

OPENING SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA.

General Hertzog : Prime Minister, may I also, on behalf of myself and my colleague, thank you very heartily for the welcome extended to us in this Conference ? I also wish to join in the tribute paid by you to the memory of Lord Curzon and Mr. Massey. Lord Curzon I never knew, except, of course, as a public man, but I knew the great services he rendered during his lifetime. Mr. Massey I happened to meet in 1910 for a short time, and I think there again I may say that what I knew of him I knew as a public man whose services were published to the world ; we all liked and respected him in that way.

Nature of Empire.

Now, Sir, we are here to consider matters of an Imperial nature, and perhaps I may say just a few words. The Empire, I take it, Sir, may be said to consist in the sum total of relations uniting so many associated States under the Crown. Those relations are of many and various kinds. We have the relations of blood, of friendship, of common interests and ideals, and of allegiance to a common Crown. The strength, therefore, of the ties that bind us as a Commonwealth will depend at any given time upon the ties, upon the relations, binding us at that particular moment, and especially upon the kind and quality of those relations. These relations are the cement of the Empire, and our strength and power of endurance will depend upon the quality of that cement. I take it that one of the objects of our gathering together here to-day and for the following weeks is to ensure the usefulness and permanency of our relations as an Empire by advancing its efficiency as an instrument of good for each of its associated members as well as for the world at large. In the attempt to attain that object I wish to assure you, Sir, of the hearty support and co-operation of myself and my colleague on behalf of the Union of South Africa. We are prepared to co-operate to the fullest extent in laying as solidly as possible the foundations of our Commonwealth of Nations so as to make it as durable as it can be, and here I wish to say a few words as to South Africa's attitude in regard to the Empire or British Community of Nations. It has our hearty support, and will ever have our hearty support, irrespective of parties and races, as long as it is, and shows the character of, a Commonwealth of free and independent nations, each free and striving to attain what is best for itself, yet in such a manner and in such a spirit as will conduce wherever and as much as possible to the well-being of all. If I may state in a few words the principle which should guide us in matters of general Imperial interest, I would say : In principle, unrestrained freedom of action to each individual member of the Commonwealth ; in practice, consultation with a view to co-operative action wherever possible. It is clear to me that in order to attain the highest degree of permanency and usefulness for our Commonwealth we shall have to be frank with one another ; but, above all, we shall have to be sincere, imbued with the spirit of good will and a desire to be of real service both to our country and to one another. It will be in that spirit of frankness and sincerity, I hope, that I and my colleague will assist at this Conference. The economic and other practical questions will receive our full and earnest consideration with a desire to co-operate as much as our peculiar circumstances and requirements will permit. If, however, this Conference is to attain success at all commensurate with the expectations entertained, it will, Sir, as far as South Africa is concerned, have to do more than simply devote its energies to economic and other practical problems of the day. These are, no doubt, of very great importance, it may be of vital interest, but we may not forget that they are of vital interest mainly, if not solely, because the Empire with which they are concerned is assumed by us to constitute a relationship that will last. It is therefore of paramount importance that we shall make sure that the foundations of the Commonwealth are such as to stand the test of time. I think, Sir, it will be generally admitted that the corner-stone of the Empire is the will, the good will, of those who compose it. Without that will the Empire must collapse. If, therefore, the Empire is to be maintained, if it is to flourish and fulfil that great task which we all hope it will achieve in the history of the world, we must see that the will to live in the Empire, as a Commonwealth of free nations, will in future, as it is to-day, be present and active with every one of its constituent elements.

Position of South Africa.

Whether at present all the conditions are there to ensure the permanency of that will, and therefore of the Empire, is a question which I think we should inquire into at this Conference. Speaking merely for South Africa, I think they are not. South Africa is anxious to possess that will equally with every other member of the Commonwealth, but that will can be assured for the future only if she can be made to feel implicit faith in her full and free nationhood upon the basis of equality with every other member of the Commonwealth. That implicit faith she does not possess to-day, but she will possess it the moment her independent national status has ceased to be a matter in dispute and has become internationally recognized. I hope, therefore, that this question of the status of the Dominions, which concerns their own communities no less than the world at large, will receive due consideration by this Conference and will be agreed upon in a manner that will remove all fear and doubt for the future. I am glad to see, Prime Minister, that, according to the Agenda, this question will be treated, and I hope the result may be such as I see Mr. Bruce, the representative from Australia, contemplates will be the effect—if we, with a will, set to business to settle these questions, they will find a solution which will satisfy us all, I have no doubt.