

221. The manager of the bank?—It is a new system, apparently, which the bank has got into.

222. Drawn by the manager on his own bank?—Yes, and countersigned in favour of the Receiver of Land Revenue.

223. Was it debited to any customer of the bank?—No.

224. But paid by the bank on its own behalf?—Yes.

225. There was no other applicant outside these?—There may be other cheques of the bank. I cannot say why this system was adopted: most of the cheques that come in are drawn in that way by the manager on the bank.

226. See, the effect of it is this: that they would not reveal to you, or to any other person, on whose behalf or out of what fund these moneys were paid?—Yes; it was the fact that the cheques happened to be numbered consecutively which made me doubt the *bona fides* of the applications.

227. *Mr. Smith.*] They were all numbered consecutively?—Yes.

228. *Major Steward.*] I would like to ask you, Mr. Baker, through the Chairman, whether you do not think, from your experience in working the Land Act, much of this might be obviated if provision were made that when a ballot takes place the applicants should be classified, and that the Board should have the power of overlooking. The classification might be somewhat in the order and manner following: First, those persons who have no land; then persons who have land in certain proportions, so that we might eliminate such as were objectionable if there were persons applying from such classes, and allow the ballot to take place between the people who have no land?—Yes; it might be done; but I am afraid it would be a very difficult thing to manage. I may say, I think power should be given to the Board to make inquiry in the cases of cash applications as in applications for perpetual lease or on deferred payments.

229. I suppose you know something of the working of Victorian lands, where there is a power of discrimination given?—If enlarged powers were given to the Waste Lands Board I have no doubt it would be an advantage; but in my opinion it might be much abused.

230. In connection with these recent land cases, it is a fact, I believe, that when a certain area of land is declared to be open for application on a certain date, with the choice fixed in the *Gazette*, the applicant has the chance of selecting within forty-five days?—That is so.

231. Is it a fact that, as regards Canterbury, they are open for selection during that period for cash at £2 an acre?—Yes.

232. Then, from land that is intended to be sold, parts of it can be picked up during the interval for cash?—Yes; but only a very small amount has been so taken; but it is so.

233. That has been done to some extent, possibly for the purpose of “squaring” properties or estates: would it not be a desirable thing in the interest of settlement that, as soon as the land is declared open for selection, it ought to be withdrawn from power of selection at £2 an acre?—That is so; it would have been done so in this case, only it was an oversight. I might remark that as regards this land it was only a very small amount that was picked up like that. If the persons paying £2 an acre had left it to their ordinary chance at ballot they would have got it at a reduced price—15s. less—so that they have simply paid the Government 15s. an acre more for the land than they would otherwise have had to pay.

234. *Hon. Mr. Richardson.*] I would like to ask a question on this point, so as to show that we keep clear of this selection at £2 an acre. I am aware of only two instances of its happening: then, when this oversight was noticed, it was stopped as regards all future sales?—Yes, that is so.

235. Do you think it would be desirable in the future to make some provision in regard to purchase for cash requiring of the buyer that certain improvements shall be made before the Crown grant should issue?—That was in the old Otago and Southland Acts when I first went there.

236. Would it not be to the interest of the colony if some such provision were made?—Yes.

237. *Mr. Reeves.*] You stated that 50,000 acres were opened on the Plains: how much of that is sold?—I think, in round numbers, about 26,000 or 27,000 acres; somewhere about that.

238. Seven thousand acres were taken up on settlement conditions and the remainder had been bought by adjacent landholders?—Yes.

239. A good deal of it appears to have been bought by professional people?—Some has.

240. These people did not probably buy altogether in their own interest?—They have sworn or declared that they did so.

241. You say this land is not of a quality good enough to tempt people to forsake their ordinary occupations in order to go and live on this land?—Not good enough for that.

242. It is obvious, then, that, at the price given for it, it would not be a brilliant speculation to buy for resale?—I do not think so.

243. Do you not think the Land Board should have power to inquire, where the applications were so sent in as to awaken suspicion of their *bona fides*?—I have said that there is no power in cash applications to make inquiry. It would be desirable; not that we could throw the application out; we should have to let the applicant go to the ballot. If, say, twenty men were to apply for the land we could not keep all these men waiting while inquiry was being made: we should let the applications go to the ballot: then, in cases where there was a doubt, after inquiry was made, if it was proved, we could forfeit, as provided by the 12th clause of the Act.

244. You say that a good deal of this land was shingly land and of inferior character?—Nearly the whole of it.

245. Yet some of it was classed as “first-class land”?—We classed it as first class—Mr. Mac-Millan and myself—so as not to allow it to be taken up in large areas.

246. If you wanted *bona fide* residential settlement on that land, would it not be wiser to put it into larger blocks, so that a man going on it would have a sufficient though a humble living—say, 2,000 or 3,000 acres?—We thought that if we put it into 2,000-acre blocks it would be too easy for adjacent landowners to get.

247. So that the advantage of getting this land settled has been sacrificed through the fear of its falling into the hands of adjacent owners: if they could not have it, would it not be fair to allow