Mr. Alfred La Vavasour Durell Fraser: It is with a certain amount of diffidence that I address myself to the Commission. My experience has not been so extensive or deep as that of the former speakers; but I feel that there has been an uncalled-for attack upon the profession of which I have the honour to be a member—that is, of Native agents—and that an injustice has been inflicted upon us. I consider, therefore, that it is a duty both to my brother agents and myself to say something by way of defence. I do this more especially as I perceive that the visit of the Commission to this place affords me the necessary opportunity; and this Commission must recognise that it is no use presenting a report to the House founded on *ex parte* statements as to any matters affecting the Native Land Court. I can indorse, but need not reiterate, many of the statements that have fallen from Mr. Grace and Captain Blake in reference to the procedure of the Native Land Court, especially with regard to Native agents; but I would go further by stating that, from the experience I have gained in this district, the rightful owners of Native land would be placed in a most unfair position through not having the assistance of expert European agents. I wish the Commission to understand that I include in the term "European" those half-caste gentlemen who are practising as agents. I shall proceed to give my reason why I think a great injustice is likely to be done to the genuine owners of Native lands if they are denied the aid of Native agents. The position of the Native Land Court has altered very much within the last few years, and now we have a class of Maoris who make a practice of setting up a claim to every block that comes into the Court. They not only set up spurious cases, but this practice has been cultivated to such an extent that it has almost been elaborated into one of the fine arts wherein they invent evidence. One of the only protections the rightful owners have as against these people are the former Court records, and, as these records are written in English, without the assistance of an expert European agent they are valueless to the Maoris. It seems to be very generally admitted hy the authorities who have expressed their opinions before this Commission that it is advisable to have Courts in distinct districts, a separate Judge sitting in each such district. Taking this, then, as the general opinion on the subject, I think the Commission is justified in accepting that as a very admirable mode of procedure. The great drawback that we have always had to contend with in discussing the subject of having Courts in separate districts was this: How was that Court to deal with rehearings? It has occurred to me that the difficulty may be got over in this way: that the whole procedure of rehearings be altered, and that, instead of, as we do now, applying to the Chief Judge, and he taking evidence and ruling whether the rehearing shall be granted or not, and then, if granted, a long rehearing taking place, I suggest a tribunal something on the lines of the Supreme Court Appeal Court should be set up for the purpose. This Appeal Court to be constituted as follows: The Chief Judge to sit, with the Judge of the district and not less than one other Judge, once, say, every two or four months, in four Native districts in the North Island, and that they hear argument on the original hearing, the Judge's notes to be accepted as the record, and, if necessary, take fresh evidence; the decision of this Court to be final. This Court to have power to indorse or remodel to any extent the original judgment. There is one subject that possibly the Commission may think is beyond the scope of their inquiry, and outside the questions they are empowered to put to the Natives; but it is one that has lately exercised the minds of members of the House of Representatives and the minds of all persons interested in these matters, and one in respect of which the Natives consider they have a distinct grievance. I allude to the investigation of the Native Land Court in respect of a block of Native land known as the Awarua. All the newspapers have made the most extravagant statements in connection with it, and the *Lyttelton Times* and Auckland *Herald* in particular have felt justified in publishing with reference to that proceeding what I have no hesitation in stigmatising as utter nonsense. Then, too, a member of the present Ministry is reported to have stated in Auckland, as an instance of the iniquities of the present system, that a subdivision case lately heard on the West Coast has cost the Natives £25,000; and those gentlemen who have spoken as oracles and authorities on this subject have generally condemned the procedure in that case, and attributed the length of the proceedings to the sixteen or twenty Native agents who were supposed to be engaged therein. I especially want to allude to this case. I trust the Commission will bear with me, for we wish to point out that the Government, or one of the departments of the Government, are to blame for the protracted nature of the investigation. The Awarua is a block of land containing 275,000 acres, and in the original Court, held in 1886, 437 persons were registered as owners of it. Under the existing law the Court had to define the relative interests of each of these 437 owners. By what Native custom or law they had to do it is a mystery, but the fact is that "The Native Land Court Amendment Act, 1888," section 21, said they had to do it. On account of this every one of these 437 people was justified in standing up and asking permission to give evidence on behalf of his or her individual claims. The case opened on the 2nd July, and the first difficulty we had to contend with was in respect of an error in the map. Numerous complaints were made by the Natives. Two officers were sent from Wellington to Marton in order to correct the map. I may as well refer just here to Maori Committees. The Court thought it would be better if they could leave the arrangement of the subdivision to the Natives, and therefore adjourned for three weeks to allow them, if possible, to come to an amicable arrangement. At the end of the three weeks the confusion was worse confounded; the Natives had done nothing. This is a fair sample of the working of Maori Committees. Then it was found that the Government claimed, out of the original block investigated in 1886, 23,000 acres, and the plan before the Court was only approved so far as the land outside the 23,000 acres was concerned. A Royal Commission was appointed to inquire into the ownership of the 23,000 acres, and, after sitting in Hawke's Bay and on the West Coast, they found that the Government were only entitled to some 1,900 acres out of the 23,000 acres which they claimed. Subdivision proceeded with the balance of the block. When the whole of the evidence was done, the Court stated that it could not give judgment because it had no approved plan before it of the whole block as originally investigated, and that consequently the Court would have to adjourn the proceedings until a survey of the land had been made between the