

the application, in their present form, of certain provisions of the principal statute relating to merchant shipping—viz., the Merchant Shipping Act of 1894, more particularly clauses 735 and 736, with the constitutional status of the several members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

In this case also we felt that, although, in the evolution of the British Empire, certain inequalities had been allowed to remain as regards various questions of maritime affairs, it was essential in dealing with these inequalities to consider the practical aspects of the matter. The difficulties in the way of introducing any immediate alterations in the Merchant Shipping Code (which dealt, amongst other matters, with the registration of British ships all over the world) were fully appreciated and it was felt to be necessary, in any review of the position, to take into account such matters of general concern as the qualifications for registry as a British ship, the status of British ships in war, the work done by His Majesty's Consuls in the interest of British shipping and seamen, and the question of Naval Courts at foreign ports to deal with crimes and offences on British ships abroad.

We came finally to the conclusion that, following a precedent which had been found useful on previous occasions, the general question of merchant-shipping legislation had best be remitted to a special Sub-Conference, which could meet most appropriately at the same time as the Expert Committee, to which reference is made above. We thought that this special Sub-Conference should be invited to advise on the following general lines: To consider and report on the principles which should govern, in the general interest, the practice and legislation relating to merchant shipping in the various parts of the Empire, having regard to the change in constitutional status and general relations which has occurred since existing laws were enacted.

We took note that the representatives of India particularly desired that India, in view of the importance of her shipping interests, should be given an opportunity of being represented at the proposed Sub-Conference. We felt that the full representation of India on an equal footing with Great Britain and the Dominions would not only be welcomed, but could very properly be given, due regard being had to the special constitutional position of India as explained in Section III of this report.

(e) *Appeals to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.*

Another matter which we discussed, in which a general constitutional principle was raised, concerned the conditions governing appeals from judgments in the Dominions to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. From these discussions it became clear that it was no part of the policy of His Majesty's Government in Great Britain that questions affecting judicial appeals should be determined otherwise than in accordance with the wishes of the part of the Empire primarily affected. It was, however, generally recognized that, where changes in the existing system were proposed which, while primarily affecting one part, raised issues in which other parts were also concerned, such changes ought only to be carried out after consultation and discussion.

So far as the work of the committee was concerned, this general understanding expressed all that was required. The question of some immediate change in the present conditions governing appeals from the Irish Free State was not pressed in relation to the present Conference, though it was made clear that the right was reserved to bring up the matter again at the next Imperial Conference for discussion in relation to the facts of this particular case.

V. RELATIONS WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES.

From questions specially concerning the relations of the various parts of the British Empire with one another we naturally turned to those affecting their relations with foreign countries. In the latter sphere a beginning had been made towards making clear those relations by the resolution of the Imperial Conference of 1923 on the subject of the negotiation, signature, and ratification of treaties.* But it seemed desirable to examine the working of that Resolution during the past three years and also to consider whether the principles laid down with regard to Treaties could not be applied with advantage in a wider sphere.

* For resolution see A.-6, 1924, p. 8.