

PART III.—RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE BIRTH-RATE

Since we agree with the opinion of the Government Statistician that the very great upswing in the birth-rate over the last two to three years is probably a temporary phenomenon, we are inclined to think that within the next two to three years there will be some decline. We have shown in a previous discussion that, while the rate operating in 1939 was not alarming, it was seriously low, and certainly much lower than is desirable. Doubtless the primary explanation of the fall in the birth-rate has been a positive decision to limit the size of the families. This is definitely associated with the changed outlook of women and the social freedom and opportunity which they now enjoy. Modern life is such as to require considerable freedom from domestic ties. We do not think that the non-availability of domestic help is a very important question in limiting the size of the families, since by far the largest proportion of the community has never had domestic help. Admittedly, when children are very young such domestic help would be of great assistance, and the Government's policy of developing the Home Aid Service has much to commend it. The primary cause, however, of the low birth-rate can be attributed to the present-day outlook which in these matters is inclined to be selfish, if not cynical. Much of our educational effort in the past has been directed away from home life, and young people growing up have been encouraged to find their avenues of recreation outside the domestic circle. There would seem to be a deep problem of moral education involved before any fundamental change can be expected. We have no doubt that the family benefit provisions recently instituted will take away much of the economic stress which has been associated with the raising of a family and should do something towards preventing family limitation for purely economic reasons; but monetary incentives are not the whole answer to this question, nor do we think that mere nationalistic drives will in the long run have much effect. The experiences in continental Europe over the past two decades have proved conclusively that mere appeals to blind patriotism do not have permanent results. Some positive measures are desirable. The work of the Minister of Internal Affairs in fostering group travel for mothers, and of such institutions as the Women's Division of the Farmers' Union in providing Home Aids in needy cases and also recuperation centres, is worthy of encouragement, but until a proper appreciation of the importance of the home and of the privileges of family-raising are inculcated into a rising generation, we cannot expect to redirect a trend which has been in operation for so many decades. After all, immigration is only a palliative and cannot really attack the major problem of peopling this country. Our future generations must in the main be born within our own shores, and it is important that the people of New Zealand should recognize to the full their responsibilities in this regard.

We desire to make some comments on the question of motherhood, and the respect due to mothers. The strain of modern life and the social problems associated with the raising of a family place a very heavy strain on the mothers during the period when the family is being reared.

Most mothers are deprived of the possibilities of enjoying even many of the more simple forms of recreation. This is particularly true of women in rural areas. We think that if in many of the urban centres, and particularly in rural towns, proper nurseries were established staffed by capable and well-trained persons more freedom could be given to mothers to carry on their domestic shopping and to enjoy some of the social amenities associated with urban life. In addition to day nurseries, consideration should be given to the provision of similar institutions where children could be cared for during the period of a mother's illness, or absence, for longer holiday periods. While we have above commended the Government Home Aid Service, and the Home Aid Services provided by voluntary institutions, we feel that there is a very great scope for expansion in this direction. The need is particularly great in rural areas, and the knowledge that such assistance would be forthcoming in times of emergency would do much to relieve the mental stress associated with child-bearing.