

3rd Day.]

DECLARATION OF LONDON.

[1 June, 1911

Sir EDWARD GREY—*cont.*

Now, as to the third point, whether the operations of the British Fleet are likely to be unduly restricted when we are at war, I think what Mr. Batchelor had in his mind with regard to that was probably that we have given up the doctrine of continuous voyage to a certain extent. We have agreed under the Declaration of London that we would not seize goods which are conditional contraband when they are consigned to a neutral Power even though destined for an enemy, and heretofore we have claimed the right to seize those goods. Therefore that is a restriction upon our power of bringing pressure to bear upon our enemy when we are at war. I believe the Admiralty have never made use of the right; the right would not be of much use in practice or much good to them, because it is so easy to consign goods, even though they are destined for the enemy, to a neutral port in such a way that it is impossible when the captain of a man-of-war boards and searches the vessel to prove that they are destined for the enemy, so that the doctrine of continuous voyage would in practice be of very little use to us in time of war.

Here again is another instance, in giving up the doctrine of continuous voyage with regard to conditional contraband, that it cuts both ways, and we gain in certain ways. Other Powers have given up the doctrine of continuous voyage too, and the result will be this: that if we found for a time there was difficulty in clearing the whole Atlantic Ocean of any of the roving cruisers of the enemy, it would be possible for goods coming here to be consigned to a neighbouring port, any neighbouring port in Europe of a Power with which we were at peace, and all we should have to do instead of keeping the whole of the Atlantic clear for neutral vessels would be to protect the passage across the Channel from some neutral port to one of our own. Of course, if the British Navy could not do that the war would be over, because we should be beaten.

Mr. BATCHELOR: We have no neutral ports.

Sir EDWARD GREY: You may not gain in this particular, but you do not lose over this doctrine of continuous voyage, and when you come to South Africa, for instance, the questions of continuous voyage and neutral ports may be of real importance.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: On that point would you mind informing the Conference, Sir Edward, what there is in the statement which is so generally made by people, including representatives from the oversea countries and published in the Press, that in time of war there would be no neutral ports in England at all?

Sir EDWARD GREY: I was dealing with the base of supplies where the terms are vague. That is going back to the other point. I will revert to it in a minute, but I had better finish the one point I was on about the continuous voyage. Certainly in South Africa it would have a very distinct bearing. I do not see that in Australia it could, because you have not got ports near you belonging to neutrals, and all your stuff comes direct. But you do not lose anything by this, and if the Dominion of Australia does not lose by this, there is no reason why other parts of the British Empire should not have the advantage which would accrue from making use of neutral ports in this way.

Where articles are absolute contraband—arms, munitions of war—by the Declaration of London the doctrine of continuous voyage can be applied, and that is a distinct gain as far as the operations of our fleet are concerned, because there has been no unanimity hitherto with regard to the doctrine of continuous voyage, no rule which we could have relied upon being accepted by other Powers when we were at war.

Sir Joseph Ward's point I really have dealt with before. People say the terms are so vague as to what is the base of supplies, that every port in the United Kingdom might be construed as a base of supplies. If you are going to say that every town from which there is a railway is to be a base of supplies, then of course every port in the world is to be construed as a base of supplies.