the premier places in Imperial History, the services of scientists have

had far more to do with the history and development, both political and economic, of the Empire, than those of the far-famed politician. Here is another case where the British Empire can be ~~compared~~^{contrasted} with the Roman Empire. The Romans failed to invent any mechanical means of locomotion. In the case of an Empire spread over a continuous land surface the development of communications was, though very important not of the same vital importance as in the case of the scattered British Empire. Besides determining the course of political thought and event within the Empire, science has made possible its continuity as a single international power. Nothing has superannuated Burke's arguments more than Watt's steam-engine, and developments in this and the internal combustion engine takes place yearly. Moreover the infant sciences of wireless telegraphy and telephony, and aviation will no doubt tend to link up the lone lands and oppose the disintegration of the empire. Thus the scientist for all his quips and cranks, saucer spectacles and numerous theories has been and is of inestimable service to the British Empire.

Although much has been done to improve inter-colonial communications much more might have been done by co-operative action. Take for

example the subject of mail contracts. There has been little idea of making these serve the common interests of the whole of the British Empire as far as possible. Thus only one route for a mail from England to Australia and New Zealand was thought practicable, namely the route via France, Brindisi and Suez. The faults of this stilted point of view are flagrant. It is not an all-British route and is certainly not the safest route from the military point of view. The depth of the Suez Canal is insufficient to allow very large vessels to pass. Lastly by touching only one British possession, Aden, the route serves least of all to develop intercourse among the various parts of the Empire. It is useless to condemn anything without providing a substitute. Substitutes for the above route are not lacking. Other equally good routes are via Western Canada and the Pacific, via South Africa or via Halifax, Bermuda, Jamaica, Panama and Tahiti. The distance from England to Aden, at the Caribbean end of the Panama Canal, via Jamaica is only four hundred miles less than via Halifax in Eastern Canada and Bermuda. The Brindisi-Suez route to New Zealand is not even the shortest route, for it is five hundred and sixty miles longer than the Atlantic, Panama and Pacific route to Auckland. Although the former route to Australia may

be the shortest route in point of distance, in point of time as fast transit could be obtained by one of the aforementioned routes owing to the fact that larger vessels can pass through the Panama canal, than can through the Suez canal, and hence higher speeds could be obtained. There is now a monthly trans-Pacific service via San Francisco which carries mails from England to Sydney in thirty days, that is the time taken by the Suez route. Truly can it be said that the sea communications to Australasia need speeding up. From the vessels which are being launched at the present time, it can safely be said that future vessels will be of great length and depth. It is a mechanical impossibility to drive small vessels at more than eighteen knots unless a large passenger revenue comes in or government subsidies are increased. To obtain high speed at a reasonable cost, vessels of great length and draught must be used. The greater draught will of course necessitate the harbours and waterways en route being deepened. A maximum depth of thirty eight feet will be required. At the present time Southampton is the only British harbour fit for large vessels of that size. London and Liverpool would have to be developed, and schemes are already in progress with this end in view.

Canada leads the way in this respect, Halifax and Quebec being already deep enough, whilst Montreal is nearly finished. Other harbours which require deepening are Cape Town, Durban, Adelaide, Melbourne, Wellington and Auckland. All these schemes could be carried out before the new services are arranged. Before passing to cable and telegraphic communication a few words must be said about the Panama Canal.

The Panama Canal was informally opened on August 15th, 1914. Just over a thousand vessels passed through the canal in the year 1914-15, whilst in 1923 nearly four thousand vessels passed through it, and of these just over one thousand were British ships. Its importance to the British Empire is thus obvious from the statistical point of view. The far-reaching effects of this canal have already been felt throughout the empire, whilst its future effects are incalculable. Firstly, British Columbia and Western Canada will be able to send most of their produce via Vancouver and Panama to the Eastern American coast and to England and Europe. This quicker and cheaper transport should mean a bigger value for the wheat, fruit and timber of the Pacific province, and Vancouver will probably become one of the largest shipping centres in the world. Secondly, the

Canal affects the West Indies which, to quote the American phrase, have formerly lain in a "dead end". This isolation is now swept away and instead of being tucked away in an insignificant corner of the world, they are now on the main sea-routes between east and west. Moreover they are brought some two thousand five hundred miles nearer Australia and New Zealand, and thus acquire those closer trade relations with Australasia, ^{which} as they did with Canada by a system of reciprocal tariffs. In fact the British Empire now occupies a very important strategic position in the Caribbean Sea. Kingston, in Jamaica lies alongside the direct sea-route from New York and Eastern Canada through the windward passage between Cuba and Haiti to the Caribbean entrance of the canal. The Virgin Islands, Barbados and Trinidad command the other routes from Colon, to Liverpool, Southampton and the Old World. Also the stupendous oil reservoirs of Trinidad will acquire more and more value as oil power comes to the ~~fore~~ fore in place of coal, and tourists visiting Panama will bring new wealth to the "flower garden of the New World". Undoubtedly one of the most important results for the British Empire is the change in the comparative distance

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between London and Australia, and New York and Australia. To-day New York not Liverpool, lies nearer Yokohama, Sydney and Melbourne. Thus Sydney which was formerly one thousand five hundred miles nearer Liverpool (via Suez) than New York (via Cape of Good Hope) now becomes almost two thousand five hundred nearer New York (via Panama) than Liverpool (via Suez.) And as the eastern sea-board of Canada also shows this proximity to Australasian ports, the centre of gravity of the English speaking races is thus changing, and will in all probability rest in the New World during the next century or so, and looking further still the centre of government of our Empire may move from England to the New World. Such are the realities and possibilities which the Panama Canal has presented!

Turning now to the question of telegraphic intercourse, it is a very noticeable fact that although cable communication is very speedy, it is still by no means cheap enough to gain universal support, whilst the British Empire still owns comparatively few lines considering its size. Nevertheless cable communication forms an effective supplement to the slower though broader interchange of thought and sentiment expressed in postal correspondence, and it strengthens the feeling of amity and brotherhood ~~not~~ in a manner not possible by correspondence

when two months or more are required for a reply to a letter. The question arises "Will wireless supersede cable telegraphy?" like aeroplanes and airships it will no doubt be harnessed to imperial service. It will serve to link up lonely islets and atolls in the Pacific and elsewhere with the outside world. As yet the full significance of wireless is but imperfectly understood and submarine cables will be a vital necessity for many years to come. The great drawback to cable communication is that it is still too much of a luxury. To be of any real use to the Empire messages of sixpence per word should be aimed at. Secondly we must obtain control of more cables. ~~but~~ The all-British cable between England and Australia has long been desired. In August 1914 we had no control or ownership of a single trans-Atlantic cable. For economic and imperial reasons we should obtain control over one trans-Atlantic cable, one from Nova Scotia to Vancouver Island, so that these two together with the British trans-Pacific line would establish an all-British line round the world. Such cables would ensure better Press service throughout the empire and indeed throughout the whole world.

Improved communications besides linking up the Empire, have helped the internal development of the colonies themselves. The Dominion

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of Canada was first made possible by the Trans-continental line which was completed in 1885. But for this railway east and west would have drifted apart, for the immense prairies and rugged Rockies were more formidable obstacles than the two thousand seven hundred miles separating England from Canada. British Columbia made the building of this railway a condition of her entry into the Dominion. There are now three transcontinental lines, whose main trend is east and west, that is at right angles to the physical lines of the continent. Two main devices made the Canadian nation, the railway system, and Free Trade east and west with Protection against the south. Winnipeg, one hundred miles from the southern border, is the heart of the railway system. This proximity is a strategic danger and for this and other reasons a new line to Port Nelson (on Hudson Bay) is being made.

Although the Hudson Straits are only free from ice from about April 10th to November 20th some of the wheat could leave this way and thus lessen the "grain blockade" further south. The Georgian Bay-Montreal canal would, if made, allow prairie corn to reach England wholly by water. As it is, it is diverted to Chicago and other American centres and carried from thence by rail to New York, Boston and other ports.

Again the Australian Commonwealth was made possible owing to railways. Western Australia after being much

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inconvenienced owing to the lack of land communication with Melbourne, is now joined by a line which circles Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. Also a line is projected from Melbourne north over the desert to Darwin on the north coast. This, if completed, should go a long way towards opening up the "silent lands" of that great continent.

There would have been no South African Union without railways. There were only about four hundred miles of railway in 1876 in all Africa, now there are thirty thousand miles of fully constructed railways whilst many more are projected. From all places on the coast feelers are being stretched out, those on the west joining with those on the east, thus forming a mighty web of railways. The Cape to Cairo line is still incomplete but when just over five hundred miles of jungle have been passed, this will be completed.

In India Lord Bryce says that railways have had a wonderful social and political influence, bringing its varied races and creeds into closer touch and gradually breaking down the demarcations of caste, both linguistic, racial and religious, which have so long opposed peace and central union.

Before concluding the "lone lands" must be mentioned. Possessing as we do such vast territories as Nigeria, Rhodesia, the Northern Territory of Australia and Uganda which are still to a large extent un

undeveloped, railway-building will be one of the imperative needs of the future, and aeroplanes and airships should be useful in spanning these vast spaces where meteorological conditions are favourable.

Thus we see that sea-power created the British Empire, and that it is only by maintaining maintaining sea-power and the communications based upon it, that an Oceanic Commonwealth like the British Empire can continue to exist. No empire has benefited ~~so~~ more by inventions and discoveries, which have led to improved communications than the British Empire. Steamships, railways, electricity and countless other factors have helped to build an empire, whose equal the world has never seen before. Nor is this all, for to quote Sir Charles Lucas (in his book "The British Empire") "what seems to be but a dream now will, if we reason from the past to the future and bear in mind that under the rule of science the world moves at a constantly accelerated pace, become a waking reality."

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Motto:— "United we stand, divided we fall."