

25 May, 1911.] RECONSTITUTION OF THE COLONIAL OFFICE.

[2nd Day.]

Sir WILFRID LAURIER—*cont.*

not only with the Government of Great Britain, but with the whole British people. The High Commissioners stand all the time for their respective Governments before the British people. They are not only ambassadors—their position in one respect is far larger; but in a technical sense, with regard to the Imperial Government, they are in the position of ambassadors—they are in the position of confidential agents. We communicate direct with the Imperial Government—that is to say, the Governor-General communicates direct with the Imperial Government—but I am sure there are constantly occasions when a despatch is sent to the High Commissioner asking him to press the matter on and to see the Secretary of State for the Colonies and represent to him the views of the particular Dominion Government. We know that besides the official despatch there is the confidential talk, in which more meaning is conveyed than in a despatch. The High Commissioners are expected to come—or, at least, many of them do come—to the Secretary of State for the Colonies to represent that the Dominion Government has sent a despatch to him on some particular question, but he wishes to press forward this or that consideration which is not included in the despatch. Therefore I think the High Commissioners serve a very useful purpose, and for my part I do not think the present arrangement can be improved; but, as I said a moment ago, if you all thought it would be better to further bisect the present Department, I am content to go with you, though I feel content with the position of things as they are.

The PRESIDENT: I should like to interpose, in view of what Sir Wilfrid Laurier has said, to say that in our view, putting forward our suggestion of the Standing Committee for your consideration, we did not intend that any question should come before the Standing Committee which is not of common interest to the whole Empire.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: That is my view.

The PRESIDENT: Such a class of question as Sir Wilfrid Laurier has referred to—that is to say, questions arising between the United Kingdom on the one side and one of the Dominions on the other—would scarcely, in our view, come before such a Committee.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: I would like to have a concrete case which would come before them.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: I would point out that Sir Wilfrid Laurier and myself are looking at the proposal from an entirely different standpoint. As I understand the suggestion made by Mr. Harcourt regarding this permanent Committee, it is to deal with Imperial matters. To use his own words, it is to deal with any resolution arrived at by the Conference, or prepare work for a future Conference. I should not myself be an advocate for questions as between the Dominion Government and the Home Government going to that Committee, because I think it would be embarrassing, and, in addition, I think the present system so satisfactory that, as Sir Wilfrid Laurier said, we could hardly improve upon it. For that reason I take it that any matter which that Committee would deal with would be of a nature quite outside a question of that kind.

The PRESIDENT: Yes. Sir Wilfrid Laurier has asked for a concrete case. I might take any of the subjects which are on the agenda here for this Conference. Take such a matter, for instance, as emigration and immigration. There are certain aspects of that which affect the whole Empire.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: Yes, but in what respect could such a Committee confer and determine about it? They could not determine upon legislation.