

625. How long have these selections been taken up?—Just about twelve months. In October and August of last year the sales took place.

626. Are any of them occupied?—They are nearly all occupied. They are nearly all residing on their sections in my blocks, and very extensive clearing is going on. Out of one block of 27,000 acres, last year there were 5,000 acres cleared, and I believe about three-quarters of the 27,000 acres will be cleared this year.

627. Genuine settlement is going on there?—Very much so.

628. *Mr. Smith.*] It is close to Pahiataua?—About fifteen miles to centre of block. People have come in droves from all over the colony to this Puketoi country. Many from Dunedin and Canterbury.

629. Is it limestone?—Yes; and some papa.

630. What was the price?—It was put up at £1 5s., and the last block went up to £1 12s. 6d. and £1 15s. for the first-class sections.

631. You have had some experience, Mr. Climie: can you tell the Committee if the present system of application is satisfactory—that is to say, when persons are applying is it not a kind of speculation now as to whether they get the section or not?—I think it is very much in that position: it is quite a lottery. I have known people who have not applied because they have known it would be next to useless.

632. There are, I suppose, numbers of disappointed applicants at these sales?—Of course, when only one is successful out of a hundred.

633. I suppose that was the reason people duplicated their applications?—To enhance their chances—yes.

634. It is well known in the district?—It is common report that people do get other people to put in applications to enhance their chances. In a great many cases they have been relations.

635. They do not care to trust strangers with them if they can help it?—No.

636. Do you think there was any speculation in the matter—that is to say, persons going in for this block, not with the intention of taking it up themselves, but to transfer it to others?—I think that has been very general throughout the whole district.

637. A good deal of it?—Yes.

638. That is, speculation by means of a transfer?—Yes, afterwards at increased prices.

639. That is really what the Committee is inquiring into; that I look upon as dummyism—when a man has no intention of residing or improving, but intends to sell his chance to somebody else. There has been a good deal of that in the district?—In the case of several sections in my block people have not intended to reside; if they could get a transfer they preferred to sell it.

640. As soon after as possible?—Yes, as soon as they could get the transfer.

641. Do you know if there have been many transfers made in that block?—The Wellington Land Board, and the Commissioner in particular, I know, strongly set their faces against transfers unless a person can show good grounds for it.

642. But lately I have noticed there were a large number of transfers granted; there did not seem to be much trouble about them?—No.

643. You do not think the law requires altering to prevent that kind of thing being possible?—I have often thought that the law should be altered in the direction of the Victorian system—for instance, I have thought that the Board should make inquiries as to suitability of applicants; and when transfers are asked for, the land ought to revert back direct to the Government, and let them sell it over again.

644. *The Chairman.*] The Crown would then get the benefit of the difference in the price, whatever it might be?—Yes.

645. *Mr. Rhodes.*] Are most of these sections sold or transferred, do you think, before the improvements are made?—The improvements are subject to the approval of the Ranger. I do not think they have been done in all cases.

646. Are the improvements done by the purchaser, and not by the original tenderer, in many cases?—By the purchaser, but I do not know for certain.

647. *Mr. Thompson.*] Have most of the transfers taken place in cases of land obtained direct from the Government or within the limits of the special settlement associations?—I think more in the special settlement blocks, as far as I have observed; but I cannot speak with any certainty on that point.

648. Have you any idea that any of these special settlement blocks have been taken up largely for speculation?—Well, a number of people in the special settlements have taken them up with that object, I believe. I do not know—taking them as a body—if they have done so. I know of individual members of these associations who have taken it up as a speculation.

649. *Hon. Mr. Richardson.*] As far as you know, are you aware of anything like the same proportion of speculative acquisition of land direct from the Government as there has been through these special settlement associations in your district?—I think there has been nearly as much. There has in my blocks.

650. Nearly as much in one case as in the other?—I think so. The sections have been larger in my blocks, and there has not been such a number of applications in the same area, of course.

WALTER WILLIAM BODMIN examined.

651. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—I am a farmer, residing at Blackbridge, Lower Hutt.

652. We are told that you have stated in the Land Office, Wellington, that you know of cases of dummyism in your district?—I made some such statement: it was more in a joking way at the time, though it was not without some foundation.

653. Can you give the Committee any information at all in that direction?—Well, I know of it in a general way, having heard of a great many cases. One especially I might refer to, and a