

EMPIRE AIRSHIP MISSION'S RETURN

THE Airship Mission has just returned to England after touring Africa, Australia, New Zealand and India. It consisted of Group-Capt. P. F. M. Fellowes (Director of Airship Development), Mr. M. A. Giblett (Superintendent, Airships Meteorological Division), and Flt.-Lieut. S. Nixon, of the Royal Airship Works. It is expected that the first demonstration flights to the Dominions of the new British airships will be made at the end of 1929 or early in 1930.

The results of this Mission, we learn, are very satisfactory, for not only has considerable spade work in connection with the proposed Empire Airship Routes been accomplished, but throughout the Dominions the Mission found great interest displayed in the proposals, especially among business and commercial concerns. The possibilities of the airship, in providing quicker communication with the Mother Country, were in nearly every case fully appreciated.

At every centre visited, also, the Mission was well received, and given every possible assistance in its work. The Mission has placed before each Dominion a full statement regarding the main requirements for the operation of the routes.

A choice of sites for airship bases has been drawn up in India and Ceylon, Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, and South Africa, while certain intermediate bases have been considered in the Cocos Islands and on the east and west coasts of Africa.

As a result of a survey of these bases, a provisional skeleton of the chief commercial airship routes has been prepared. These routes are much the same as those put forward at the Imperial Conference in 1926, but it is pointed out that the actual programme for the future necessarily depends upon the results of the exhaustive series of trials which will have first to be carried out at home with the new airships.

These routes may briefly be outlined as follows—England to Canada (Ottawa) or Newfoundland; England to Cape Town, either via Cairo, Aden and east coast of Africa, or via the west coast of Africa; England to India and Ceylon via Cairo, and Karachi; and England to Australia and New Zealand, by way of India and Cocos Is. or by way of Africa.

The first demonstration services, which will follow the conclusion of the home trials, will, it is planned, be made across the Atlantic to Canada, and to South Africa—although trial flights along the India route may be possible—owing to the fact that a base in each Dominion is available. In this way, provided these first flights are successful, it will be possible to obtain some valuable and practical experience in the operation of airships under sub-arctic, temperate, sub-tropical, and tropical conditions.

Subsequently, these services having proved successful, longer and more ambitious services will be undertaken—to Australia and New Zealand. While the obvious commercial route to the Antipodes would be via India, Ceylon, and Cocos Is., it is expected that the first flights will be via Cape Town. The reason for this is because it would not be possible to fly

along this route without intermediate bases for re-fuelling, and also on account of adverse winds from Ceylon. On the other hand, the other route to Australia would be better, with bases at Cairo and Cape Town, and with a favourable wind available. On the homeward journey, however, the India route becomes a more reasonable proposition, the adverse winds over the Ceylon section then being favourable.

In any case, the first demonstration flights must be arranged to follow the routes which entail the least possible expenditure on ground bases, etc., after which, should sufficient support be forthcoming from business concerns in the Dominions, the whole question of airship routes will be further developed.

As we have previously stated, considerable spade work has been done by the Mission. Existing meteorological information required over the proposed routes has been added to wherever possible, and the Dominion authorities have been acquainted, in detail and by personal discussion, with the essential weather and wireless services required before airships can operate on long distance routes.

In South Africa, four possible bases were surveyed near Cape Town and four others near Durban, but the final selection has yet to be made by the South African Government—the Ministry of Transport, it may be added, is in charge of this matter. Intermediate bases were also surveyed on the west coast at Bathurst, Sierra Leone, and St. Helena, and on the East Coast at Mombasa, Zanzibar, and Dar-es-Salaam.

India is already engaged on a programme of expansion as regards commercial aviation, much having already been done especially as regards meteorological organisation for the England-India route, so it may be taken that the various requirements in connection with Empire airships will readily be met. In Ceylon, the Mission had a gratifying reception, and suitable sites for bases were selected as well as arrangements made for the provision of meteorological information.

Good work was also accomplished in Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand. Possible sites were surveyed at Perth, Fremantle, Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney; at Burnie, Devonport, Hobart and Launceston in Tasmania; at Auckland, Christchurch, and Wellington, in New Zealand.

At the request of Mr. Bruce, the Mission supplied special information regarding Empire Airships to many of the chambers of commerce and business concerns in Australia—and in fact, were kept so busy meeting the demands for information that the stay in Australia was extended considerably over the time originally planned.

In New Zealand, also, interest was very keen, so much so that the Premier convened a joint session of the Houses of Parliament at which Group-Capt. Fellowes gave an address of some length, on the subject, numerous questions on various details being discussed and answered immediately after. Reports were presented to both the Australian and the New Zealand Governments, and each has put in hand the preliminary meteorological organisation.



After 15,800 Miles: Officials of the Dutch Air Force inspecting, at the Armstrong Siddeley Works, the three "Lynx" engines used by Lt. Koppen on his splendid flight from Amsterdam to Batavia and back, in a Fokker monoplane.

