

We are often told that self-interest binds the Empire together. A half-truth presented as the whole is a dangerous falsehood. I have likened the ties which unite us to steel, but steel of the wrong temper may be brittle as glass. The only element which can give a tensile quality to human ties is a sense of duty in men to each other. We, gathered in this chamber, will strengthen the bonds which unite us so far as we are able to keep in mind the needs of others than those for whom we speak. We stand here on an equal footing, and no Government present in this chamber can bind the rest. We can act with effect so far as we agree, and no further; but I weigh my words when I say that we shall achieve agreement and so strengthen the bonds which unite us only in so far as each and all of us is seeking how to relieve not only our own difficulties and troubles, but those also of a distracted world. The British Empire cannot live for itself alone. Its strength as a commonwealth of nations will grow so far as its members unite to bear on their shoulders the burdens of those weaker and less fortunate than themselves.

OPENING SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA.

Mr. Mackenzie King: Prime Minister and gentlemen: The Prime Minister in his opening remarks made reference to precedents which have been established at former gatherings. I understand that the representative of the senior Dominion has been the first to speak after the Prime Minister of Great Britain. In these circumstances, I venture to say just a word or two. Personally I could not but wish that one of the more experienced and older members of the gathering had been the first to address his remarks to this Conference—my friend Mr. Massey, or General Smuts, who have been at similar gatherings in the past; but it may be well that precedents should be observed and the procedure at former Conferences followed.

Welcome to Representatives of Irish Free State.

May I thank the Prime Minister very cordially for the heartiness of the welcome which he has extended to us. I am sure we all join with him in experiencing pleasure at the presence at this gathering of the representatives of the Irish Free State. Coming from the Dominion of Canada, the close association of the name of our Dominion with that of the new Irish Free State in the Treaty and Constitution makes it a special pleasure to me to have the privilege of meeting at this table the representatives of that State.

Comments on Mr. Baldwin's Speech.

Having regard to the short time we expect to occupy this morning, it would scarcely, I think, be advisable for me in any way to attempt to comment upon the clear, comprehensive review which has been made by the Prime Minister of the situation in Europe, and the mention made of other parts of the world, except to say that the information which has been given to us to-day, and particularly the elevated note which has been struck, will, I believe, be welcome not only to members of this gathering, but to the countries that are represented here, and, indeed, should be helpful in the wider field of international relations. The subjects that have been touched on are, of course, among the most important with which the British Empire is concerned, the issues with which they deal and to which they give rise are far-reaching, and it would not be advisable therefore to attempt to comment in any particular upon any phase of the questions at this stage. During the sittings of the Conference I assume ample opportunity will be afforded to all of us to make such references and comment as we may think would be necessary and helpful.

Value of Imperial Conferences and of Personal Consultation.

I feel it a very great privilege to have the opportunity of meeting in this personal way members of the British Government, the heads of the Governments of the self-governing Dominions, and the representatives of India, to discuss matters, many of which are of common concern. In matters of government the value of personal contact and association cannot, I think, be overestimated. Some of the gentlemen present—most, in fact—I am having the opportunity of meeting for the first time to-day; some little acquaintance has been formed by correspondence and cables, but I think a personal meeting is worth more than all the cables and correspondence combined. In so far as I have the privilege of speaking for the people of Canada, I would say that at this Conference we have only one aim and purpose, that, namely, which actuates all of us, of meeting together with a view to being mutually helpful, in doing what we can towards solving as far as may be possible many of the great problems which are of concern to us all. I think, as we each speak our minds clearly with reference to matters in which some of us have perhaps a special interest and to other matters of general interest, we will find that no problem is incapable of being at least in some way appreciably solved if the spirit of good will is present, as it is certain to be in this gathering.

Value of Publicity.

May I just say this one word—it is a thought which has come to me more forcibly as I have listened to the Prime Minister's review: Important as it is that those of us who represent Governments, and are members of Governments, should have the information which has been given to us to-day, and should have a common understanding among ourselves, more important I believe it to be that the Parliaments of the Empire should have equal advantage, as far as may be possible, of the fullest information with respect to such matters as are of concern to us all; and not only the Parliaments, but still more important, I would say, as far as this can be attained, the peoples of the various Dominions from which we come. For that reason I am glad of the publicity which it to be given to to-day's proceedings.