

First Day.
15 April 1907.
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(CHAIRMAN.)

"inform them that I shall look forward with pleasure to receiving them on my return to England. The questions which will be submitted to the Conference for discussion, involving matters of weighty interest, not merely to the Colonies there represented, but to the British Empire at large, will, I am sure, receive the most careful attention, and I am confident that the decisions arrived at will tend towards the closer union of my Colonies to the Mother Country and to each other, and to the strengthening and consolidation of my Empire."

Gentlemen, may I, in a single word on my own behalf, offer a welcome to those who have come to attend this Conference. For the rest it is, I am sure, a gratification to all—as it is especially to myself—that my Right Hon. friend on my right has been able to attend this meeting, and without further preface I will ask the Prime Minister to address the Conference.

The PRIME MINISTER: It is a great pleasure to me to respond to the invitation of Lord Elgin that I should welcome, as I do most sincerely in the name of His Majesty's Government, the Prime Ministers of the great self-governing communities beyond the seas, who are now for the fourth time gathered together in the capital of the Mother Country for consultation on matters affecting their common interests and ours. You are all of you friends, most of you personal friends, some of you old personal friends of myself and the Ministers with whom you have come to confer. Sir Wilfrid Laurier has, if I may use a slang expression of the day, a "record performance"; he has been here on each occasion. Mr. Deakin, now speaking for the Commonwealth of Australia, attended as Chief Secretary of the Colony of Victoria, the earliest Conference in 1887, a gathering, which, as we all remember, was not restricted to the self-governing Colonies or to the Prime Ministers. Sir Robert Bond, as Lord Elgin has said, has not yet arrived. He took part in the previous Conference; but the other Prime Ministers are here for the first time in this capacity, and I wish to extend a special greeting to General Botha, the Benjamin of the Brotherhood, if I may use that phrase, the first Prime Minister of the Transvaal, whose presence in our councils I am sure you will welcome as cordially as do His Majesty's Government. I should have been glad if he could have been accompanied by the Prime Minister of the Orange River Colony, but that has been impossible because its constitution could not be brought into effect in time, and I may perhaps throw in the observation that there will be no avoidable delay in establishing it. The absence of the heads of so many Governments from the sphere of their activity, must, I am afraid, have occasioned great inconvenience and considerable public as well as personal sacrifices, but we sincerely trust that your presence in council will justify these sacrifices, that it will offer solid compensation for the long journey you have undertaken, and for the time which you are about to devote to the discussion of the matters which are of common concern to us all.

Gentlemen, whatever be the value and whatever be the issue of your deliberations, it is with the greatest gratification that we welcome you, and warm as I know your attachment and devotion to the Mother Country to be, I can assure you the feelings of affectionate interest and pride entertained within the shores of the Old Country is not to be surpassed even by your warmest sentiments. But I need not dwell upon the expression of our cordial relations; in fact, I am not sure that in private life those who are united by the most sacred ties of relationship and the sincerest affection gain in the estimation of their neighbours by the too frequent and effusive protestations or exhibition of their feeling towards each other. I am not therefore disposed to occupy much of your time in mere declarations of our friendly attachment to each other, and our common solicitude for our joint