

3rd Day.]

DECLARATION OF LONDON.

[1 June, 1911.]

Sir EDWARD GREY : I did not in the least mean it to be exclusive.

Mr. FISHER : You only mentioned that one particularly.

Sir EDWARD GREY : I was taking that as an instance where it is quite easy. There are cases where it is difficult, but in so far as it can be done we would do it. I will give you one instance now where we are engaged in certain negotiations.

Mr. FISHER : I would rather not hear that. It is not restricted in your own mind merely to the Hague Conference?

Sir EDWARD GREY : Certainly not.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER : In the proposition which was moved by our colleagues from Australia, especially as commented upon by Mr. Fisher, certain principles were laid down which seemed to me to be very far reaching. If I understand him correctly, the proposition he laid down was that the Dominions should be consulted upon all treaties to be negotiated by His Majesty. There are two sorts of treaties between nations. First of all there are commercial treaties; and, secondly, there are treaties of amity, which are calculated to prevent causes of war, or to settle afterwards the effects of war. With regard to commercial treaties, His Majesty's Government has already adopted the practice of never including any of the Dominions beyond the seas except with their consent. That implies consultation prior or afterwards. Liberty is left to us to be included or not included in such a treaty as that, and I think that is very satisfactory.

In Canada, I may say, we have gone further and claimed the liberty of negotiating our own treaties of commerce, and, so far, since the time we applied for this privilege, which was given to us, of course the negotiations have been carried on with the concurrence of the Foreign Office in conjunction with the Ambassador, but at all events our liberty was not restricted at all in that respect.

Coming now to the other class of treaties, which I characterised as treaties of amity, it would seem to me that it would be fettering, in many instances, the Home Government—the Imperial authorities—very seriously, if any of the outside Dominions were to be consulted as to what they should do on a particular question. In many cases the nature of the treaty would be such that it would only interest one of the Dominions. If it interested them all the Imperial authorities would find themselves seriously embarrassed if they were to receive the advice of Australia in one way, the advice of New Zealand in another way, and the advice of Canada, perhaps, in a third way. Negotiations have to be carried on by certain diplomatic methods, and it is, I think, not always safe for the party negotiating to at once put all his cards on the table and let his opponent know exactly what he is after.

I noticed particularly what was said by Mr. Fisher a moment ago, that the British Empire is a family of nations, which is perfectly true; but it must be recognised that in that family of nations by far the greater burden has to be carried on the shoulders of the Government of the United Kingdom. The diplomatic part of the Government of the Empire has of necessity to be carried on by the Government of the United Kingdom, and that being so I think it would be too much to say that in all circumstances the Dominions beyond the seas are to be consulted as far as the diplomatic negotiations are concerned. That is what I understood Mr. Fisher to desire.

Mr. FISHER : My last point was that it should be done whenever possible.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER : I have no doubt that wherever possible the Government of the United Kingdom will do its duty.

Mr. FISHER : And primarily when our interests were involved.