

Sir WILFRID LAURIER—*cont.*

Dominions beyond the seas to the British Crown and the British institutions. At least I can say so for the Dominion from which I come, and I have no doubt my colleagues from the other Dominions can say the same for their own people.

Those who attended the Conference four years ago will also remember that when we met the feeling in this country was rather charged with doubt and misgiving lest the work of the Conference might be fruitless and barren of results. The event, I think I may say, properly showed that for these doubts and misgivings there was no foundation whatever. I do not claim, no one does claim, I am sure, that the discussions which took place were in any way sensational, but I think we can claim that they were productive of material and even important results. The most important of these results was to substitute for the kind of ephemeral Colonial Conferences which had taken place before, a real Imperial system of periodical Conferences between the Government of His Majesty the King in the United Kingdom and the Governments of His Majesty the King in the Dominions beyond the seas for the discussion of common interest to all.

We are just met, as you said a moment ago, Sir, for the purpose of discussing such topics in the first of these Imperial Conferences. Perhaps I may say that of this Conference, as well as of the last, it will be said when it is reviewed, that the discussions were neither sensational nor dramatic, but conducive to good results. Indeed, it is already evident that these Conferences which have taken place from time to time, and which will now take place at regular periods, have already been productive of very important effects. They have brought together British subjects all over the world who probably but for these Conferences would never have met. They have brought more closely together the different Dominions of the British Crown, and made them feel more strongly the advantages of British connection. They have produced another result: they have shown us that whilst we are British subjects, who have interests which are common to all parts of the British Empire, there are between Dominions and Dominions and between the Dominions and the United Kingdom, differences of local interest which, unknown and ignored, tend to disintegration, but which, known and recognised, may be harmonised, and harmonised towards union.

I have the happy privilege of representing here a country which has no grievances to set forth and very few suggestions to make. We are quite satisfied with our lot. We are happy and prosperous, but we recognise that there is always room for improvement, and we approach with an open mind the suggestions which shall be made by our colleagues for what they conceive to be the better interests of the British Empire.

I have only one word to add, Sir, and it is to say that we shall be most anxious to second you in offering our homage to our new Sovereign, King George V. As to the sentiments which you have expressed a moment ago, perhaps it would be better not to anticipate them, but for my part, I heartily recognise the truth of the principle which you have laid down, that if there is one principle upon which the British Empire can live, and ought to live, it is Imperial unity based upon local autonomy.

Mr. FISHER: Mr. Asquith, unlike my distinguished friend, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, I appear at these Conferences for the first time, and naturally with some trepidation in the presence of so many distinguished gentlemen. I wish to express my appreciation of the speech you have just made. Its sentiments express the views not only of the representatives here but, as Sir Wilfrid has said, of the whole of the people of the Dominions. I came to the Conference cheerfully and wholeheartedly because I have always been an advocate of Conferences. I think they are good when they assemble here, but I think no loss, indeed I believe a gain, would accrue if they could be held outside the United Kingdom. I do not speak now of the Imperial Conference as it is named and constituted. I hope the time is not far distant when Conferences of the representatives of the United Kingdom and of the Dominions beyond the seas will