

Sir WILFRID LAURIER—*cont.*

present organization or put it on a different political standing, though I and my colleagues are satisfied with what exists, we would not offer any objection if the other members of the Conference are disposed to press that point. The matter is not, according to our judgment, one which we feel strongly upon, but is one upon which we should defer to the wishes of our colleagues if they thought it preferable to press it forward. There is no difficulty with regard to that. One difficulty, however, and a serious one, arises in regard to the Committee which it is proposed to organize. What will be the position of that Committee? As I understand, it will have submitted to it matters which affect one particular Dominion, and as to which perhaps there may be a difference of opinion between the Home Government and the Government of the Dominion. Is such division of opinion to be submitted to that Committee to advise upon, and is it to carry a proposition as to the solution of it by vote? If so, this would seem to me a very cumbrous system and a very unsatisfactory one. I will give a case in point. Questions may arise between the autonomous Governments and the Imperial Government upon some matter as to which there may be some difference of opinion. That difference of opinion had much better be settled between the Home Government and the Government interested than referred to another body, which would not be responsible to anybody.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: That same objection applies to the meeting of a Conference like this.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: No, we are representatives here, and we are not dealing with actual questions which we have to decide, but simply offering suggestions. But take a case in point: Some years ago we had in Canada a very important question—namely, the settlement of the boundary between part of His Majesty's Dominion of Canada and the United States in Alaska. It was a delicate and difficult question, and we had correspondence going on for weeks and months between the Dominion Government and the Imperial Government. We, of course, had to have the assent of the Imperial Government, because, though we were the most interested, they were interested also, as we were a part of the British Empire. We contended the boundaries were at a certain point; the United States contended they were at another point. We had to come to a solution, and we decided to refer it to arbitration. So far there was no difficulty, because we should all agree that arbitration is the best manner of settling any such differences as may arise. But when we came to consider the composition of the tribunal, if I may say so without breaking any secret, we had differences with the Imperial Government which, by correspondence we settled. Suppose there had been such a Committee as is now suggested in existence at that time, and that Committee had been seised of the question and had suggested a solution which, perhaps, was not agreeable either to the Imperial Government or the Dominion Government, or if satisfactory to the one, not satisfactory to the other.

I do not see that the Committee would be of the least advantage over the present system by which we should settle such a question—as we did settle it then—by mutual correspondence. I fail to see in what way any question which may arise could be solved in any manner at all better than we have at this moment. I do not know that I would press the point much further than that, but I do not see any advantage in a Committee of this kind to discuss and determine matters of this nature, which are altogether of the purview of the Dominion Government interested and the Imperial Government. If there had been in the past any example where the solutions had not been satisfactory, or if there had been a grievance of any kind which had not been met, I could understand this remedy being suggested, but, so far as I am aware, no grievances of any kind have not been remedied—if any existed.

Now, with regard to the status of the High Commissioners. Their status is one which is somewhat delicate, because the whole of the constitution is something new, which has never existed in the world before, for which we have no precedent, and which we have to create ourselves. The relations between the Imperial Authorities here and the Dominion Governments are themselves peculiar, as the Conference in which we are engaged is peculiar. The High Commissioner is, first of all, a representative of the autonomous Government,