

5th Day.]

STANDING COMMITTEE.

[8 June, 1911.]

Sir EDWARD MORRIS—*cont.*

and Measures, or any of these questions as subsidiary matters, how could they possibly accomplish this any better than the Board of Trade or other similar Boards here by dealing direct with the Dominions? If they were here sitting to-day on any of these matters, they would simply have to invoke the aid and assistance of the machinery of the Board of Trade or other Department.

Then, as regards the constitution of such a body, it appears to me that is only going to lead to confusion and circumlocution; in other words, they would have no binding powers; they would have no authority whatever. All they have to do is to advise, and even then it would be difficult for them to advise unless they were a permanent body, daily acquiring such information as would entitle their recommendations to be regarded seriously. I took rather an interest in the debate resulting from the proposal of Sir Joseph Ward in relation to the Imperial Council. I thought it was an impossible proposition as long as the present machinery of government exists; but it may come when a complete change will have taken place in the Constitution of the Imperial Government as well as the Constitutions of the Dominions. This Conference itself is a very good illustration of the little practical work it is possible to accomplish even if you had such a permanent committee as is now proposed.

It is four years now since the last Conference was held. We came here nearly a month ago with very comprehensive agenda not contributed to, perhaps, equally by all the Dominions, but very careful and, as I say, comprehensive agenda, and the result of the work will probably be—the outcome of the whole deliberation will probably be—one or two important matters that were not on the agenda at all. The first is a statement by the Secretary of State in relation to the consultation in the future of the Dominions with regard to trade matters similar to the Declaration of London, and the partnership constituted by the statement of the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey. Now if the last four years was only able to furnish the material that we have been discussing, and from which such little practical result, I am afraid, may flow, what value would there be in having a committee sitting to deal merely with matters which, I assume, would only go to them after the failure of the various Dominions themselves to deal with the Colonial Office direct?

Speaking for Newfoundland, we would have nothing, practically, to submit, except it would be some very serious and important question upon which we should have a difference with the Colonial Office, because at the present time we are not interfered with in any way. In other words, we are allowed to work out our constitution in its broadest possible way, and thus it is only on an important constitutional question that we should have any difference; and if that difference should arise, it is not a matter we would submit to that Committee. Of course, there might be more matters in common between Dominions like New Zealand and Australia, where probably a Conference between their representatives on matters in which they would be peculiarly interested might be of value; but to have a permanent committee dealing with questions which are now being satisfactorily attended to does not appear to me to be of any very great importance; and I am afraid, by reason of the fact that they are to have no powers whatever—that seems to commend itself to some—the fact of their having no powers and not being able to do anything at all—and being merely advisory, it would simply lead to multiplication of departments, circumlocution, and confusion. That is my humble opinion.

I understand this was merely a suggestion of the Secretary of State for the Colonies arising out of the proposal of Sir Joseph Ward, and if it was a mere question of voting against it, I do not suppose I should vote against the proposal, for the reason that, in my opinion, it will not amount to anything.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: As I said at the outset, I approach—and my colleagues, who unfortunately are not here to-day, although I have had some discussion with them, have approached—this question with an open mind, not in any way favouring it, but we were not anxious to press our own view, and are rather anxious to take the views of our colleagues at the Conference; and certainly, for my part, I am thankful it has been done in so open a manner as it has been done.