

is within the recollection of every one, that a short time after the outbreak it became known that a great many of the insurgents came from that district, which comprises a tract of land granted by the Government to the Prince Albert Colonisation Company; and it was correctly reported at the time that one of the causes of the rebellion, and one of the causes which made the people discontented, was because they found their lands given away to a colonisation company, and they became dissatisfied, feeling as they did they might be evicted from those lands. The Government have been endeavoring ever since to repel the impression which was then created in the public mind. They have been trying to show that whatever might have been the cause of the rebellion by the people who took up arms, that they had not been impelled to do so by the existence of a colonisation company. Mr. Pearce visited the settlement, undoubtedly, with the view of procuring evidence to that effect, and that evidence we have before us now. But when he visited the settlement he did not visit it with the ostensible view of taking evidence in that regard. The pretence he gave to the people when he visited the settlement was that he went there to adjust land claims, and to take such evidence from the people as would place him in a position to give them the patents to which they were entitled. That was the pretence. Mr. Pearce went further than that. He did not content himself with taking such evidence as I have hinted at, but he took evidence in order to exculpate the Government from any blame in having granted those lands to the colonisation company when in possession of actual settlers. He took evidence, and the evidence is now before us. He took several affidavits which have been placed before this House, and upon the strength of which the Government have endeavored to establish that they were altogether blameless in this matter, and that, whatever was the cause of the rebellion, those half-breeds had no grievances under that head because they never knew a colonisation company was in existence. Any man must admit that very little weight can attach to affidavits framed with the exclusive object of exculpating the Government, obtained by agents of the Government and obtained from people who were lately insurgents, whose relatives were lately insurgents, and who, themselves, or their relatives, are still liable to imprisonment, to coercion and punishment. It must strike anyone's mind that these poor people, ignorant and illiterate as they are known to be, must be an easy prey to the longheaded agent of the Government. And we have the evidence of that. I have the evidence in my hands, that, whatever the agents might have meant, the affidavits that have been placed before the House do not convey the real thought which the half-breeds had in their mind when they signed those affidavits. The nature of the affidavits was known in the settlement and neighborhood before they came to Ottawa. It transpired there what the nature of the affidavits was, that the people had never heard of the colonisation company or had any uneasiness on account of that company. A gentleman at Prince Albert heard of that, and knowing that such a statement was contrary to the truth, he took the trouble to investigate the matter. I have the letter which he wrote on the 17th February, 1886, and which is to this effect:

"Some time in last December William Pearce, formerly land commissioner, arrived here ostensibly to arrange for the surveying of the French settlement into river lots. After staying here a few days he left for the French settlement, taking with him Col. Sproat, our registrar and Tory intriguer, and an interpreter. His destination was chiefly or solely the parish of St. Louis de Langevin, the district held by the Prince Albert Colonisation Company. After their return, we heard that they had obtained an affidavit from the half-breeds and other residents on the company's lands, to the effect that they had never heard of the Prince Albert Colonisation Company, that they have never feared or been threatened with ejectment, and that the transfer of the land, on which they had settled, to the company, had had nothing to do with the late trouble. Knowing this to be false, I took the first opportunity to interview one of the Métis residents of that district on the

subject. He informed me that the document had been read over to them, and purported to contain only a statement to the effect that they knew nothing of the existence of the colonisation company previous to their settlement on their lands, and that they were given to understand that the signing of the document was a necessary preliminary to the obtaining of their patents. Many of them had settled on their lands before the company existed. Believing that the document, whatever it might be, was intended for political use, and as a document of that nature would be of no political value, I concluded that its real nature was more in accordance with the rumor, and being unable to find anyone who had read it over for themselves, I have the enclosed affidavit drawn up and signed by all the Métis who could be found to have signed the other in that district."

Now, I hold in my hand also the affidavits which were thus signed at the time, but before reading them, I will show the nature of the affidavits which were obtained by Mr. Pearce. I will take one as a sample of all the rest.

"Heard this land was within a colonisation company's tract, but no official of that company ever said anything to me, nor, do I believe, to any of the family, or I should have heard of it. The fact of this land being within a colonisation company's tract never gave my father, brother, sister, or myself any concern whatever, as we always believed we would eventually obtain entry as we desired.

"Sworn before me, at Township 45, Range 24, W. 2nd Meridian, this 9th day of December, 1885, having been first read over and explained to him, and he seemed thoroughly to understand the same. (Signed) "WM. PEARCE, Superintendent"

(Signed) "SOLOMON BOUCHER."

Mr. WHITE (Cardwell). Does the hon. gentleman say that the other affidavits are the same as that?

Mr. LAURIER. So far as the reference to the colonisation company goes, yes. I believe that to be the case, but if I am astray I may be corrected. It must be manifest that this illiterate population, the moment they were informed that their lands had been granted to a colonisation company, having prayed for their patents for years and not succeeding in obtaining them, must have been very uneasy. Yet these people are made to swear that, although they knew of this statement, they never had any uneasiness about it. Now here is the affidavit to which I have alluded:

"We, the undersigned, residents of the Métis settlement on the south branch of the Saskatchewan River in the North-West Territories do hereby state: That Mr. William Pearce, Commissioner of Dominion Lands, did, on the occasion of his visit to our settlement in the month of December, 1885, present to us for signature a document which was stated to contain only a statement that we knew nothing of the existence of the Prince Albert Colonisation Company when we settled on our land. As we had in most cases been on our lands long previous to the formation of that company, we signed the document, taking his word that the contents were as stated. But we have since learned with great surprise that the paper referred to contained statements that we had heard nothing of the company previous to the uprising last spring, and that we knew nothing of any rumor that our lands were to be taken away, and that the formation of the company and the granting to them of lands in our settlement had nothing to do with occasioning trouble in our settlement. If any such statements are in the document which we signed, we were entirely misled as to its meaning, because we were all well aware for some time before the taking up of arms that there was a company which claimed to own our lands and to have the power to turn us off our homesteads, and even encouraged in the belief of that fact by the failure of the Government to give us any legal title to the lands which we had so long occupied. The only point on which we were entirely ignorant was the extent of our territory which was so granted away from us and it was the fear which we all had of losing our homes that was one of the greatest causes of uneasiness among us."

This is signed by Charles Boucher, Moïse Bremner, Elzéar Swain, Napoléon Boyer, Modiste Laviolette, William Bremner, Alexander Bremner, Joseph Bremner, Baptiste Boyer, William Bruce, Solomon Boucher. To this is attached the following declaration:

"Canada,
"North-West Territories,
"Prince Albert.
"To wit:

"I, Charles E. Boucher, of St. Louis de Langevin, in the North-West Territories, farmer, do solemnly declare that I was personally present and did see the within statement duly signed by Moïse Bremner, Elzéar Swain, Napoléon Boyer, Modiste Laviolette, William Bremner, Alexander Bremner, Joseph Bremner, Baptiste Boyer, William Bruce and Solomon Boucher.