

amount fit for cultivation in most of these places is very small; on most blocks there is, perhaps, a site for a small homestead.

199. Do you know, in several families, of each, or one, or more members of it sending in applications?—That is done; but in regard to settlement land the ballot is a difficulty in such cases. There was one family represented by seventeen applications, but the land went to a man who had put in only a single application—to the man who was *bona fide*, and intended to settle.

200. I am sure you would be able to give the Committee information how to avoid these sales of land in any other way than for *bona fide* settlement?—If I am to express an opinion on that I think the Act itself invites dummyism, inasmuch as you allow a woman or girl, say of seventeen or eighteen years of age, to put in an application. I know, from experience of small settlements, this is invariably used to give the father a larger holding. It is the same in regard to a married woman.

201. Do you not think it would be possible to amend the Act so as to prevent this?—I have for several days past been, with the Surveyor-General, discussing this matter and suggesting amendments to the Land Act.

[Mr. McKenzie requested leave for Major Steward, a member of the House, to be allowed to put questions to the witness through the Chairman.—Leave granted.]

202. *Major Steward.*] Do you remember certain land for which one Alexander McPherson was an applicant?—Yes.

203. That application comprised certain lands—1,932 acres, marked D—in the Pareora Survey District?—Yes.

204. Will you tell the Committee how many applications—if you can, from memory—there were for the section put up on that occasion: was the number about forty?—No; nineteen.

205. On that occasion, I believe, Mr. Brydone was one of the applicants?—Yes.

206. And also Mr. Alexander Macpherson?—Yes.

207. You have just stated, in reply to Mr. McKenzie, that you are aware it is a very frequent occurrence that a number of applications are put in which in reality form only one and the same interest?—Yes.

208. And you say that the Act does not prevent that, but invites it?—Yes.

209. Have you any reason to believe that more than one application was put in for this particular block of land which I have named?—Nine names were put in in the interest of the land company, Mr. Brydone making the tenth, he being attorney for the company. His declaration was decided to be informal. Macpherson, you speak of, was also an applicant. There were applications from six of his children, or five children and his wife.

210. Then, as a matter of fact, there were, out of nineteen applications, eight that were thrown out?—We only threw out one.

211. There were nine in the same interest?—Yes. There were two others from Pringle and Rhodes. Out of the nineteen applications, there were only three that were *bona fide*—that is, there were only three people really wanting that special block, besides the land company. The person we refused appealed, but the appeal was withdrawn. But there may be several applications from one person who is a *bona fide* settler: as he is obliged to take his chance of the ballot, he will put in six or seven applications if he can.

212. *Mr. Cowan.*] Were these children of the specified age?—They declared they were: I never saw the children. I asked the man myself, as I was at Timaru when the applications were made, whether they were of the proper age. He said they were, very distinctly, and I have no reason to doubt it.

213. You have given the Committee information as to another sale of the Levels property, in respect to which all the applications were made by people in the interest of the land company, as you think?—There is fair reason to think that they were so.

214. Do you know Mr. Edward Acton, of Timaru?—Yes.

215. He is the Chairman of the Harbour Board?—I believe so.

216. But you know that he is a man filling an important public position—a credible person: is that so? I mention this, because I hold a letter in my hand from Mr. Acton, in which there is a statement to the effect that he met you about three months ago—that is to say, before that sale. He says he spent the day with you; and that you, with him, looked over some of the blocks to be offered for sale?—Yes.

217. There was a conversation between you and Acton, in the course of which he represented to you that he had reason to believe that there was dummyism to be practised—referring to the “Levels” sale?—I cannot remember: we were riding over the ground talking of a good number of subjects: if he says so, I would not deny it; but I do not recollect it.

218. If I quoted a remark made by Mr. Acton in this letter, it might bring the matter to your memory. It is to this effect: “Baker said the land company should be carefully watched; he thought it impossible for them to obtain much land.” That implies that you were careful to keep your eyes awake to the public interest?—It is quite possible I might have said so: I could not say whether I did or not.

219. There is a statement that applications were put in on behalf of nine persons who were in the employment of the company, as you have described—namely, T. N. Orbell, manager; Patello, manager; G. Lyall, manager; F. Dixon, overseer; McQueen, book-keeper. These are all the names mentioned in this letter, the other names being supplied by yourself: Hook, Gracie and Clube?—Yes.

220. There is one point with regard to these applications which I wish you would be good enough to inform the Committee upon: in what way the money was paid?—I took note of that: it was by cheques drawn on the National Bank of New Zealand, but all of them drawn by the manager of that bank.