

1st Day.]

OPENING ADDRESS AND REPLIES.

[23 May, 1911]

Sir JOSEPH WARD—*cont.*

showed the wisdom of those responsible, and in the result it certainly, from my standpoint, helps to make me feel very cheerful as to what may be the outcome of the deliberations of this Conference on some of the important matters which later on will come up for consideration. I am one of those who believe that the difficulties that have faced the British statesmen in the old land and the younger British statesmen in the younger lands are to be overcome, and I trust that even although we may differ upon material points in discussing these matters, we may be able to apply some of those splendid characteristics which in the past have been the means of accomplishing so much, to the important work which will come before us upon this occasion.

I desire to say, Mr. Asquith, that in New Zealand we recognise fully that in the matter of governing our own country, we have always been allowed by the British Authorities to do practically what our people desired, and practically what we liked, with the reservation that is usually exercised, and rightly so, as to the consent of the King to any important alterations that might be contemplated affecting British subjects in other portions of the Empire, or concerning the constitution of our country itself. With those reservations we have been in the happy position of always being allowed to do what we liked. I wish to emphasize the point, referred to so eloquently by you, that we to the fullest possible extent recognise the principle of being daughters in your house and mistress in our own, and I am in full accord with the sentiments expressed by you as to the necessity of elasticity and flexibility in connection with any matters that may be attained as the outcome of this Conference, or by any legislation that may be necessary with a view to promoting any of the matters which we may finally decide desirable to bring about.

I am in entire accord with you and the other representatives at this Conference in saying that above all things we require to preserve our local autonomy; but I do believe—and later on I propose to elaborate a little more that point—that the preservation of our local autonomy and the elasticity and flexibility to which you have alluded can be maintained, but that it is essential for us to make a step forward, and an important step forward, if we want to prevent that to which you have also alluded, and which I believe to be a danger at the present moment—namely, the future disintegration of any portion of the British Possessions. I do not propose on this occasion—it would be the wrong time for one to do so—to do more than merely allude to that.

I also wish, as the other two gentlemen who represent Canada and Australia have done, to give expression to the homage of the people of New Zealand to His Majesty King George V., and to say for them how earnestly we wish him long life and happiness in the important and high position he occupies. The belief that he will have a great career is strongly impressed upon the whole of us, if I may be allowed to say so, by the excellent way in which His Majesty has conducted the high and difficult duties attached to his office since he has assumed it, a post made more difficult from the fact that his great predecessor, Edward VII., rose to so high a standard in his continual endeavour to bind all portions of the Empire together, and worked so successfully to promote the peace of the world.

I can only again thank you, Mr. Asquith, for the very cordial welcome you have extended to us, and express the hope that the outcome of this Conference's work will be for the good of the Empire as a whole.

General BOTHA : Gentlemen, I also have listened to the opening remarks of our respected Chairman with the greatest pleasure, and I wish to thank him most sincerely for his cordial words of welcome. On behalf of South Africa I must again express the deep sorrow of our people on the death of our late beloved King Edward VII. From the people whom I represent I bring the most loyal greetings and dutiful homage to our King George V.