

## VITAL STATISTICS.

I have again to record my sincere thanks to the Registrar-General (Mr. E. J. von Dadelszen) for his kindness in permitting me to incorporate his figures in the annual report.

It should be borne in mind that his year embraces the period January to December, 1907, while the Health Report covers from the 1st April, 1907, to the 31st March, 1908.

The average number of children to a marriage is still on the decline. Last year the proportion of births to every marriage solemnised in the preceding year was 3·21, while for 1907 it was 3·15. Whatever we may think of this almost universal decline in the birth-rate, I confess I see no way in which the State can interfere to check it. Commissioners have sat in various parts of the world and discussed the subject in all its phases. Voluminous reports have been written, but it has all been as a beating of the wind. To my mind the remedy is not to be found in reports, but in a national awakening and an increase in patriotism. All sorts of cures have been advocated—such as grants of land to parents having over a certain number in the family. I have little faith in such remedies.

But if the loss to the State through the lessened advent be outside practical politics, the conservation of the health and strength of the children born is not so. Much has been done both by the State and private associations, but still the awful waste continues.

## INFANTS.

The various Societies for the Promotion of the Health of Women and Children have done much good work, and in this connection the efforts of Her Excellency Lady Plunket and Dr. Truby King are deserving of record. By your direction a sum has been placed upon our estimates for the purpose of aiding these societies in their work.

## DEATH-RATES.

The general death-rate increased last year from 9·31 in 1906 to 10·95. This, as the Registrar-General points out, is the highest rate since 1883. The rate, however, is still much below that of the older countries, as will be seen from the table on page .

## INFANTILE MORTALITY.

The death-rate among children was very heavy last year. Ninety-seven out of every thousand males born, and eighty of every thousand females, died before attaining the age of one year—that is, one in ten of male children and one in twelve of females.

If we group those deaths due to diarrhoea and enteritis—which is much the same—along with marasmus—which often spells nothing more than bad feeding—we have 861, out of a total of 1,811, due to ignorance, want of care, and impure milk. Replace these with knowledge, love, and a clean milk-supply, and much would have to be subtracted from this awful toll. And yet New Zealand shows less sacrifice than any other country. Take Russia, with an average rate over ten years of 268 deaths under one year to 1,000 births, England and Wales 147, and we find the Dominion right at the bottom with 88·79 per 1,000 births. Though the toll exacted be small in comparison, yet is it too great. The earlier notification of births insisted on by the Act of 1907, which requires a birth in a city or borough to be registered within seventy-two hours, is sure to effect much good.

## INFLUENZA.

Influenza claimed 223 victims in 1907, as against 132 in 1906.

## PLAGUE.

Detailed accounts of the two cases which occurred in Auckland will be found in the reports of Dr. Purdy and Dr. Makgill. Prompt measures were taken, and the cheering spectacle of Municipality and Central Government working hand-in-hand in the common cause of cleanliness and prevention was splendidly illustrated.

## VACCINATION.

This has been the subject of several special reports to you during the year. I have nothing further to add to what I said last year.

“Once more I draw attention to the lamentable disregard of the law relating to vaccination. The introduction of the so-called conscientious clause into the English Act in 1897 made it difficult for the believers in the efficiency of vaccination to insist on its being made compulsory under “The Public Health Act, 1900.” To grant a certificate of exemption because a parent simply states that he conscientiously believes that to vaccinate his child would be to injure it is practically to leave the matter in the hands of the parent entirely. He may know nothing about the question—that matters not. He is not required to show even an intelligent appreciation of the *pros* and *cons* of the posi-