

3rd Day.]

DECLARATION OF LONDON.

[1 June, 1911.]

Sir JOSEPH WARD—*cont.*

can be tried by an international court as against a system, which exists at this moment, of your opponent trying his own case, it is a most important advance.

As far as the oversea Dominions and Great Britain are concerned, I look upon the whole question as being a matter of the supremacy of the British Navy, and this is the crux of the whole position from the point of view of both the United Kingdom and the oversea Dominions. The preservation of the sea routes comes right into prominence from the standpoint of protecting our enormous interests. What is important to us and to England is that all oversea routes should be fully protected. When I remember that 90 per cent. of the ships carrying foodstuffs to England are British owned and under the British flag, I recognise, with regard to this question of dealing with our sea routes, how enormously important the maintenance of an Empire Navy is, and how widespread the British interests are.

I do not quite agree with Sir Wilfrid Laurier—though I know he holds the view pretty strongly—as to the desirability, in the case of treaties, of our not having a say where possible where they affect the interests of any one of the oversea Dominions. I realise to the full that to-day without taking part in the treaties, in the event of anything untoward happening to the British Empire, it would be vital to the oversea Dominions, and whether they were taking part by way of suggestion or having treaties referred to them which affect the oversea Dominions, I recognise that directly and indirectly they are involved in connection with the general position of the maintenance of British supremacy. It does appear to me that it would have been very much easier, from the point of view of the British Government itself, if it had been possible for the proposed rules of this Declaration to have been submitted to the oversea Dominions; and if the oversea Dominions had gone into the matter fully, and the opportunity had been given to the whole of the members of the overseas Governments who are entitled to be heard on a matter of this kind to consider these proposals, I believe long ago we should have come to the conclusion that the course which has been pursued here is the best in the general interests of the Empire.

Sir Edward Grey's suggestion that for the future, in connection with the Hague Conference for instance, the opportunity for consideration is to be afforded—which implies that if an alteration is made in connection with the Declaration of London as we are dealing with it to-day, the opportunity would be afforded to us—I think would be of material importance to all the Governments, including the British Government, so that we should be able to go into the matter and express our opinion in time before the final decision was arrived at. I fully recognise the force of the point put forward by Sir Edward Grey, that as the Minister with the great responsibility upon his shoulders of directing the foreign affairs of the British Government, he has not always time to confer with his colleagues concerning circumstances which may arise. He has, moreover, to accept the responsibility, and the oversea Dominions, even if taken into consultation with the British Government, could not, during the sitting of a conference, always have the opportunity of expressing an opinion even on matters of consequence prior to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs deciding what course to take.

With regard to the definition of "base." I look upon that as important, and I recognise, with Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Mr. Asquith, and the other gentlemen, that as the matter is stated in the proposed rules it is practically as clear as it can be stated. I do not attach that importance which I know a number of people do to the suggestion that there is not to be a neutral port in England in the event of these rules being adopted. It does appear to me to be stretching the whole matter to an enormous extent to suppose that wherever a railway line leads to a port, that is to be looked upon as a base, because foodstuffs might be conveyed over that line of railway to the forces, and used for the preservation or protection of England itself. So far as my judgment goes, the Declaration of London is an improvement upon the present position, and I therefore support its being approved.

Dr. FINDLAY: I do not know that I can contribute much fresh light to the very illuminating explanation we have had from Sir Edward Grey, but it seems to me this matter is of national importance, and it is better that one who