

IMPERIAL AIRSHIP BASES

It will be remembered that a couple of years ago the Director of Civil Aviation, Flight-Lieut. S. Nixon, O.B.E., and other experts, visited India in order to survey possible airship bases. Karachi was selected as the most suitable site for immediate purposes, and in consequence a shed and mooring mast are now in course of erection there. While the mission was in India, possible bases at Bombay, Calcutta, Rangoon, and Colombo were also surveyed. The Indian Air Board, in a recent report to the Government, has regretted that the expense of the Karachi base was not undertaken by India, and has recommended the acquisition of that base as soon as funds are available, has asserted that a mast is essential at Bombay as well, and has urged that the site at Calcutta should be acquired by the Government.

Meantime, the Imperial Conference was very deeply impressed by the programme of air routes laid before it by Sir Samuel Hoare, and the Premiers of Canada and South Africa forthwith assented to his suggestion that the Dominions should each erect an airship mast. These two Dominions also formally requested that missions of experts should be sent to advise them in selecting suitable bases. Australia also intimated that if a mission visited the Commonwealth it would be welcomed and its advice would be appreciated.

A programme for the first of these missions has now been drawn up; though the dates given must be considered as probable and approximate rather than accurate. The mission consists of Group-Captain P. F. M. Fellowes, D.S.O., A.D.C., Director of Airship Development; Flight-Lieut. S. Nixon, O.B.E.; and Mr. M. A. Giblett, M.Sc., Superintendent of Airship Meteorology. This mission is to deal with Africa and Australia.

Flight-Lieut. Nixon has already started on ahead, and is proceeding down the West Coast of Africa. He is in particular visiting and surveying Bathurst in Gambia, and Freetown in Sierra Leone. Expert information about these two ports is certainly desirable, even though it may not be put to immediate use. Not only is it as well to consider whether an airship route to the Union of South Africa would find its best course down the west or the east coast of Africa, but if a service to the West Indies and British Guiana were ever

undertaken the "jumping-off place" would presumably be in either Gambia or Sierra Leone. When he has spent sufficient time in this little-known quarter of the British Empire, Flight-Lieut. Nixon will move on to South Africa, and will engage in preliminary discussions with the Union authorities. In April he will start again up the east coast to Mombassa, and will consider the possibilities of Kenya from the airship point of view. Then he will return once more to the south and should meet Group-Captain Fellowes and Mr. Giblett at Capetown on May 23. The united mission will doubtless find its path smoothed and its work expedited by the preliminary survey of the advance officer, and probably by the first week in June the Union officials will be able to arrive at some definite decision.

On June 10 the mission will sail from Durban and arrive at Perth on June 26. From four to six weeks will be spent in Australia. One can imagine that while there the mission, which by then will be primed with some knowledge of African conditions, will discuss the major point of whether the airship route to Australia shall run via Karachi or via Durban. In the memorandum drawn up by the Air Ministry for the benefit of the Imperial Conference, both these routes were mentioned, and the time for the Indian route to Australia was given as 11 days; that of the African route as 10½. It is known that south of direct line from Durban to Perth there is a steady current of eastward-blowing winds; while to the north of that line there are trade winds blowing in the opposite direction. These winds would be an immense help to airship navigation. On a decision between these routes depends the location of the Australian mooring mast. If one accepts the dictum that it is the business of an airship to reach the nearest and most convenient point of a country, and that distribution throughout that country is the function of the aeroplane, then the selection of the Indian route might imply a terminus at Darwin, while the African route would certainly entail a base at Perth. The mission will return home in August via Colombo and Bombay. Probably another mission will visit Canada in May, but the details have not yet been settled.

F. A. DE V. R.



L.Z. 127 for Atlantic Service ?

It seems likely that the first air service across the South Atlantic will be inaugurated by the new German airship, the L.Z. 127 now being constructed at Friedrichshafen. The proposed route is from Seville to Buenos Ayres and will probably commence next year if the Spanish aerodrome is completed. The ship is well advanced in erection, the frame being up. Work is proceeding slowly, however, as certain improvements are being embodied which have been developed since the last Zeppelin crossed the Atlantic under Dr. Eckener. A new fuel, in the form of a gas, which is at the moment a secret, is being substituted for benzine for the motors. Experiments have proved that this gas does not cause overheating in the motors and is so light that the loading capacity of the ships is correspondingly greatly increased. Certain new navigation instruments too, are to be fitted that are apparently the object of much interest on the technical side. We have already referred in *FLIGHT* to this new ship, giving more detail. The passenger accommodation will be luxurious for the four days' flight, the intention being to achieve the comfort of a liner's cabins.

Aircraft in the Great War to be Filmed ?

THE Air Ministry are considering the creation of a film of great historical significance depicting air battles at high altitudes. Obsolete aircraft that fought in the early days of the war will take part in the reconstruction of those first aerial combats. It will be the aim to reveal realistic impressions of the beauty of aerial tactics. For the creating of this film, special cockpits on the wings of giant 'planes will be made to house observers with the cameras, and from these prominent positions they will be able to get close-up views of the manoeuvres. The control of the aeroplane to reveal man's mastery of the air will be filmed, and it is intended the cinema audience shall be made to gasp, as machines rush straight at them very swiftly, threatening to overwhelm them. Other photographers will be established on the tops of high wooden towers.

Beetles at the Air Ministry !

It is suggested that new ideas for wing folding for aircraft may be gathered from the study of a macratoma beetle found off the West Coast of Africa, which folds its broad, square wings in an ingenious way. Specimens are being sent to the Air Ministry with this object in view, by Mr. Alexander Barns, the explorer, who has just returned from an expedition



["FLIGHT" Photograph

BECOMING "AIR-MINDED": Mrs. Bell, wife of Squadron-Leader J. R. Bell, Assistant Liaison Officer of the Royal Australian Air Force at the Air Ministry, is undergoing a course of flying lessons at the de Havilland School. Mrs. Bell is here seen with her instructor, Capt. R. W. Reeve, before going up for a "lesson."