

23 May, 1911.]

OPENING ADDRESS AND REPLIES.

[1st Day.

Mr. FISHER—*cont.*

not only meet in London but at the centres of other Dominions also. Nothing in my opinion has tended to develop Imperial feeling in the best sense of that term like the improvement of intercommunication, the speed and comfort of transport, and the principle of representatives meeting together and discussing the affairs of their countries.

I hope I shall not be travelling beyond the subjects which call for observation to-day if I earnestly appeal to the President to take some strong steps to remedy a grave abuse affecting the commerce of the Empire and other countries; I allude to the exorbitant charges made upon shipping using the Suez Canal. I should like also to say that I believe it would forward the interests of the Dominions and of the Mother Country if you, in the exercise of that great authority which you possess, could more expeditiously give to the Dominions the benefit of the Trade Reports that come to you through your officials in every part of the world. Should you do so we should be able to utilise them more effectively. I think by that means also we shall be able to bring our interests and our associations closer together.

You said in your address that the genius of the British race rather than a dispensation of Providence had developed the unity of the peoples of the Empire. I think that is a fine sentiment boldly stated. The other point that impressed me was that greater freedom had led to closer unity. It had done much to assure peace in the world, and might do more to prevent war. That is a great achievement. I hope the limits of such an organization have not yet been reached.

With regard to Defence, speaking for the Commonwealth, our object is to protect the liberties of our people, and assure the safety of our country. Aggression is not our aim. Anything we can do to help maintain an honoured name and free institutions shall be done cheerfully.

We particularly desire the Commonwealth to be closely associated with the Government of the United Kingdom in all they may do to promote the cause of International Arbitration, and help preserve the peace of the world.

I wish to convey through you to His Majesty the King, on behalf of the people of the Commonwealth, our gratitude and loyalty, and hope that we shall ever remain true and faithful subjects.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: Mr. Asquith, I desire to say how very highly I, as one of the representatives of New Zealand, appreciate the cordial welcome you were good enough to extend to us on our assembling here. I remember so well the circumstance to which you alluded that took place four years ago, and I also recollect the distinguished gentleman who filled the high and honourable position which you now occupy. I well remember, too, the speech delivered by him upon that occasion, and how reassuring it was to the whole of us Colonial representatives to find that the head of the British Government was anxious to do what he could to help on what we people in a minor way were endeavouring to do in the oversea Possessions, and were anxious to co-operate with the British Government in giving effect to here.

During the course of your speech, Sir, I have heard of nothing with greater pleasure than your reference to the great work, the Empire work, initiated by the late Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. I want in a humble way to add my personal testimony to what I believe has been one of the greatest achievements of the century from the historical point of view of the British Empire in the bringing together of the divided States of South Africa into one whole. It is a work that has done an immense amount of good for that country, and has impressed upon the British people all over the world the fact that probably no other people in the world than those of Great Britain, and perhaps no other Parliament in the world than the Mother of Parliaments, would have carried out what was looked upon by some as a very risky proposal to give effect to. It