

practically the same and were preserved for the benefit of local authorities. The former provisions relating to the keeping of trust accounts were abolished, as they were unworkable, and, indeed, most auctioneers were unaware of their existence. Instead, creditors of auctioneers were protected by means of a bond of varying amounts according to the number of licenses held by one auctioneer. Provisions were retained for the issue of special licenses at a reduced fee in sparsely populated districts. Certain former restrictions against night auctions were repealed, being no longer necessary in view of modern methods of lighting. Generally, the whole Act was framed so as to be more in accordance with modern conditions, whilst at the same time it aimed at protecting the public without casting unduly harassing conditions on auctioneers. Regulations were subsequently issued under the Act prescribing forms and effecting other objects necessary to bring the Act into full force.

Municipal Corporations Amendment Act.—This was an important Act, which in general conferred on municipalities much wider powers than they formerly possessed. The Act, among other things, gave legislative effect to many of the remits which had been passed at Municipal Conferences. Special provisions were made with respect to the keeping of the accounts of trading undertakings of municipalities, with the object of ensuring that the accounts should show better the true position of the undertaking.

Local Legislation Act.—The annual Local Legislation Act was passed, which contained seventy-nine clauses, affecting the activities of numerous local authorities and public bodies. The usual policy was followed in regard to the various proposals submitted for inclusion in this Act—namely, to examine most carefully every such proposal, so as to ensure that general principles were not being violated nor particular rights interfered with.

As usual, a large number of Local Acts were passed by Parliament, and, in accordance with practice, the Local Bills Committee submitted to this Department for examination and report the majority of the local Bills introduced.

RATING OF FARM LANDS IN BOROUGHES.

The most important subject which was considered last year was the rating of farm lands in boroughs. This subject was taken up primarily as a result of particular difficulties which were brought before the Department in respect of the Borough of Otaki. A Commission was set up, with a wide order of reference, with the object of evolving a scheme so as to place matters in Otaki on a much more satisfactory basis. The Commission consisted of R. M. Watson, Esq., Stipendiary Magistrate, of Feilding; W. T. Strand, Esq., of Lower Hutt; and W. Nash, Esq., of Wellington. The Commission, after careful inquiry, reported on the various subjects submitted to it, and after dealing with certain particular matters, and with a view to relieving the occupiers of farm lands in Otaki from unduly burdensome rates, and of making the incidence of rating in Otaki more equitable, it submitted a scheme of classification whereby lands in the Borough of Otaki should be classified into three classes—namely, (a) building-lands; (b) potential building-lands; and (c) farm lands—and recommended that the borough rates should be levied on a graduated scale over the three classes, so that lands classified as potential building-lands should pay less rates than lands classified as building-lands, and lands classified as farm lands less rates still. About the same time it had become increasingly evident that a somewhat similar state of hardship was being experienced throughout the Dominion by the occupiers of farm lands in boroughs, and as, on account of the peculiar local difficulties in Otaki, the report of the Otaki Commission was not a panacea for the rest of the Dominion, it was considered desirable that further inquiries should be made with a view to determining whether the principle of classification could be made applicable to all boroughs which contained a proportion of farm lands. The same gentlemen were constituted a Commission for this purpose. This Commission held inquiries, mainly at Feilding, and also took evidence at Wellington. Much evidence of a valuable nature was tendered to this Commission by gentlemen who had from various angles given serious thought to the vexed question of rating, and as a result it recommended a universal system of classification of borough lands for rating purposes, and the levying of differential rates, similar to recommendations in the case of Otaki, to be applied in those boroughs to which the system is applicable, after careful inquiry into the circumstances of each such borough. The method of inquiry was set out by the Commission in its report. The reports of both Commissions were under consideration at the close of the year, with a view to legislative effect being given thereto.

LAND AGENTS.

During the year 999 licenses were issued and ten transfers granted, as compared with 1,143 licenses and fourteen transfers last year. Further cases of defalcation were under consideration.

TOWN-PLANNING.

The year has been marked by great activity in town-planning, and substantial progress has been made in the education of public opinion on the subject, without which, as experience has shown, efficient schemes can neither be prepared or realized.

Mr. J. W. Mawson, F.R.I.B.A., M.T.P.I., who succeeded Mr. R. B. Hammond as Director of Town-planning on the 1st October, 1928, is at present engaged on an extensive tour of the Dominion in response to invitations from the local authorities of over a hundred towns to confer with them or to address public meetings; which in itself is a clear indication of the wide public interest which has been aroused and the anxiety of local authorities to take advantage of the powers conferred upon them by the Town-planning Act.

Meetings of the Town-planning Board are being held at regular intervals, and many decisions of a far-reaching nature have already been taken.

Important amendments to the Town-planning Act which have been shown by actual experience to be necessary or desirable are under consideration, including provisions to enable local authorities