

Mr. ASQUITH: Lord Elgin, and gentlemen, it is now my duty in conjunction with my right honourable friend and colleague, Mr. Lloyd George, to state on behalf of the Imperial Government the view which they take of the matters which have been so ably and exhaustively discussed around this table during the last two or three days. Let me say, first of all, that, I think, two things are abundantly manifest and will be gladly acknowledged by all of us. The first is that whatever decision, or if you please, whatever absence of definite decision, may result from our discussions and proceedings, nothing that has been said here, or that can be said here, can in any way weaken our sense of Imperial unity or the desire of every one of the great communities represented at this table, within the limits of its opportunities, and, so far as the interests of its population allow, to promote that unity by every means in its power. In the next place let me add another thing which has appeared, I think, very clearly in the course of discussion, and that is the advantage of debates of this kind. If this Imperial Conference has produced no other results—and I am glad to think it is going to produce a number of very definite and very desirable ones—I think the mere fact that it had assembled round this table during the course of these three days the representatives of the self-governing communities and the Imperial Government, for a free and frank interchange of opinions on matters of this kind, enabling one to realise as we can never do until we are brought face to face in friendly intercourse with one another, one another's points of view, and, if we differ, to see that that difference arises not from mutual misunderstanding but from a clearer and fuller understanding of one another's position, would in itself have been well worth while as a result to be attained. I am speaking, as I am privileged to do for the moment, on behalf of the Imperial Government. I can assure you, in their name, that we have derived great advantage and benefit from the interesting speeches, particularly the speech of Mr. Deakin, in which the case of preferential trade has been presented during the course of these three days.

But, gentlemen, there is one other thing, one further point, which emerges from the discussion, and which we may regard as common ground between us all. Sir Wilfrid Laurier has often said, I know, from what one has read of his speeches and of his writings—and he was the practical pioneer of Imperial Preference—that in this matter each community of the Empire must primarily pay regard to the interests of its own members, and I was very glad to hear that statement reiterated with great emphasis and explicitness by Mr. Deakin more than once in the course of his speech. There we are all agreed. We desire, as I said a moment ago, within the limit of our possibilities and opportunities to increase the sense, to enlarge the range, and to deepen the foundations of Imperial unity. But, particularly in these fiscal and economic matters, the primary and governing consideration with every one of us—the first consideration—must be how does it affect the community with which we are more particularly connected and which we have the honour here to represent? I believe, in saying that, I shall carry with me the unanimous opinion of the whole Conference. Imperial unity cannot be effectively or enduringly promoted by ignoring local conditions, interests or sentiments. As both Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Mr. Deakin have said, nothing is permanently gained for the cause of Imperialism, particularly in matters of this kind, unless what is given is spontaneously offered and what is received is ungrudgingly accepted. I think again I shall have the assent of you all to that.

Many people have endeavoured to explain in a formula or in a phrase that which distinguishes our Empire from the other empires of history, and I shall not enter into the competition. Mr. Deakin used some admirable language in his speech which expressed completely the ideas which most of us I think have in our mind, but we shall all agree in a general way that