

*5th Day.]*

STANDING COMMITTEE.

[8 June, 1911.]

Dr. FINDLAY : It seems to me that is an immensely useful function; because it is hopeless to go into the details of the uniformity of Company Law and Copyright Law at a Conference like this.

Mr. FISHER : When Conferences were first suggested there was considerable opposition to them, because they might interfere in some way with the self-government and the responsible government of the Dominions. That has been successfully overcome, and I think, with the greatest respect to those who take a different view, that the time has arrived when we need some such body to carry on the work between these Conferences. Hitherto the Conferences have been dealing with the Government of the United Kingdom, with part of the household shut. During this Conference the Government of the United Kingdom have taken the representatives of the oversea Dominions fully into their confidence in matters of moment and of grave concern to the whole of us. I think under those circumstances it is all the more necessary that we should have this subsidiary Committee to deal with the important work that is done openly in this Conference and facilitate communication even to a closer extent and degree than hitherto.

That seems to me to be the position we occupy to-day. As to this draft memorandum, I say at once that I agree so far as it says that this Committee shall only be advisory, and shall have no executive power whatever to commit any one to anything except to advise the Governments and to co-operate with the Ministers here in any matter where it can assist and be of use to them. I agree with Sir Joseph Ward that, while it might be advisable that the principal representatives of the Dominions permanently here might be most useful members on that Committee, still it would be more advisable to name no one, but to leave it to the respective Dominions from time to time to appoint their own representatives.

I am very glad of this opportunity of saying that many important matters will undoubtedly come up between these four-year Conferences. Immediately we were taken into the full confidence of the Government here I was very doubtful whether that new position would stand four-year Conferences. It seems to me that the Conferences will have to be at shorter periods, unless you are going to intrust to some other person or body larger powers than we are intrusting them with at the present time, and unless the Government here will convey to them, or to us in a larger measure than they have done in the past, their confidence in matters that we cannot discuss here.

On the merits of the proposal I think they are good, and I should like my friend Mr. Batchelor, who is immediately concerned with this matter, to address himself to the subject, if he will.

Mr. BATCHELOR : In addition to the limitation that was mentioned by Mr. Fisher, and which was also referred to by yourself, Sir, that this Committee would be purely advisory and would have no power to vote, there is also the further limitation, that before it can consider anything at all, before it can be brought into being at any time, the Secretary of State will inform the Dominions, and the Dominions must agree to the discussion of any question. Under those circumstances it seems that there can be hardly any doubt as to the advisability of having a Standing Committee, which, whenever all the Dominions desire anything to be discussed which has come before this Conference or which ought to come before the next Conference, can be called into being and discuss them. It is a proposition which I should think no one, however anxious for complete autonomy, could object to. I suppose the Secretary to the Imperial Conference, Mr. Just, would report to this Committee on any work he had been engaged upon?

The CHAIRMAN : Certainly.