

intended to advance the money in order to contest these rights. It had been reported that a snap verdict had been obtained, either through the neglect of the lawyer for the Indians or by sharp practice upon the part of their opponents. It had also been charged that this question had been used for political purposes. On these points, however, he gave no opinion; but what position had the Government taken in this matter? It seemed to him that the Government had been remiss in its duty in not pushing this point to an issue in order to settle, beyond doubt, the rights of the Indians in that locality. He had read with great care the report of the hon. member for Charlevoix on this subject, which was accepted as exhaustive by his successor, who refused to reopen the question, and could not fail concluding that while the gentlemen of the Seminary had rights to the soil, and, perhaps, the fee simple in it, there were reservations in all the deeds granted and in the Act affirming their title, and certain duties imposed on them towards these Indians. The difficulties which had arisen out of this dispute between the Seminary and the Indians should have impelled the Government to effect a settlement and prevent their recurrence in future. He might be wrong in his inference, but from his reading of the law and of the report of the hon. member for Charlevoix, he could but draw the conclusion that there were certain duties imposed upon the Government in connection with these matters, and also upon the gentlemen of the Seminary by the deed of cession and subsequent legislation, which should be faithfully fulfilled.

MR. MILLS: What are those duties?

MR. BOWELL said it was unnecessary for him to point out those duties. If the hon. Minister was prepared to state that no duties devolved on the Government, and that the Indians had no rights, then the position of the Government would be known. If the Indians had no rights, or supposed rights, the Government should not have advanced money to test their legality in courts of law.

MR. MILLS said he had not understood to what the hon. gentleman alluded in many of his observations.

MR. BOWELL.

The duties imposed on the Seminary were wholly spiritual. There was not a single provision that they should feed and clothe the Indians and provide places of residence. If there was a trust imposed upon the gentlemen of the Seminary, it was one over which the Government of Canada had no control whatever. If any Government had any control over the matter, it would be the Government of Quebec. He admitted, if the Indian had a right to the property, that right should be protected. That was the only matter with which this Government had any concern. Certain gentlemen of Montreal held very strongly to the opinion that the Indians had certain legal and equitable rights in this property, and that these rights were capable of being successively maintained in courts of law. His predecessor, upon the advice of the Minister of Justice, had said to these parties, if you will select a favourable base to ascertain whether the Indians have any title, the Department will pay the expense. Those gentlemen engaged a legal gentleman of Montreal to test these rights. They selected the strongest case they could. The matter was deferred from time to time, and when the case came for trial, they failed to put in an appearance, and judgment went against them by default. So far as he knew, matters still stood precisely in that position. He was not going to say to-night whether these opinions were well or ill-founded, but the hon. member for Hastings would agree with him that if the Department, after taking the best possible legal advice, were informed that the rights of the Indians could not be successfully maintained in law, the best mode of acting would be to obtain a compromise with the Seminary. If the matter were brought before a court of law, and it was held that the Indians had no rights whatever on the soil, it would be impossible to obtain any compensation from the Seminary, for the rights the Indians would be supposed to have. The Government were acting on behalf of the Indians in the way they believed to be the most consonant with their interests. All they could do was to seek to allay the irritation as soon as possible, and await a favourable opportunity for a complete settlement of the question.