

For England and Wales the proportion of illegitimate births to the total births in 1903 was 3·9 per cent., having gradually diminished from 7 per cent. in 1845. The minimum rate was 2·4 per cent., in Moamouthshire, and the maximum 7·7 per cent., in Montgomeryshire. For London the percentage was 3·6.

The average proportion of illegitimate births in Scotland in five years was 6·3 per cent., but in Ireland the extremely low average of 2·6 per cent. obtained.

The Legitimation Act.

An important Act was passed in 1894, entitled the Legitimation Act, which makes provision for the legitimation of children born before marriage on the subsequent marriage of their parents. Under this Act any child born out of wedlock, whose parents afterwards marry, is deemed to be legitimised by such marriage on the birth being registered in the manner prescribed by the Act. For legitimation purposes Registrars must register a birth when called upon to do so by any person claiming to be the father of an illegitimate child; but such person is required to make a solemn declaration that he is the father, and that at the time of the birth there existed no legal impediment to his marriage with the mother of the child. He has also to produce the evidence of his marriage. It will thus be seen that in cases dealt with under the Act registration becomes the test of legitimacy. In the December quarter of 1894, 11 children were legitimised; in the year 1895 the number was 68; in 1896, 56; in 1897, 48; in 1898, 59; in 1899, 41; in 1900, 62; in 1901, 47; in 1902, 96; in 1903, 65; in 1904, 87; and in 1905, 84; making altogether 724 legitimations since the passing of the law.

"The Infant Life Protection Act, 1896."

By this statute it has been rendered unlawful for a person to take charge, for payment, of an infant to maintain or nurse for more than three days without holding a license as an infants' home keeper. The house of such a person must be registered as an infants' home.

The administration of this law is a matter entirely managed by the police. The licensed homes are periodically inspected, and the results have shown that licensees generally comply with the required conditions, the homes and infants being well looked after.

The Commissioner, in his report for the year ended 31st March, 1905, writes:—

"During the year there were 528 registered homes throughout the colony, representing 728 infants, against 544 homes and 854 infants in 1903.

"Twenty-one deaths occurred in the homes during the year, against twenty-eight in the preceding year. Five licensees were prosecuted for breaches of the Act, and convicted, against six prosecutions and four convictions in 1903. Three licenses were cancelled, and no neglect by licensees was disclosed at inquests."

Births and Birth-rates in the Four Chief Cities.

The total number of births registered as occurring in the four chief centres and suburbs in 1905 was 6,335, as against 5,970 for the previous year.

There is increase in the births for the four chief cities and suburban boroughs found on comparison with figures for 1904. The birth-rates for 1905 were:—

						Birth-rates per 1,000 of Mean Population.	
Auckland City	...	...	...	...	...	30·06	
"	and five suburban boroughs	...	...	...	...	27·88	
Wellington City	...	...	...	...	...	29·70	
"	and two suburban boroughs	...	...	...	...	29·38	
Christchurch City	...	...	...	...	...	29·70	
"	and one suburban borough	...	...	...	...	29·63	
Dunedin City	...	...	...	...	...	23·90	
"	and six suburban boroughs	...	...	...	...	23·97	

By the inclusion of the suburbs the rate is raised at Dunedin, but lowered at Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch. It will be observed that Christchurch has the highest rate, Wellington next highest, Auckland and Dunedin following with intervals. The difference between the Christchurch rate (29·63) and the Dunedin rate (23·97) is considerable. The birth-rate for the whole colony last year was 27·22 per thousand. Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch are thus over the average, and Dunedin below it.

The birth-rates for three of the central boroughs last year show a rise when compared with 1904. In Auckland the rate fell from 31·08 to 30·06; but it rose in Wellington from 26·77 to 29·72, in Christchurch from 27·53 to 29·70, and in Dunedin from 22·40 to 23·90. The rates for five years, 1901 to 1905, are:—

		Births per 1,000 of Population.				
		1901.	1902.	1903.	1904.	1905.
Auckland (without suburbs)	...	30·00	30·80	31·67	31·08	30·06
Wellington	"	26·35	25·29	29·22	26·77	29·72
Christchurch	"	24·12	25·84	26·59	27·53	29·70
Dunedin	"	22·04	19·96	19·54	22·40	23·90

Deaths.

The deaths in 1905 numbered 8,061, being equivalent to a rate of 9·27 in every 1,000 persons living, as against 9·57 in 1904. The lowest rate experienced since the year 1887, when the deaths were 10·29 per 1,000 of the population, was that for 1896 (9·10).