

20 June, 1911.]

CONCLUDING SPEECHES.

[12th Day.

Sir EDWARD MORRIS: Mr. Asquith, I desire to very heartily concur in the resolution so very ably proposed by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and to indorse everything that has been said by the other speakers in support of that. I desire merely to add my own appreciation of the uniform courtesy and kindness extended to me by you, and by Mr. Harcourt, and the various departmental heads of the offices who have been here as well as members of the Staff. I would also like to indorse what has been said in relation to the staffs of the various departments, particularly the Colonial Secretary's Department, and the Secretary to the Conference, and the other secretaries that we have come in contact with, and to express the hope referred to by Mr. Fisher that their efforts will be suitably and properly recognised, as I have no doubt they will.

The PRESIDENT: Gentlemen, I thank you very heartily for the terms in which this resolution is couched, for the speeches with which it has been supported, and for the evidence which those speeches and your demeanour afford of the genuine sentiment which it conveys. So far as it refers to me personally I can assure you that I esteem it as great a privilege as has fallen to my lot since I have had the honour of being in this country the First Minister of the Crown, that I have been permitted to be the first Prime Minister of the United Kingdom who has occupied the post of President of an Imperial Conference. That will be a recollection which I shall always cherish with pride and satisfaction. I am confident that the example which it has been my honour to set will be followed by those who come after me, and that the presidency of these conferences will be regarded as one of the obvious and natural, as also one of the most important, duties of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

Gentlemen, as your main obligations, so far as you are under obligation at all to persons in this matter, are due to my right honourable friend and colleague, Mr. Harcourt, I associate myself entirely, if I may do so, with every word of Sir Wilfrid Laurier's eloquent tribute. Mr. Harcourt has not been long at the Colonial Office, but I think I may venture to appeal to the verdict of you who know better than anyone else and with more intimacy and more responsibility what the affairs of the Empire are, that he has already more than justified his selection for that responsible post. And that the work, as Sir Wilfrid Laurier says, not perceived, work carried on behind the scenes, but none the less arduous and responsible, preparing the ground for a meeting of this kind, has never been more efficiently performed. We both thank you very heartily for your kind recognition for any services we have been able to render.

I would, if you will allow me, just say two or three words more by way of survey in regard to the work achieved by the Conference itself. If I were asked to define what has been its dominant and governing feature, I should say it has been the attempt to promote and develop closer co-operation through the old British institution of free and frank discussion.

Gentlemen, I think you will agree with me that the value of the Conference and its permanent results are not to be judged entirely—although in that respect it need not be afraid of comparison with any preceding body of the kind—by the actual resolutions which it has affirmed and the proposals which it has adopted. I agree with Sir Joseph Ward that some of the most valuable, perhaps the most valuable, use to which we have been able to put our time has been in the consideration of matters which we have deliberately abstained from coming to any, for the moment, definite conclusion upon. We have cleared the air, we have cleared the ground, we have got to a better mutual understanding of our relative and reciprocal requirements. We see, if I may venture to say so, in truer perspective and proportion, the bulk and dominance of not a few of our Imperial problems, and that is a result which could never have been attained in any other way than by the assembling together of the responsible statesmen of the different parts of the Empire to hold a perfectly free interchange of opinion, each presenting those aspects of the case with which he himself, from his own local experience, was exceptionally familiar. It is the bringing together into the common stock, if I may say so, of all these various contributory