

I would further say that in so far as there is an advantage in exchange from a smaller and more circumscribed service, in the way of greater promotion and greater experience, I should be equally glad to consider any arrangement that we could make for something in the nature of an occasional exchange between officers working in our territories and those working in the mandated territories administered by the different Dominions.

West Indies.

Having detained you thus far, with a general appreciation of what the colonial Empire may mean to us all, I hope I may be allowed, following the precedent of the last Conference, to take you in a short survey round the different main portions of that Empire. I might begin, perhaps, with the West Indies first of all, those old historic colonies which were almost the foundation of the colonial Empire, and which, in the eighteenth century, were so fiercely disputed between us and our French and Spanish rivals—many of them the scene of great naval encounters, taken and retaken, and the object of the fiercest disputes at Peace Conferences afterwards. That was because in those days the West Indies were highly developed relatively to the rest of the tropical world and were of immense economic importance. There is one West Indian island which we held at one time and which now belongs to France. It belongs to France because at a Peace Treaty France preferred the possession of Guadeloupe to the option which was open to her to keep a few acres of snow—" *quelques arpents de neige* "—in the shape of Canada. I think that shows that there is no territory of great extent, however small its value may appear at the present moment, but can be of immense importance some day when developed.

Their Isolation.

Those West Indian islands have, during the greater part of the last century, been in a state of stagnation and backwardness. That has been due to a variety of causes. One, of course, is their isolation from each other. They are mostly small islands and, though we think of them collectively, they are separated from each other by great distances. Jamaica is twelve hundred miles from the eastern group of islands, and four hundred or five hundred miles from British Honduras, to the west of it. They have also, in the course of the world's development, become isolated from the main channels of world trade. They were once on the old great sailing route to the Spanish Main; during the last century they have gradually fallen out of the main routes. I think the future may change that. They are to-day in the course of shipping from Europe and from North America to the Panama Canal. As trade between North America, more particularly Canada, and South America develops, they are straight along the line of that development. If airship communication should develop, as I believe it will, it will tend to follow the old sailing routes in order to take advantage of the prevalent winds, and in that case one may find once more that the West Indies are more accessible from here than New York.

West Indian Conference.

A good deal is being done at this moment to deal with those difficulties. The difficulty of mutual isolation is being overcome by the colonies getting into closer touch with each other. The outstanding feature of their history since this Conference last met has been the meeting in London last summer of a West Indian Conference of all the main colonies, continental as well as insular, round the Caribbean. They met in London because London, under present shipping conditions, is the most convenient centre for the West Indies. They met for the purpose of considering the establishment, and drafting the constitution, of a standing body to deal with their common affairs. For the first time in their history these colonies, entirely on their own initiative and not under any instruction from the Colonial Office, met under the roof of that Parliament from which so many of their assemblies are directly descended, in order to face the problem of how to get together in order to help each other and to be able to deal more effectively in trade and other matters with the outside world. That Conference was a complete success. They unanimously accepted the principle of a standing West Indian Conference, and I may say that their action in that respect pays us the compliment of the fact that they expressly modelled their constitution upon that of the Imperial Conference. If I may quote from their own report—"The West Indian Conference is a purely advisory body, with no executive powers, meeting at regular intervals and performing for its constituents functions analogous to those which the Imperial Conference performs for the Empire as a whole." In certain respects, however, they have departed from, and gone beyond, possibly improved upon, their model. This Conference is to meet alternately in London and in the West Indies. I do not know if there is any moral in that for ourselves. It is to have a permanent and travelling secretariat. Their voting, owing to the entirely different political conditions there, will be not by colonies but by individuals, because it is to be a Conference not purely of Government delegates but of representatives of both Governments and legislatures, "including many shades of opinion"—if I may quote once more—"assembled in conference together for the purpose of eliciting, by the process of free and unfettered discussion, an expression of the general will of the West Indies on their own affairs." These recommendations of the West Indian Conference have been laid before the Legislatures and Governors of the different colonies and, if, as I imagine and hope, they are accepted, the first meeting of the new body will be held in Barbados, in a year's time. I think we can all watch with interest and with sympathy this experiment which has paid us the homage of imitation, and which may open a new chapter in the career of those old historic colonies.

Trade Relations with Canada.

Dealing with the general relations of the West Indies, another important event in their history in recent years has been the Conference on Trade and Shipping which they held with the Government