

4th Day.]

DECLARATION OF LONDON.

[2 June, 1911.]

The PRESIDENT : The British Government do not want to shovel it off on to the Dominions.

Mr. FISHER : I do not want to handicap you either. We want to be associated as far as possible.

The PRESIDENT : I really think that this gives effect to both views in the resolution. Speaking on behalf of the Government I think it does. Then is it the pleasure of the Conference that this resolution be adopted?

The resolution, as amended, was carried unanimously.

Sir JOSEPH WARD : I think it would be desirable, in view of the position that we have got to now, for the Conference to express an opinion on the Declaration of London, and I suggest we put on record our view : "That the Conference, after full consideration and debate, approves the ratification of the Declaration of London." If we are all in agreement as to the desirability of the Declaration of London, as we have it, being ratified by the British Government, I think the mere expression of our opinion, which does not after all concrete into a practical proposition, is not sufficient; and it seems to me it would be just as well, as we have unanimously supported it, to express our opinion in the direction I have indicated.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER : For my part I shall be very glad if you will move in that direction.

Sir JOSEPH WARD : I move, "That the Conference, after full consideration and debate, approves the ratification of the Declaration of London."

Sir WILFRID LAURIER : I shall be very happy to concur in that resolution.

Mr. FISHER : I find myself in a difficulty here.

The PRESIDENT : May I say a word before Mr. Fisher states his difficulty? I quite recognise the position that the Australian Government has taken up in this matter, and, if I may venture to say so, the admirable spirit which they have shown in their desire to secure unanimity in our procedure with regard to this matter. It is in every way worthy of them, and of the spirit which has animated the Conference from the beginning.

I confess, speaking upon behalf of the British Government, I do attach considerable importance to the passing of such a resolution as this, because, for reasons which no one has given better than Mr. Fisher just now, it is a tremendous step in advance in the direction of, first of all, framing a code of international law, which, though it may not be perfect—and we do not for a moment contend that it is perfect, and recognise the force of many of the criticisms which have been made in regard to particular provisions—is yet an enormous advance upon anything that has hitherto taken place, and setting up simultaneously an international court which may be trusted to act impartially in the administration of that code, and in the settlement of concrete cases in dispute which may arise under it. To have got the great Powers of the world into agreement upon a point like that seems to us to mark such a tremendous and significant step on the road which we are hoping to travel, that it will be an immense encouragement, I think, if this Conference, representing as it does all the self-governing parts of the British Empire, whatever opinions we may individually entertain as to particular provisions of the Declaration of London, and however much we should like to see a phrase altered here or there, and something, if you like, omitted, or something added, will, looking at what Mr. Fisher has called the general trend and object of it, welcome it and say : "Yes,