

4th Day.]

COMMERCIAL RELATIONS AND BRITISH SHIPPING. [2 June, 1911.]

Mr. BUXTON—*cont.*

marine, but I thought it would be a satisfaction to Mr. Pearce to know that the tendency is in the right direction.

I am afraid I am not in a position to accept this resolution if it is intended to apply to the particular point raised by Mr. Pearce. I took it as a general proposition to which we should assent in principle, and as regards the general proposition I should have no objection to it. But at the moment, at all events, until the trade develops more than it is at present, the position that we have taken is that the result might be, if we accepted the Australian position, possibly a serious disadvantage to British trade without material advantage on the other hand.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: This question is a purely Australian one, but it involves principles in which all the Dominions are certainly interested. I do not know if I have correctly apprehended the whole tenor of the question. I will state it as I understand it and if I am wrong I would like to be corrected, so that we may know exactly the true situation we have to deal with.

The question arises, as I understand, from a Bill which was passed some years ago by the Commonwealth of Australia giving for British manufactured goods a preference of 5 per cent. on condition that they were carried in British bottoms, with the further condition that the crews should be exclusively white. For the moment we can eliminate the colour question and confine ourselves simply to the fact that the condition of this preference was that the goods in order to earn the preference should be carried in British bottoms. As I further understand, this Act was returned and the assent was refused on the ground stated by the British Government that its disposition would interfere with certain treaties of commerce now existing between England and various nations. It would be important to know exactly what are those nations and what are those treaties, and the discussion would perhaps be more profitable if we knew exactly the full extent of what those treaties are; but leaving that aside for the moment we are face to face at the present time with a condition of things which exists, as far as Australia is concerned, as far as Canada is concerned, and probably New Zealand also, that there are certain treaties which have been long in existence, negotiated long before the Dominions had reached the position in which they are now, and which were negotiated at the time simply from the point of view of Great Britain, and Great Britain alone, and which yet affected all her Possessions. In recent years—I had occasion to refer to that yesterday—the British Government, whenever negotiating treaties, has always been careful not to apply those treaties to the self-governing Dominions, except upon their own volition and assent. If those treaties which Australia finds in its way to-day had not been negotiated years ago and were to be negotiated at this moment, Australia would not be included in those treaties except upon the assent and volition of Australia. We are face to face, therefore, with this position: the old treaties we find are an obstacle to Australia to-day. We may find ourselves in Canada also in the face of similar treaties which in Canada might be an obstacle to our commercial development. Years ago the Government of Canada obtained from the Government of Great Britain the denunciation of two treaties, which were very obnoxious to the Dominion—the treaty with Germany and the treaty with Belgium. The British Government, on that occasion, denounced the treaties entirely. It may be difficult, I conceive, to ask the British Government to denounce those treaties which are, as is represented to us, of advantage to the United Kingdom; but I had in my mind—in fact I discussed the question before I left Canada—to bring to the attention of the Conference and the British Government some method of dealing with such questions as this. As to those old treaties, which may be of advantage to the United Kingdom, no one here would think for a moment that the United Kingdom should not have the full benefit of those treaties. On the other hand when a Commonwealth like Australia finds a treaty of this kind not only an obstacle to its own commercial development, but finds in it an obstacle to closer trade relations between Australia and the Mother Country, I would submit that perhaps it might be possible that the British Government should enter into negotiations with those nations with a