

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

THURSDAY, 10th JULY, 1890. (Mr. WHYTE, Acting-Chairman.)

Mr. JAMES P. MAITLAND, Commissioner of Crown Lands, Otago District, examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] Will you kindly tell us what you have ascertained, in the course of your Commissionership, regarding what is going on of the nature of dummyism in the Provincial District of Otago?—Do you wish me to tell you what is going on at the present time in the way of dummyism in Otago?

2. Yes, under the existing law. There are various Acts. What is your experience as to the operation of these Acts as a whole?—The cases of dummyism that have come to the front, and been dealt with by the Land Board of Otago, were under Acts passed prior to the Act of 1885. I am not aware of any action on the part of the Land Board in connection with dummyism since the Act of 1885 has been in force. Of course, I do not mean to say that dummyism did not exist after the Act of 1885, and may not exist in some instances, possibly, at present in connection with lands which have been acquired under the Act of 1885, and previous to a change in the law. But, as far as I remember, no cases of dummyism under the Act of 1885 ever came under the official notice of the Land Board and were dealt with as such. That, of course, is a very general statement, but I cannot make anything but a general statement without specific questions.

3. Can you not tell us whether there are any cases of dummyism going on at present under the existing law?—Unless a case has been brought under the official notice of the Land Board, and been considered and dealt with, it does not come within my knowledge. Cases may possibly exist: I am not prepared to deny their existence; but I would not be prepared to say dummyism existed in any case until brought under my official notice, and it had been brought before the Board and investigated.

4. You can state your opinion as to how the law is operating, and how it has been evaded?—I have been speaking of the Act of 1885.

5. The Committee would like to know how the existing law is operating, and how it has been evaded?—Settlement may be said to be now going on under the Act of 1887. That Act introduced an alternative choice of systems, and provided that land may be taken up for cash, deferred payment, or perpetual lease. The applicant has the option of taking up the land under any of these three systems. Applications coming in for the same land on the same day are considered as simultaneous in connection with surveyed land, and have to be balloted for. There is no preference given as to applications made under the three systems mentioned, but all have to go alike to ballot. The fact that all simultaneous applications for the same land have to go to ballot has induced applicants in many cases to get members of their families to put in applications for the same land as perhaps the head of the family was applying for, in order that they might have more chances at the ballot. This, of course, strictly speaking, might be called "dummyism;" it might be called "family dummyism" perhaps. Of course, the applications for the land were not made for speculation, or to prevent the land coming into use for *bona fide* occupation, but quite the contrary; the object is to try and insure the obtaining of the land for *bona fide* occupation. The applications I have described are greatly caused from the fact of many blocks in Otago having been surveyed lying adjacent or contiguous to old settlement-blocks which have been occupied for many years, and in which the settlers were extremely anxious to add to their holdings. The block that was opened being perhaps the only chance they might ever have of adding to their holdings, they were naturally extremely anxious to have as good a chance as possible of getting the sections they wished; and that induced them to do what I have described. That is almost all the dummyism that exists in Otago at the present time to my knowledge. There is very little or no land bought for cash or for speculative purposes; and the land taken up under the different systems is not taken up for speculation, but in order that it may be occupied for *bona fide* settlement. It might be called a diluted kind of dummyism. I do not know of any other form of dummyism in Otago at the present moment, and if such exists it is of small dimensions.

6. *Mr. Smith.*] I would like to ask you whether in some of these cases it is not true that applications were sent in by persons who did not wish to take up the land for themselves, but rather to make money out of it by transferring it to others if they were successful?—There may have been such cases, although they have not been proved. They may have occurred here and there, but seldom, as far as I can find out.

7. Are there not many applications to your Board for transfers without the persons ever taking up the sections?—When transfers are applied for to the Board within one, two, or three months after acquiring the land, or before the expiry of the six months allowed, the applicant, under the deferred-payment system or the perpetual-lease system, before going into occupation of the land is examined as to his reason for desiring the transfer, and unless he can satisfy the Board that there is some good and sufficient reason for asking for the transfer the Board decline to approve it.

8. You admit there have been some applications for transfers?—Yes; but I do not recollect any application for a transfer that was refused by the Board for the reasons I have stated.

9. Have there been many applications or not?—There are applications for transfers all round the year; they occur constantly; but I understood you to refer to persons who had taken up sections for speculation and desired to transfer them. Such cases have been very few; in fact, when I tell you that the Land Board has not refused any transfer it is sufficient to make it evident