

of Australia. Should the cable bifurcate from Norfolk Island to New Zealand an additional length of 450 miles will be necessary, and an additional landing-place will be created. In continuation of this comparison, it should be borne in mind that the two existing cable routes to Australia converge at Java, and, bifurcating thence, end, one at Port Darwin in the north of Australia, the other at Roebuck Bay in the north-west of Western Australia. Thus we find that to reach the centres of the greatest population, which lie in the east and south-east of the continent, telegrams have to travel over very great lengths of land-lines. In the case of the Roebuck Bay cable there is a distance of about 3,300 miles to be traversed from that point before even Melbourne is reached, and more than 4,200 miles (about half the length of the Pacific cable) before Brisbane is reached. Again, a telegram *via* Roebuck Bay, destined for the town of Burketown in Queensland, has to travel over a length of land-line which is greater than the distance between London and Calcutta, or several hundreds of miles more than the distance intervening between London and Vancouver. The land-wire from the Port Darwin cable-station is not so long, giving about 2,400 miles to Melbourne and 3,300 miles to Brisbane. It is now, we are told, proposed to land the "Cape" cable at Perth, the capital of Western Australia, which is more than 2,000 miles by land-line from Melbourne, and over 3,000 miles from Brisbane. On the other hand, in the case of a cable landing on the Pacific coasts of Australia the main centres of population and commerce are within easy reach, Melbourne being only about 450 miles south of Sydney by land-line, while Brisbane is about 530 miles to the north. The great importance of these figures will be at once evident when we realise that the long land-lines from Port Darwin and Roebuck Bay, the only means by which telegrams from Europe can be forwarded at present, have been interrupted on no less than fifteen occasions during the last six months, the duration of each of these interruptions varying from a few hours to several days. In speaking recently of the Roebuck Bay land-line, Sir Charles Todd, the Postmaster-General of South Australia, says it "is acknowledged to be the worst line in Australia, the many fogs on the coast rendering it very hard to get signals through." It is thus clear that a Pacific cable would offer advantages which cannot reasonably be looked for, either in the case of existing cables, or in that of the proposed cable from the Cape. The land-lines in the compact group of colonies, Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland, are numerous, and here reliance has not to be placed on long single wires, as in the cases above referred to. Duplicate communication with New Zealand can be easily assured by a short branch cable from Norfolk Island. The advantages above indicated are obvious, if we consider that the population in the south and east of Australia is about 4,200,000, who carry on a total export and import trade equal to about £120,000,000 annually, employing for this purpose some 17,000,000 tons of shipping. It would therefore seem beyond dispute that a cable landing right in the heart of this busy district is much more to be desired, and is much more worthy of support, than one which would terminate in Western Australia, in which vast area (eleven times the size of Great Britain) the total population, although increasing, is less than that of the town of Cardiff, and the trade and shipping correspondingly small, the exports and imports for 1896 being valued together at something over £8,000,000.

We propose to touch but lightly on the financial side of the question. We were informed through the Press that the cable to be laid *via* the Cape is to be carried out in return for "certain privileges." Some light has recently been thrown on the nature of these privileges, one of which seems to be the payment of £25,000 per annum by the Cape Government for twenty years; another being the prolongation of the annual subsidy of £32,400 which has been paid by the Australian Governments to the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company since 1879, and which, if not renewed, will lapse in July, 1900. There may be other concessions which have not yet come to light.

It is a question whether the limits of modesty are not being overstepped, when we remember that one of the companies concerned, *i.e.*, the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company, has already received from Australasia subsidies amounting to over £750,000; and that in the ten years ending December, 1896, the annual receipts of this company, which are now about £640,000 (including subsidies), have increased by £187,459, and this notwithstanding a reduction in rates of about 50 per cent., which was only brought about under great pressure. An allied company, the Eastern and South African Telegraph Company, of which almost the entire capital is held by the Eastern Telegraph Company, has received in subsidies from various Governments a total of considerably over £1,000,000. It is not, perhaps, a cause of wonder that even a far-fetched attempt should be made to secure the continuance of similar "privileges," but we do not think that it is at all in the interests of the colonies, or of England, to assist in the consolidation of any such monopoly.

We have dealt at this length with the subject as it seemed only fitting and just that, however useful a cable to Australasia *via* the Cape may be, the claims to superior utility, both strategic and commercial, of a cable *via* Canada to Australasia should not be undermined by the circulation of misleading information.

No. 2.

The SECRETARY, General Post Office, Wellington, to the Hon. AUDLEY COOTE.

SIR,—

General Post Office, Wellington, 2nd June, 1898.

I have the honour, by direction, to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the — ultimo, forwarding a reprint of a newspaper article which appeared in the *Electrical Review* of the 4th and 18th March last under the title of "The Empire and Telegraph-cables." The Postmaster-General desires me to thank you for the article, which he has read with much interest.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. Audley Coote, Waverley Park, Sydney.

W. GRAY, Secretary.