

Third Day.
18 April 1907.

FUTURE
CONSTITUTION
OF THE
CONFERENCE.
(Mr. Deakin.)

of the President, except again to repeat the suggestion made yesterday that this, instead of being an absolutely iron rule, might perhaps be expressed less conclusively in order that at certain sittings where it might be thought appropriate, the senior Prime Minister from one of the dominions over the seas might have the compliment of presiding. I do not mean merely as a formal compliment, but as carrying out the principle which has been so gracefully accepted by the Prime Minister and the present Chairman of this Conference. Put in this form I take no exception to it, except that it appears to preclude the possibility of any other presidency than that of either the Prime Minister of Great Britain, who certainly when present could not give place to anyone, or his colleague, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, who is certainly on the great bulk of the questions that will come before such a Conference the proper person to appear as his representative; but need it be framed so precisely? Can we not put it in some slightly laxer form which would permit of the Senior Prime Minister present being, if it were thought fit or desirable, asked to occupy the chair by way of illustrating the fact that this was a meeting, as has been expressed here, between Governments. I do not attach fundamental importance to it.

CHAIRMAN : May I say I have very carefully considered Mr. Deakin's suggestion since he made it. I can only say for myself that nothing would be more agreeable to me than to serve under the presidency of the present senior member of the Conference, but I regard this simply as a matter of convenience. It is quite common in all arrangements of life to have two officers, one a President and another a Chairman, and I have specially avoided the use of the word "Presidency" in this case, and said "take the "chair" rather to put the Secretary of State in the position of the second officer of the Conference, and for this reason I should be delighted to sit under the presidency of my friend on the right; but this is a question really of the man who is to carry on the work; he must make the whole arrangements for the Conference, and the thing runs on that he shall do so, and I think, really, as a matter of business arrangement, it is the most convenient thing that he should be in the chair.

Mr. DEAKIN : I do not suggest otherwise.

CHAIRMAN : I do not in the least shut out the possibility. At the last Conference, Mr. Chamberlain, for instance, was prevented by an accident from presiding, and if such a thing happened to me to-morrow I think it would be for the Conference to select their own Chairman.

Mr. DEAKIN : That is sufficient; what I had in my mind was that there might be an occasion on which the Prime Minister was necessarily occupied elsewhere; the Secretary of State for the Colonies might be called for if he were a member of the active House to leave the Conference. Under those circumstances I now understand that by this phrase you leave it open.

CHAIRMAN : It may be left, as far as I am concerned, for the next Conference to decide.

Mr. DEAKIN : There might be either no member of the British Government present, or simply the representative of some Department, whose subject was under discussion. What I wish to provide against in the most considerate fashion is, that it should be implied from any statement to which