

First Day.
15 April 1907.

(Sir H.
CAMPBELL-
BANNERMAN.)

ambitious which have been put forward, but I will just make a remark applicable to all such proposals. We found ourselves, Gentlemen, upon freedom and independence—that is the essence of the British Imperial connection. Freedom of action on the part of the individual state, freedom in their relations with each other, and with the Mother Country. Anything which militates against that principal would be wholly contrary to the genius of our race and our political ideals, and would sooner or later be disastrous. There are some words which perfectly express what I have in my mind and which were used in this place five years ago by Mr. Chamberlain; and I cannot mention Mr. Chamberlain without expressing on my own part and the part of my colleagues, and indeed I think I am authorised to say on behalf of the whole of the public of this country irrespective of political opinion, our deep and sincere regret, which I know is heartily felt all over the British Dominions, that he is for the present unable to take an active part in our public affairs. These are his words to which I refer: “The link” he said “which unites us, almost invisible as it is, sentimental in its character, is “one which we would gladly strengthen, but at the same time it has proved “itself to be so strong that certainly we would not wish to substitute for it a “chain which might be galling in its incidence.”

Gentlemen, freedom does not necessarily mean letting things drift, and in my opinion some provision should be made for maintaining the impetus which these Conferences will give to the consideration and settlement of questions which have been discussed here. I would also refer for a moment to the precedent that has recently been made for holding what I may call subsidiary Conferences upon matters of importance. I refer to the Navigation Conference that is sitting under the presidency of my friend, the President of the Board of Trade, and at which I observe that Sir Joseph Ward, Sir William Lyne, and other representatives are rendering great service in the discussion of very difficult problems. To my mind the precedent set is of high importance, and I should like to see these ancillary Conferences held from time to time as matters arise which require more time and treatment in greater detail than is possible in the Colonial Conference itself.

Well, Gentlemen, I have no more to say. I am fully confident that your coming here will not have been in vain. You will not judge of the feeling entertained towards you by acclamations and festivities alone, although of those there will be abundance, but by the mutual spirit of friendship, the desire to stretch every point that can be stretched in order to meet the views of each constituent part of the Empire, the desire, equally strong I hope, to avoid prejudicing in any way the interests of each other; and over and above all, you will be inspired and invigorated by our common pride in the great beneficent mission which the British people in all parts of the world are, as we believe, appointed and destined to fulfil.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: Lord Elgin, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, and Gentlemen, it so happens that I am about the oldest Member of this Conference, and, as has been said by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, I can almost boast of a record performance, having been here twice, in 1897 and in 1902, and it is not without some sense of regret I must say that I find myself about the only man who attended those Conferences. I share altogether the sentiments which have been expressed by the Prime Minister, that it is a matter of deep regret, not only in this country but all through the British Empire, that at this time the man who presided over the last two Conferences which I attended, Mr. Chamberlain, should not be able to take any part in public affairs; and I am sure that I express the same sentiment when I say that we all hope, in the most distant homes of the British Empire,