

problems with which we are face to face. I feel confident of this: that it will be a very long time before his services are forgotten, either by South Africa, with which he was more intimately associated, or with the citizens of the British Empire wherever they may happen to be. I want, too, to express my regret that we have not with us on the present occasion men who did great work in days gone by. I refer to Lord Milner, Lord Long—better known to us as the Right Honourable Mr. Walter Long—and Sir Robert Borden. I hope that their retirement from Empire service is only temporary; but, in any case, I trust—and I know it—that when we require their advice and counsel their services to the Empire will always be willingly and faithfully given.

I think I ought to say a word of welcome to those who are met in this room for the first time, and I feel confident that they will do credit to those behind them who have honoured them with their confidence, and that their coming here will be an acquisition to the Conference, which I hope and believe will make for better things so far as the Empire is concerned.

And now, Prime Minister, I want to refer, briefly, to the very fine speech which we, the members of this organization, had the opportunity of listening to yesterday.

#### STATUS OF DOMINIONS.

I want to say that I look upon it as the most important speech delivered since the war, and a speech which, to the British citizens of the Dominions, will give great satisfaction, and not only to them but to the citizens at the heart of the Empire, the United Kingdom itself. It will give confidence to a number of people and a very large number of citizens who are anxious about the present position and feel a certain anxiety with regard to what may happen at this Conference. The speech was candid, outspoken, and well expressed, and it gave the impression, which I have not the very slightest doubt it was intended to convey, that the Prime Minister intends to place the whole of his cards upon the table—take us, who are the representatives of the overseas Dominions, into his complete confidence, and ask for our assistance in settling the difficulties which at present appear to confront us. The speech, in my opinion, struck the right note, and it will give, I am quite sure, more confidence to people overseas and to citizens generally than the Prime Minister himself imagines could possibly be the case. Ever since the signatures of the representatives of the Dominions were attached to the Peace Treaty at Versailles on the 28th June, 1919, there has been a feeling on the part of many intelligent men and women that the future of the Empire may possibly have been endangered thereby. What I mean is this: that I have seen it stated repeatedly, as a result of the signing of the Peace Treaty—which, of course, included the Covenant of the League of Nations—the Dominions of the Empire had acquired complete independence, and in case of the Empire being involved in war—which, I say, heaven forbid! and I say it with all my heart and soul—any one of the Dominions might refrain from taking part or assisting the Empire in any way. I do not agree with that view, and I go upon the principle that when the King, the Head of the State, declares war the whole of his subjects are at war; and that must be the case if some of the best constitutional authorities are right. That is one of the causes of anxiety at the present time. There is the other as a logical sequence of the first—that any Dominion—I will not say Dependencies: Dependencies are in a different position—but any Dominion may, on account of what has taken place, enter into a treaty with any foreign country irrespective of what the Empire as a whole may do. I am not now referring to a treaty entered into for commercial purposes—that is quite another matter. As I understand the position, any Dominion may make a commercial arrangement with any foreign country, but the treaties of which I am thinking and of which many other people are thinking are treaties involving war or peace, or foreign policy, as the case may be. These latter are the treaties which I understand, in existing circumstances, a Dominion has not the right to enter into. I bring this up now; I had thought of waiting for another year, but one never knows what may happen during twelve months. Personally, I doubt if it will be possible to hold the Conference which was intended for next year, for reasons which may not perhaps have occurred to many here present. I think I am right in saying there will be an election in Australia next year. I am not autho-