

About the time of the first Colonial Conference it was the cables to Australia which were continually breaking down, but latterly the cables to the Cape have deprived them of the record for frequency of interruption, and therefore the supplementary scheme referred to by Mr. Hofmeyr is strongly advocated by the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company, the Eastern Telegraph Company, and its offshoot the Eastern and South African Telegraph Company, the latter of which suffers both in purse and reputation owing to the frequency of interruptions to the Cape cables.

The point to which we take most serious objection is that the popular advocates of Mr. Hofmeyr's project hope to advantage their cause by a continuance of the system of inaccuracy in figures and statements advanced, and by so doing to prejudice opinion against the Pacific cable route. For example, it used to be roundly asserted that the depth through which a Pacific cable would have to pass was "estimated at 12,000 fathoms (or fourteen miles) in some places." This assertion was contained in a note from the Postmaster-General of South Australia to his Government, and, coming from such a source, aroused a natural objection on their part to examine any further into the matter, more especially when the same authority further asserts, in the same note, with a courageous confidence worthy of a better cause, that "as the Government are aware, I have given this subject very great and careful consideration—more so, perhaps, than any one else." We are glad to see that this figure (an utterly imaginary one) is now reduced, by others better informed, to "a depth of five miles;" it is not, however, made clear by these recent critics that this latter depth (which really does exist) occurs in an isolated depression which is more than 600 miles away from the proposed Pacific cable route. We may mention here that there are two cables lying in West Indian waters which were laid within sixty miles from a similar depression, more than four miles and a half in depth, and one of them has been working for over twenty-five years without giving any exceptional trouble. An unbiassed examination of the Admiralty charts will prove to any one that along the proposed route of the Pacific cable the general depth to be expected in the deepest sections averages about 2,700 fathoms, and that the greatest depth would in all probability not be more than 3,200 fathoms—a depth, we may say, no greater than that in which a cable has recently been laid between New York and Hayti, and about the same as that met with along the line of the Government-supported cable which has just been laid from Bermuda to Jamaica. The Pacific cannot, therefore, be looked upon as an ocean of impossible depths, nor one where a cable cannot be picked up if necessary; indeed, experience teaches us that a cable has been picked up at the depth mentioned. The route sketched out *vis à vis* the Cape to Australia has, as yet, been but very imperfectly surveyed; it seems, however, to have an average depth similar to that through the Pacific Ocean, and in one place at least along the Cape line there is a depth of nearly 3,200 fathoms. Thus it will be seen that as regards depth of water the supplementary route has absolutely no advantage over the Pacific line.

It is true that a cable between Vancouver and Fanning Island would be longer than any one length suggested for the supplementary route, but the length required would exceed by less than 250 miles that of a cable at present being laid across the Atlantic, and would in reality be about 250 miles less in length than the advocates of the Cape route make it out to be. The following quotation from an Australian paper is another sample of the class of information circulated. Referring to the Vancouver-Fanning Island section, we are told, "This section is practically twice the length of the longest section of the 'Cape' proposal." Now, this is an utterly misleading statement, as the real length of the section spoken of is here increased, for the purpose of condemning it, by some 1,200 miles. As the writer in this case illustrates his article by a map on which the proposed lengths of "the Cape route" are all carefully set down, it seems incredible that he should be so ignorant as he would appear to be regarding the original scheme, which he criticizes adversely. It has also been said that, being a "single line," the Pacific cable has no alternative in case of interruption; but those who, in their anxiety to furnish objections, advance this as an argument seem to forget that, if correct, the same objection also applies to the proposed single line from the Cape, and that, should either of these single lines break down, the already existing cables to Australia would afford more or less useful alternatives to one as much as to the other of these proposed single lines.

We have dealt with some of the more prominent of the objections which are now being revived against a cable through the Pacific. The "enormous depths" of this ocean, it will be seen, are now discounted, and we even find it put forward, with an austere assumption of impartiality, that the great depth of water through which the Cape cable must pass would obviate the serious danger of interruption to which the existing lines to Australia are exposed in the shallow Java Sea. We quite agree with the opinion expressed that the present cables which pass through the Mediterranean would probably be rendered useless in case of warlike complications, as this did actually happen during the Egyptian war; but we would go still further and point out that the same objection applies with equal force to several sections along the proposed Cape route, which, in places, would necessarily have to lie in very shallow water, and where they could be easily cut by the enemy. Take, for example, the section which would pass off Brest, where, for more than 150 miles, all the existing lines to Africa and the East are in water of less depth than 100 fathoms; and through this dangerous belt it is now seriously proposed to lay a strategic cable. In the case of the Pacific scheme any such danger is quite avoided.

To turn to another aspect of the new "supplementary" scheme, we find that to carry it out some 13,700 miles of cable would be necessary, to which should be added 1,000 miles of land-line from Cape Town to Natal. We also find that the cable would be landed in no less than eleven different places—almost all points of weakness—the last being the town of Perth, in Western Australia. As opposed to this, we find in the Pacific that the length would only be 7,600 miles, and the landing-places only five in number, lying in a part of the ocean little frequented by foreign vessels of war, the cable terminating between the towns of Sydney and Brisbane, on the east coast