

short time ago the subject was brought up among a few gentlemen in the train in which I was travelling down from Napier. They gave two or three instances of very clear cases.

654. Can you specify any particular cases at all that you know of?—I was going to specify this case that I was speaking of just now.

655. What case was that?—I merely relate it to you as the conversation took place. It was the case of a man to obtain a section, and made application for it. He found out afterwards that there was another gentleman who was making application for the same land, and had got seventy of his friends and relations to apply for it; at any rate, he put in seventy applications. The first-named gentleman, however, put in his one application, and was fortunate enough to get the section, while the seventy other applicants were, of course, unsuccessful.

656. Do you know the names of any of these men?—No; they were quite strangers to me. They were talking amongst themselves in the train, and it was some distance from home.

657. Do you know the names of any of those applicants?—No. I did not think of asking any questions, as these gentlemen were total strangers to me.

658. Do you know of cases yourself?—I do not know individual cases that I could point to with any certainty. Of course, it is one of those things you hear spoken of all around you, and if you are not acting the part of a detective and hunting the thing up you can know nothing for certain—you can only judge from what you hear talked of.

659. Would it be difficult, do you suppose, to find, or could you suggest, any gentleman who might give you some assistance?—I should name Mr. Cattle.

660. Who is he?—I first heard of it through him. I felt rather interested in the subject, and hoped there would be some change in the law. In talking about it I said, "You might just as well put a pound in the Melbourne sweep as apply for one of these sections. There is very little chance of getting any land unless you have friends and can put in applications through them." I had been thinking of taking up some land for my sons, but knew it was of no use applying.

661. *Mr. Smith.*] You think the system has grown to be such that, unless a person has friends, or does what is contrary to the spirit of the Act, he has no chance, or his chances are very small?—I am certain of it.

662. And the effect of it is that you gave up the idea of going in for any sections of that kind?—Yes.

663. *Hon. Mr. Richardson.*] Have you ever applied for land at the Land Office?—Yes; I have one section.

664. Have you applied recently at the Land Office?—No.

665. You have not been looking for land?—No.

666. Why do you say that except you have a lot of friends you have no chance?—I consider you have one chance amongst eighty; and perhaps amongst that eighty there may be only three or four *bona fide* applicants.

667. Until you have been to the Land Office to make an application, do you think you are justified in making these statements?—I do, because I believe them to be the case, and I hear very many people speaking in the same manner.

668. What are your grounds—merely hearsay?—Of course, you may call it hearsay, but I feel so certain of it that I could not be more certain if I knew the individual cases.

669. Then, you have to withdraw what you said just now that a man requires a lot of friends before he can obtain a section?—The sections are to be obtained by ballot.

670. No section is balloted for unless there is more than one applicant?—In the case of a good section you may be sure there would be more than one applicant.

671. As far as I can make out, all your evidence that we have been taking down is what you have heard other people say?—Precisely.

The COMMISSIONER of CROWN LANDS, Napier, to the UNDER-SECRETARY, Crown Lands Department.

Crown Lands Office, Napier, 18th July, 1890.

*Section 1, Block XIV., Woodville.*—In compliance with your telegram of 17th instant, I have to report as follows upon the circumstances connected with the applications received for this land:—

Mr. Alexander Peebles, the owner of adjoining freehold land, applied to the Land Board to purchase the section, upon which valuations were obtained varying from 10s. to 15s. per acre. The latter price was adopted, and the land was notified for selection as unsurveyed, in terms of section 18 of "The Land Act, 1887."

Sixty-six applications were received in all; but five of these were ruled out of the ballot on account of deficient deposits or some other informality, thus leaving sixty-one applicants to draw. While the drawing was proceeding, Mr. H. Baker protested against certain persons being admitted to the ballot, on the ground that they were selectors in the Wellington District; but, as this office could not reasonably be expected to know the status of such selectors, the drawing was allowed to proceed, and the section was drawn by Mr. Joseph Sowry, whom the Land Board (then sitting) decided to accept as the successful applicant. Messrs. H. Baker and E. J. Gothard then appeared before the Board and reiterated their protest. The Board held to its decision, but informed these gentlemen that it was open to them to appeal against it; and this they did shortly afterwards. In the meantime the circumstances were reported by me to the head office, and inquiries were made at the Wellington Land Office as to the eligibility or otherwise of the persons taken exception to, with the result that Mr. Sowry was the holder of a deferred-payment section in one of the Wellington special settlements, and that eight other persons who had been admitted to the ballot were in the same or similar positions.