

1 June, 1911.]

DECLARATION OF LONDON.

[3rd Day.]

Mr. FISHER : And then blame the Prime Minister.

The PRESIDENT : As a matter of fact, the Prime Minister can generally be communicated with, but you cannot assemble the Cabinet.

Sir EDWARD GREY : Just in the same way as one individual Minister sometimes has to act and take responsibility without consulting the Cabinet, and the Prime Minister has to act without consulting the Cabinet on some things from the nature of the case when there is not time, so the Home Government when the Conference is going on would have to deal with the points without being able to consult the Dominions, simply because it is not physically possible to do so. Then there will be Conventions signed at the Hague Conference, and a considerable interval for ratification. Those Conventions will be circulated to the Dominion Governments, and they will have an opportunity of signifying whether they are satisfied with those Conventions or not. If they are not satisfied, and if those Conventions are not ratified, and if the matter is really of great importance, we must have, of course, something in the nature of a conference here, to which the Dominions who found themselves specially interested could name their own representative and send him to thresh the matter out; and the final decision, whatever it was, would be come to, I hope unanimously; but, anyhow, whatever the decision come to was, it would be after considerable consultation, and there could be no complaint again in future that there had not been consultation between the Dominions and the Home Government.

It is possible that some Convention by the Hague Conference may be signed which the Home Government may approve of, and which one of the Dominions may object to and another may strongly approve of, and so forth; so we cannot be sure of unanimity; but we can be sure of consultation, and it is the intention of the Government in future—and I have described the process gone through in order to make it clear—not only to have consultation, but to make that consultation really a practical thing, which, as regards the proceedings of the Hague Conferences, and so forth, will be, and can be, carried out.

In conclusion, I have only to say that I do hope the Conference will agree to the ratification of the Declaration of London, because some other Powers are very much attached to having the Declaration of London ratified. They look upon it as a step forward in international agreement and arbitration, and if at this time of day, after all that has passed, we were to withdraw from it and say we would not ratify it, it would be, as far as we are concerned, a great blow to the confidence of other Powers in regarding us as a Power which is prepared to forward arbitration. As we are anxious, especially with the United States, to co-operate in furthering arbitration, I think it is absolutely essential that we should go through with the Declaration of London. I think on the merits it is advantageous to us, though we have not got everything that we want, and, from the general point of view of arbitration, I think it would be the greatest disappointment to other nations, and really almost an incentive to them to go on with their arbitration arrangements and international arrangements of this kind without us, if we stood aside from this Declaration and were not to ratify it.

Mr. FISHER : Do I understand you to limit this to matters which may be referred to the Hague Conference? We wanted to go into other departments of your work.

Sir EDWARD GREY : You mean into treaties generally.

Mr. FISHER : Yes.

Sir EDWARD GREY : I do not intend to limit it to that. There are some cases of treaties where it is exceedingly difficult, owing to time, to have any such consultation.

Mr. FISHER : We recognise all that, but I do not wish to be limited to the Hague Conference.