

or the province but the position was such that the Dominion could not approach the Indians satisfactorily to secure the surrender of any of their reserves. The time came, however, when an opportunity seemed to occur in the case of the Metlakatla reserve at the port of Prince Rupert. When the Grand Trunk Pacific desired to acquire a large area of land upon that reserve for townsite purposes, it seemed as if something might be done; the Indians were approached and asked if they would alienate a portion of that reserve at a figure, subject of course to the reversionary interest of the province of British Columbia. The agreement was entered into, the alienation was made so far as the Indians were concerned but then the province stepped in and said: Our rights are such that any relaxation of the hold of the Indians on any of these lands, transfers that land absolutely to us. That is the position in which that land stands to-day and of course as long as that situation continues, this government is absolutely debarred, as a business proposition, from undertaking to deal with any other reserve in the province of British Columbia. However, there have been negotiations between the two governments looking to a decision by the highest authority as to the respective rights of the Indians and the province in these lands. This government has agreed or suggested that the British Columbia government should join issue with us and have this question tried and finally settled. The Dominion government recognizes that it is not to the advantage of the Dominion that these fertile valleys in British Columbia should be held in the hands of people who do not use them. At the same time, as guardian of the Indians, it is not for us to undertake to displace them nor is it for us to trespass in any way on the rights of British Columbia. So we hope that with the concurrence of the province we will have it tried before the courts; the Dominion will have to act for the Indians, not in any spirit of hostility to British Columbia, but merely in discharging the responsibility placed on us to guard the interests of the Indians. The matter will be tried in due time, and when a decision has been rendered it will be possible to deal with the reserves in a more businesslike way than in the past.

Mr. FOWLER. This is a matter of importance as any one who has visited British Columbia and is at all familiar with the situation will realize. I have had occasion to bring this matter up several times when this vote was under review in past years. It seems to me that it ought to be a very easy matter for the two governments, presided over presumably by business men, to get together, even without the intervention of the courts and arrange this matter in such a way that the Indians will be much better provided for by the pro-

ceeds of the sale of these lands than by their possession. Any one familiar with the reserves knows that, as has been pointed out by the hon. member for Vancouver, they are in many instances close to towns, and valuable lands are thus prevented from being used for settlement, which is not in the interest of the country; and this also brings the Indians into too close communication with modern civilization, which is not always an advantage to the Indians. The two governments should get together in a friendly spirit, and in a business way settle the question; let the lands be put up to public tender and sale and the proceeds divided, a portion going to buy out the reversionary interest of the province and the balance going to the Indians.

Mr. DUNCAN ROSS. This is such an important question from a British Columbia standpoint, that it is scarcely proper to discuss it in connection with the salaries of the officials of the Indian Department. I might say, however, that even if a judicial decision is secured in reference to this matter, I do not think it would settle it so far as the Indians or the people of British Columbia are concerned. If the courts hold that the province of British Columbia has a reversionary interest, we are just in the position we are in now, that is that there shall be no encouragement to the Indians to abandon the right to their reserves and nothing would be done.

Mr. FOSTER. Is that the only question that would come before the court?

Mr. DUNCAN ROSS. I suppose so. I suggest that as this government has secured 3,500,000 acres in the Peace River Valley, and 6,500,000 acres in the railway belt in British Columbia, the minister ought to bargain with the provincial government and offer to exchange a portion of this land taken from the province of British Columbia for the reversionary interest in the Indian reserves. If the province should abandon its reversionary interest in the Indian reserves these reserves should be dealt with by the department just as in other parts of the Dominion. To-day, of the whole Similkameen valley, one of the richest in the Dominion, only half is open to cultivation. There is room there for from 100 to 200 families growing fruit. It is absolutely impossible, under present conditions, to have anything done with it. The Indians quite properly say: We do not want to do anything; if we abandon our right to the reserve, any money to which we are entitled for abandoning that right goes into the provincial exchequer, not into our pockets at all, so why should we abandon our right? Thus it is practically impossible to do anything while you have what is to all intents and purposes dual authority over the lands of the Indians. I would throw out the sug-