

20 June, 1911.]

RECIPROCAL VISITS OF MINISTERS.

[12th Day.]

Mr. FISHER—*cont.*

the next meeting of the Conference in one of the oversea Dominions." I do not want to labour it. I do not want to embarrass the Ministers of the United Kingdom in any way; but I do say few of them have any conception of the kindly welcome that would be given to them if they were able to visit our oversea countries. I do impress upon you, Mr. Asquith, and those with whom you are associated as your Ministers, the advantage it would be to us to have these visits. I shall not press that part of it. The time at their disposal I know is limited; but, at any rate, the advantage to be gained by being personally acquainted and having personal knowledge would be very great indeed. We had the pleasure of meeting Sir Charles Lucas in our Dominion of the Commonwealth, and it has been a great advantage to us to have that visit from him; but, while that is true of the permanent head of a Department of the Colonial Office, it would be to a greater extent true, regarding any Minister of the United Kingdom who could come and honour us with a visit.

The second part of the resolution is one of greater consequence, that the Government might be asked to take into consideration the question of whether a Conference or Conferences should be held outside London, because that is practically what it comes to. I am strengthened in my view in this matter because you do not hesitate to go to other centres to discuss Treaties; you send your important representatives, sometimes Ministers of the highest standing, to different parts of Europe to discuss, negotiate, and settle Treaties. Now the discussions at this Conference, in my opinion, will have as great an effect upon the government, safety, and progress of the whole Empire as even some of the great Treaties have had; and it is for those reasons that I venture to submit this resolution, not dogmatically nor demanding that it should be done, but that the matter be taken into your most serious consideration with a view to discovering whether anything of the kind can be done. I have my own views about the Conference. I believe that the time is not far distant when we shall have even a larger number of representatives at this Conference. In your own words, Mr. Asquith, the genius of the British people seems to have been able to discover a method not only of uniting our own people, but helping in a great many cases to unite other people in peace and amity and to promote progress.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: I altogether approve the suggestion of my friend, Mr. Fisher. He has put the case as admirably as it could be put in everything that he said, and I humbly commend it to your consideration if you can find time to do what he proposes.

Sir JOSEPH WARD: Mr. Asquith, I should like to indorse the sentiments so well expressed by Mr. Fisher and Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and to say that if it was possible for one of His Majesty's Ministers to visit the oversea Dominions, I am persuaded it would do an immense amount of good. The Secretary of State for the Colonies I know must have heavy duties attached to his office to which he must devote his attention as his work is so widespread over the British Empire, but the people of our countries would hail a visit of that kind from the standpoint of regarding it as being a practical work for the benefit of the Empire, and I know of nothing that would do so much good as if a gentleman in the position of Mr. Harcourt could during his term of office come out to our countries. I am sure it would be an immense satisfaction to the people, and from the practical standpoint would do an immense amount of good.

Regarding the second proposition, while I am prepared to support it, still I foresee great difficulties in connection with it. I do not see how, speaking frankly, it is possible for all the machinery requisite for the Imperial Conference to be transferred to any one of our oversea Dominions, and a conference would be of little practical use without it. If His Majesty's Government can see their way clear to do that, however, I agree with Mr. Fisher that it would be of immense service, and I should be exceedingly pleased to learn that it could be carried out.

General BOTHA: Mr. Asquith, I agree with what Sir Joseph Ward has said. I have sympathy with the first proposition, but, as to the second one, I doubt whether it is practicable. We come here to England, and we have the opportunity of meeting all