

12th Day.]

RECIPROCAL VISITS OF MINISTERS.

[20 June, 1911.]

General BOTHA—*cont.*

the Ministers and discussing with them, and we have to discuss with the Minister of Defence, the Naval Minister at the Admiralty, and with the various other Ministers. If you have the next Conference in one of the Dominions, I doubt if we could have all the British Ministers there, and therefore I think it would be awkward. I doubt whether it is practicable, although we would be very glad if it could be done.

Sir EDWARD MORRIS: I rather agree with this proposal of Mr. Fisher. I am altogether in sympathy with it as regards the desirability of the public men of England from time to time coming to the Colonies, especially those who look forward some day to being Ministers, but as regards the holding of the Imperial Conference in the various Dominions, I think with the others that that would be almost impossible; for instance, we could not have held this Conference without having Parliament here prorogued, because it would be necessary to have the Prime Minister and the various chiefs of departments and all the machinery and all the material, and all the books and documents transferred. I think besides that, holding it here in the centre of the Empire adds greatly to its strength and really makes it an Imperial Conference. But if it could be held with advantage in the Dominions, then, of course, there could be no possible objection to it.

The PRESIDENT: Gentlemen, on behalf of the Government of the United Kingdom I have to thank Mr. Fisher for the very kind and considerate terms in which he proposed the resolution, and to assure him that we heartily reciprocate the sentiments which he expressed. I think this Conference has admirably illustrated the advantages of personal intercourse between the responsible statesmen who are carrying on in different parts of the Empire what is, after all, the same Government, His Majesty's Government. We get to know one another, which is a very great pleasure and advantage in itself. Persons who are represented merely by names become to us living personalities, and I think I may go so far as to say, become not only acquaintances, but friends, and we realise much more clearly than we possibly could by correspondence and by indirect means of intercourse what are the real problems and difficulties of government in different parts of the Empire. There can be no question that personal contact and intercourse for a few weeks like this is an enormous advantage to us all.

In regard to the actual proposals in the Resolution, the first branch of it which declares that "it is desirable that Ministers of the United Kingdom and the Dominions should, if possible, between Conferences exchange reciprocal visits" is one with which I altogether agree. I notice, from the type-written Resolution, that Mr. Fisher has not put in the words "if possible" which I have just incorporated.

Mr. FISHER: "Desirable."

The PRESIDENT: He says it is "desirable." He does not go so far as to say that it is necessary. That it is desirable there can be no shadow of a doubt, and I must say, so far as the United Kingdom is concerned, I shall certainly, if I continue to be responsible for the conduct of affairs here, make every effort I possibly can to insure that one or more of my colleagues shall have the opportunity of carrying out your kind wish of visiting the Dominions. It is not, as you know, all of you who are Heads of Governments, easy to spare a hard-worked colleague presiding over a very complicated department for an indefinite length of time.

Mr. FISHER: It is a good rest.

The PRESIDENT: It would be very pleasant for him, but perhaps not quite so pleasant for those who are left behind. All the same, those are difficulties which ought to be overcome with a little adjustment, and I assure you that we shall do our best to give effect to that part of Mr. Fisher's resolution.

With regard to the second part of the resolution I confess that I share the doubts that have been expressed. There, again, if it were possible I think it would be a very desirable thing, but I share the doubts that have been expressed by more than one speaker as to the practicability of carrying it into effect, and yet preserving the full utility of this institution of the Conference. Here we are in the centre of the