

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

MONDAY, 10TH SEPTEMBER, 1877.

Mr. GEORGE BELL examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] To what part of the Bill does your evidence refer?—To the Appendix, page 47.

2. Will you be good enough to state what you wish to impress on the Committee?—I wish to impress upon the Committee that the Appendix K is not similar to Appendix G, which is the one prepared for the Canterbury Bill. The land in Southland has always been open for sale at a fixed price to the first applicant, the pastoral tenant only holding a right to depasture on what is not sold, and receiving neither compensation for the land sold nor return of rent which he might have paid on the previous day. We hold that our leases have been exactly similar to the Canterbury leases. We have had free selection since 1865, and we consider that if it is advisable to give extension to the one, it should be given to the other. We also object to the 4th clause, which in Appendix K gives the Board power, after the money is paid, and thirty days after survey, to refuse to sell either the whole or a part of what you have applied and paid for.

3. Does the provision you speak of differ from existing provisions in Southland?—Yes. This subsection gives the Board power to refuse to grant any applications. The clause we object to is that the survey might not be made for goodness knows how long, and the Board might say at any time that they will refuse to sell the land. This clause does not refer to withdrawing land from sale, but after an application has been made and granted, and the money paid, thirty days after survey the Board may step in and say they refuse to sell it, and return the money. That is what the clause says. The next part of Appendix K refers to the proclamation of hundreds. I am quite clear there has been no hundred in Southland since 1865. But this gives the Land Board power to declare hundreds in Southland.

4. *Mr. Rolleston.*] You say this is not part of the terms under which you hold the land. How do you mean that this clause is really an obstacle? It is rather to the advantage of the pastoral tenant to put an obstruction on the sale?—We think it is an objectionable feature in the Bill that power may be given to refuse to sell land. We think that the whole of the land should be either open for sale or not, and, if not open, withdrawn before any one makes application, and not after the land has been applied for, and the money in the hands of the Treasury perhaps for twelve months, and then the Board step in and say, "We refuse to sell the whole or any portion of it." As to the proclamation of hundreds, I cannot see that there can be any fairness in having it in a country where the land has been open to free selection since 1865. Again, we wish to understand clearly in what position we stand with regard to the renewal of leases. We have now a very serious injury to contend with from rabbits, as the following figures will show:—The diminution in the number of sheep has been 152,800; in wool, 1,699 bales; and the number of rabbits killed has been 1,059,500. As we stand at present our leases expire in three years, and it is not likely we shall continue to kill rabbits to the extent we now do, unless we know on what footing we shall be, because it is not likely that any man will spend his capital upon improving the lease for his successor. I am perfectly disinterested in the matter, because I do not consider that I shall re-lease any of the lands I now hold. I am speaking on behalf of the general body I represent. I think they are entitled to consideration. It is considered advisable in this Bill to extend the leases in Canterbury, and we hold we should be in the same position. The conditions of the Act of 1865 have not been rigidly adhered to. This Bill makes no provision for saying that leases shall go on or terminate. If we understand they are to terminate, we shall know what to do. Southland is put in the same position as Otago, where land was not on the same footing. It was not open for sale, and could not be taken without compensation.

5. With regard to your objection to clause 4, which enables the Government to hold back land from sale, do you complain of it as affecting the purchaser or the runholder?—We complain of it for the ordinary purchaser. We hold a grazing right; and the rest of the public may purchase it at any time, or we might wish to purchase, and the Board may refuse us or any one. Supposing we do wish to purchase the land, we pay for it, and the money is lying a year in the Treasury; the Board can step in and say, "We shall not sell; the money shall be returned." Is it a desirable condition that such power should be given to the Board? We hold that the land should either be open for sale or reserved from sale.

TUESDAY, 18TH SEPTEMBER, 1877.

Mr. W. J. M. LARNACH, M.H.R., examined.

6. *The Chairman.*] Mr. Larnach, a proposal is about to be brought before the Committee to adopt generally the regulations which apply to Canterbury District, and the Committee will be glad to know what is your opinion as to the desirability of taking that course?—Well, Sir, I think it would only be