

4th Day.]

DECLARATION OF LONDON.

[2 June, 1911.]

Sir EDWARD MORRIS—*cont.*

formation from those who have no very special party interest. Now, I take it that the Lord Chancellor's speech is practically a Judgment on this Declaration as if he were sitting on the Bench, and it is important and instructive in that way; and I think all round we have a new work on International law, and what was chaos and confusion before is now to a very large extent made clear and certain.

For these reasons I should be sorry to see any resolution go on record which might be misunderstood, which might be misleading, and which probably now would not be intended.

Mr. FISHER: I am sure we are gratified, and I think the whole Conference are pleased with the manner in which the debate has been carried on on this resolution submitted by the Commonwealth. The members will see that the terms of the resolution are such that it is not intended to hit either at the Government or at the Declaration itself. There were certain features in that Declaration which appeared to us to be bad, and which should not appear there in the way in which they do appear. The whole general trend of the Declaration was not attacked, and has not been attacked at any time—at least, from our side; but we did think, and Australia has thought for many years, that we should have been advised in some way not merely prior to the signing of the Declaration or a treaty or a convention affecting our interest, but we should be informed before the ideas of the Imperial Government had matured on any subject that would materially affect our interests one way or the other. That is our view. I think General Botha put it very clearly in his statement this morning when he said that the Imperial Government should not bind themselves with foreign countries before consultation. That is a very definite statement.

Sir D. DE VILLIERS GRAAFF: Affecting a particular Dominion.

Mr. FISHER: Obviously that is so. Hitherto, I think, there have been promises of such a thing being done, but not in such a definite, distinct, and clear way as it was put to the Conference by the Secretary for Foreign Affairs the other day, speaking on behalf of the Government; and we feel gratified that a new condition of affairs shall prevail from now, I presume. I do not know whether I can make it clearer, but that new condition of affairs, as I interjected while the matter was being discussed by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs yesterday, should not be limited to questions that are brought before the Hague Conference, but should apply to other questions also, and that, I think, is concurred in. We do not feel, under the circumstances, that we should press this resolution now, but it has been suggested, and we approve of it, that, as the Declaration itself is a great advance on any previous arrangement in international affairs, it would be wilful waste of, shall I say, energy and a loss of valuable labours if we were to destroy it simply because it does not contain everything that we desire. I spoke strongly in opening about our desire to co-operate in every effort of the Imperial Government and all other Governments to provide machinery for the settlement of international disputes without resort to war. This Declaration is undoubtedly a new and additional piece of machinery; it will be a valuable piece of machinery. We do not say it is perfect—we say it is a long way from being perfect from our point of view; but we do say that as it stands it is much too good for us to vote against.

I propose, with the concurrence of the Conference, to ask leave to withdraw that motion, and to substitute another motion to this effect: "That this Conference, after hearing the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, cordially concurs in the proposal of the Imperial Government, viz.: (a) That the Dominions shall be afforded an opportunity of consultation when framing the instructions to be given to British Delegates at future meetings of the Hague Conference, and that Conventions affecting the Dominions provisionally assented to at that Conference shall be circulated among the Dominion Governments for their consideration before any such Convention is signed; and (b) that a similar procedure where time and opportunity and the subject-matter permit, shall as far as