

1 June, 1911.]

## DECLARATION OF LONDON.

[3rd Day.

Mr. BATCHELOR—*cont.*

now obtaining and the probabilities in the event of further naval campaigns—a knowledge which can hardly be said to be possessed perhaps completely by any individual.

Any one would hesitate before being dogmatic as to what would be the precise effect of this Declaration, and particularly of some of its provisions. We have taken up the view after the amount of discussion that has been going on recently, and the fierce light which has been thrown on the whole subject by that discussion, that it is possible that something new may have been brought out, something that may not have been considered perhaps fully by the negotiators and by the Government, or at any rate perhaps not considered so fully as it is now. Of course, I recognise this, that once the agreement was signed all information from an official source practically one would expect to be backing up and making the case strong for its ratification, because that is naturally the policy of the Government, and it is the policy of the office. That brings one up to this point, that possibly it would have been an advantage if, before the signing of the agreement, some larger consideration could have been given—I will not say to other interests, but to the Dominions who are equally concerned, so that the way in which it strikes them, the way in which it affects them, may be in the hands of the negotiators.

We are to-day approaching the consideration of this Declaration of London at too late a stage to alter the course of negotiations in any way, or at too late a stage to do anything. Ought the self-governing Dominions to be in that position? The only opportunity we have of considering it is when it is too late to modify in any sense, or to suggest modification. We can, of course, urge on you that it should not be ratified, but that is taking a very extreme course, a course which nothing but the feeling that the safety of the Empire is in some way endangered by the provisions would justify us in taking. But ought we not to have had some opportunity of urging a modification possibly in some direction?

Sir Edward Grey said, I think, in answer to a question in the House of Commons—I forget who asked the question—that it was not practicable to consult the Dominions at the time or during the negotiations. I do not know whether he actually used the words “during the negotiations” or not, but that was how it was reported, that he had said it was not practicable to consult the Dominions. I would like to ask why it was impracticable to consult the Dominions at some time or other before the signing of the Convention. It seems to me that it would not, as far as I can see, have been altogether impracticable. Take the case of Australia; we have a sea-borne commerce of about 130,000,000*l.* in and out—72,000,000*l.* export and 60,000,000*l.* import. Per head of population we have the greatest commerce of any country. In itself it is a very large amount. Many of the Powers which signed this Convention, or many of the Powers which were consulted—let me put it in that way—had a much less interest in it than we had. Under those circumstances, had we been independent, of course, we would have been consulted. Our interests in the whole matter as a maritime country wholly dependent on commerce for our imports and for our exports, practically for our life, are such that, had we been independent, we would have been consulted. We were not consulted. The first intimation we got was from the Blue Book after it had been fixed up. That is the first intimation we had that there was any such proposal which necessarily would affect us very considerably—the Blue Book—after the whole matter had been fixed up.

As soon as the attention of the Prime Minister of Australia, Mr. Deakin, was called to the signing of this Convention, he telegraphed to Colonel Foxton, who was in England, in August, 1909—nearly two years ago. Colonel Foxton was the honourable Minister attending the Council of Defence. This is Mr. Deakin’s telegram: “Are Dominions to be consulted before ratification of Declaration of London by Imperial Government? Inquire, and if ratification proposed represent strong feeling of Government of Commonwealth of Australia against being committed to Declaration without consultation on matter of greatest importance to Australia.” Colonel Foxton replied on the 23rd: “Declaration of London, will make strong representations. Understand no likelihood of ratification during present session.” Then on 24th September he telegraphed the text of a letter received from the Secretary of State for the Colonies: “Secretary of State for the Colonies has supplied me copy letters received from