

10th Day.]

TREATIES.

[16 June, 1911.]

Sir E. GREY—*cont.*

negotiations for a new treaty in which we would make one of the Articles to the effect that when that new treaty came into force it would abrogate the old treaty ; but supposing the negotiations were protracted, and we found more difficulty than expected in arriving at a satisfactory conclusion of a new treaty, the old treaty, with such benefits as it contained, would still remain in force, and there would not be the risk of our having denounced an old treaty, the old treaty coming to an end, and our having found insuperable difficulties in the way of negotiating any new treaty, and having that unsatisfactory state of uncertainty existing as to what the commercial relations were going to be with the foreign country, which is always very much resented by trade. So what I would propose is that we should accept the Resolution with the intention of opening negotiations as soon as possible with the particular countries whose treaties are now out of date, and that we should make them the proposal in the first instance which I have suggested—that they should alter the existing treaties to bring them up to date, and, if that is found impracticable, that we should then ask them to open up negotiations for a new treaty ; but the old treaty to remain in existence until the new treaty had been concluded. I ought to say I think negotiations for a new treaty would take considerable time, in some cases at any rate, because in the case of these old treaties there are some provisions which are convenient to us and to which we appeal from time to time to these foreign countries, but which are no longer so convenient to them as they were at the time they were framed ; and, therefore, it is quite possible that when we ask them to negotiate new treaties because we wish to bring up this point which we consider essential to us arising out of modern conditions, they may find certain other points which are convenient to them which they also may wish to bring up. But that is no reason why we should not begin the negotiations. I only mention it now to prevent disappointment.

Mr. FISHER : Can you give any indication in years of what you mean by a considerable time ?

Sir E. GREY : I do not mean geological periods of time, but a year is a good long time for negotiations, of course.

Mr. FISHER : Anything like that—a year or two.

Sir E. GREY : If you cannot bring a thing to a conclusion in a year or two, providing you are negotiating earnestly, it rather points to the fact that negotiation is impossible.

Mr. FISHER : If all you mean is a year or two, that is all right.

Sir E. GREY : If we cannot bring it to a conclusion in a year or two it looks as if the negotiations would never result in anything, and we should have to consider the situation afresh ; but I do not think we need contemplate that until we have found negotiation impossible. It would follow from the Resolution that we should begin negotiations, and if we find those impracticable the next Imperial Conference would have to consider the situation as we find it then. We will make the best use of the time we can for negotiation in the intervening years before the next Conference.

The PRESIDENT : It appears to be the unanimous wish of the Conference that this Resolution should be carried and put on record. Perhaps I may be allowed to say that we have had a very frank as well as interesting discussion.

Mr. FISHER : Is it not the case that the Austria-Hungarian Treaty and the Italian Treaty are almost interlaced with each other, which makes it somewhat difficult to denounce the one without the other ?