

the assembly of the League of Nations, and their representatives have already attended meetings of the league; in other words they have achieved full national status, and they now stand beside the United Kingdom as equal partners in the dignities and the responsibilities of the British commonwealth. If there are any means by which that status can be rendered even clearer to their own communities and to the world at large we shall be glad to have them put forward at this conference.

The attitude of Premier Hughes of Australia at that time is rather interesting. Let me quote briefly from his remarks as reported at page 22. Premier Hughes of Australia, expressing the matter in his own blunt way, said:

I have nothing further to say on those matters to which you referred yesterday, but reference to one other point may be permitted. It is well that we should know each others' views. We ought not to discuss things in the dark. It has been suggested that a constitutional conference should be held next year. It may be that I am very dense, but I am totally at a loss to understand what it is that this constitutional conference proposes to do. Is it that the dominions are seeking new powers, or are desirous of using powers they already have, or is the conference to draw up a declaration of rights, to set down in black and white the relations between Great Britain and the dominions? What is this conference to do? What is the reason for calling it together? I know, of course, the resolution of the 1917 conference. But much water has run under the bridge since then. Surely this conference is not intended to limit the rights we now have. Yet what new right, what extension of power can it give us? What is there that we cannot do now?

There is a statement of the situation as it existed in 1921. It goes on:

What limitation is now imposed upon them? What can they not do, even to encompass their own destruction by sundering the bonds that bind them to the empire? In effect, we have all the rights of self-government enjoyed by independent nations. That being the position, what is the constitutional conference going to do?

Such was the position, Mr. Speaker, in 1921. This position has not been changed since and was not changed in any respect at the time my right hon. friend the Prime Minister went to London in October last.

Now in the summary report which has been issued of the recent conference, and which I propose to discuss for a few minutes, the first thing I note with great interest is this—and if I am wrong I want to be corrected; I want my right hon. friend the Prime Minister to set me right in his remarks upon this occasion, for I have no desire to be wrong myself in this important matter, nor have I any desire to mislead anybody else. I find there are certain definite statements in this report so plain and so exact that I think we can all

[Mr. Guthrie.]

understand them. Is there anything behind them which we do not understand? The report starts out with an introduction stating:

We were appointed at the meeting of the Imperial Conference on the 25th of October, 1926, to investigate all the questions on the agenda affecting inter-imperial relations. We found on examination that they involved consideration of fundamental principles affecting the relations of the various parts of the British Empire inter se, as well as the relations of each part to foreign countries.

I agree that they started out upon a very broad and general basis. They found that fundamental constitutional principles were involved. Who gave my right hon. friend the Prime Minister instructions from this country to discuss fundamental principles in our constitution? I do not ask that in any spirit of disrespect. He went to the conference, as was his clear duty, but I submit that he was not summoned there for the purpose of discussing fundamental constitutional principles, and he had no opportunity for preparation in that respect.

Now this is the pronouncement which the committee of Prime Ministers of the empire make, and they have placed it on page 9 of the report, in italics, to call attention to it, and to make it clear and definite. Speaking of the overseas dominions and of the mother country, they say:

They are autonomous communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the crown, and freely associated as members of the British commonwealth of nations.

This is clear and exact language. They are equal in status; they are in no way subordinate one to the other. The meaning of that language if I understand the English language is this: That Canada's status under this declaration is one of equality with Great Britain; the status as between Canada and the other overseas dominions is one of equality. There is absolutely no subordination on our part or upon their part; we are equal in every way so far as concerns all our domestic and all our external affairs. This is a broad and definite statement.

Lower down on page 9, as if to emphasize the position, there is another clear declaration upon the same subject:

Every self-governing member of the empire is now the master of its destiny. In fact, if not always in form, it is subject to no compulsion whatever.

I submit, Mr. Speaker, that the attention of all sections of Canada should be drawn to this declaration. It implies no limitations, no