COMMENTS ON THE WORKING OF THE EXISTING SYSTEM OF BALLOT, AND PRELIMINARIES THERETO, AND ALSO SUGGESTIONS REGARDING AN IMPROVED METHOD.

MY experience in respect of the working of the existing ballot system in the disposal of lands in the different districts where I have held office as Commissioner of Crown Lands has been varied; necessarily so under the dissimilar conditions often peculiar to different localities. At times the system has been far from giving satisfaction to would-be selectors, this being very largely due to circumstances and conditions which were but in embryo at its institution, but which have rapidly developed of late years—so much so, as to suggest the necessity for some modification being made to meet the present condition of things.

The need for some such modification has been accentuated of late years through the increased demand for land, owing largely to the rise in the price of stock and the improved facilities for the disposal of all agricultural products, which has induced so very many to devote their energies to farm life; whilst, in consequence of many of the tenants on the earlier settlements having disposed of the goodwill of their leases at high figures, on account of the rapid rise in the price of land in the district, it is to be feared that numbers seek to acquire land merely as a speculation.

I have often felt grieved to see the disappointment of some who, after making expensive journeys to inspect the land, &c., have time after time failed to acquire a holding at the ballot. This failure could not always be wholly attributed to bad luck, but more often to the number of chances that others had secured by means of relatives and friends who lent themselves, notwithstanding their sworn declaration that they were applying "solely for their own use and benefit, and not directly or indirectly for the use or benefit of any other person or persons whomsoever." The meaning which applicants assign to the words "solely for their own use and benefit" differs very considerably with different persons, some considering themselves quite justified in making the declaration (and openly expressing such opinion) if they see the prospect of making a pecuniary profit out of the transaction. I am sorry to say that one is repeatedly brought face to face with the fact that to many the declaration undoubtedly seems to have lost its emphatic and binding significance; indeed, numbers seem to sign it without a thought of what it involves.

In the disposal of Crown lands under the provisions of the Land Act, where a person is not required to make a deposit with his application, but only to pay if successful at the ballot, the difficulty is created not so much by the moneyed man who is capable of finding the cash for deposits on a number of applications (excepting where he wishes to acquire a number of sections, which is, however, sometimes the case), but rather is the difficulty caused by the person who has a large circle of relatives or, it may be, of obliging acquaintances. And the problem is to devise some means that will reduce to a minimum the introduction of this undesirable and unfair inequality in applicants' chances. In the case of land disposed of under the Land for Settlements Acts, money does tell as well as relatives and friends, for a deposit, very considerable in some instances, has to accompany each separate application.

In the multiplication of chances we have, first, the wives of married applicants who enter in order to duplicate their husbands' chances. As the law stands at present, a man through his wife, may, under the Land Act, not only double his chances at the ballot, but control or practically hold 960 acres of first-class or 3,000 acres of second-class land. The provisions of the Land for Settlements Acts, however, do not permit of the wife holding a section if the husband has one, unless the Land Board is of opinion that the husband's holding is too small, or *vice versa*, though she may duplicate his application to the extent of 320 acres of first-class and 1,000 acres of second-class land. Secondly, there is the case of the unmarried woman, who can select up to the maximum for men, and who, in land matters, is either a relative or friend of the family, and an application from one such can almost invariably be looked upon as being made solely to increase the chances of some other person at the ballot. As I shall shortly show, out of 303 applicants at our last ballot there were no less than forty-two single women, besides a greater number of married women, and there was not one of either condition that did not bear the same name as some one of the male applicants. The experience here is that where unmarried women have been successful at the ballot, and have secured land, there is every reason to believe that it is invariably worked by and in the interests of a relative. I mention these facts to show how the ballot is capable of being "stuffed." Similar remarks may apply to many of the single young men, though not to the majority of these.

In the case of lands under the Land for Settlements Acts, the Land Board does its best in the examination to purge the ballot list, but it is difficult to do much in the face of sworn declarations and with the limited grounds for rejection which are sanctioned by the existing law and regulations.

To show what an enormous disadvantage the man with the single application labours under in a ballot, I cannot do better than give the particulars of the last two ballots—the first, for the Chamberlain Settlement, 9,528 acres in twenty-three sections, under the Land for Settlements Acts; and the other, a block at View Hill of 8,174 acres in thirty-eight sections, under the Land Act.

Chamberlain Settlement (leased under the Land for Settlements Acts).

Of the 246 applicants, 67 were women—49 being married, and 18 single.

				Applications.
In 86 cases	each applicant	had	but one chance	86
„ 40	„	„	two chances, through relatives ...	80
„ 10	„	„	three „ „ ...	30
„ 7	„	„	four „ „ ...	28
„ 3	„	„	five „ „ ...	15
„ 1 case	the	„	seven „ „ ...	7
				246