

25 May, 1911.] RECONSTITUTION OF THE COLONIAL OFFICE.

[2nd Day.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: I understand that it is to be an advisory committee as far as the Imperial Government is concerned, consisting of gentlemen including the High Commissioners or any other gentlemen the Governors might select, with a view to dealing with important matters which affect the oversea Dominions. I am not quite prepared to commit myself definitely, without a little consideration, to the proposal of the High Commissioners occupying that position. Necessarily the High Commissioners are under the direct authority of their respective Governments, and we are very often in our country in the position—I am—of asking for information quite outside the Colonial Office—not anything inimical, but anything that was going on between the Governments and the Colonial Office, and asking the High Commissioner to obtain certain information for the guidance of the Government of New Zealand, with a view to our arriving at a decision to be conveyed finally through the Governors to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. I just foresee the possibility of the High Commissioners being placed in a somewhat embarrassing position. If they are upon a Committee upon which they have to vote, their independence, as far as the Government is concerned, would not be interfered with, but it would, I think, diminish their position as a channel we want to work through from time to time to obtain information for our guidance. Upon that point I would like proper time for consideration, because, so far as I know, the men whom we send here as High Commissioners are good men, representing all the countries, and, without some consideration, I should not like to place them in an invidious position.

Mr. HARCOURT: I only suggested the High Commissioners because they are the only people I could very well suggest; but I particularly said, "or any other representatives whom the Dominions might like to suggest."

Mr. FISHER: Yes, you said that.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: That is so; but I am dealing with that particular idea as it occurred to me. I think that the proposal is a step in the right direction, and I hail it with a very great deal of pleasure from that standpoint, and without in any way reflecting upon the work of the Colonial Office, because my experience has been that the work done by the Secretariat created after the last Conference in 1907 has been done excellently. I know nothing to the contrary. Everything I know is really of a very favourable character.

Regarding the proposal made for the High Commissioners being the channels of communication, I recognise what Mr. Harcourt says; but I want to point out what occurs in practice—and I speak subject to the local knowledge of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for the Colonies, who are here. The Governors in our country take the place of the King; they are his representatives. We are not infrequently in the position of having a double channel of communication—the Governor is advised upon a matter, the High Commissioner is advised upon a matter. We receive frequently a duplication of the information. In the Old Country I understand that all that information comes to the King from the administrative head of the Government—a copy of everything of importance goes to him.

The PRESIDENT: Not always through the head of the Government. For instance, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs every day sends despatches and letters to the King in the first instance.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: Yes, but it does not go direct to the King from any one outside the British Government?

The PRESIDENT: No, certainly not.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: In our country experience has shown me, at all events, that we frequently have a duplication of the work. We all lead pretty busy lives, and it is only with a view to having what I call the most effective