

The deputation submitted a draft of the Bill, which with a few alterations (which we mutually deemed advisable) is well worthy of your consideration.

In connection with this subject complaints have been received from the Wanganui and Napier Education Boards that the certificates of plumbers who have passed the examination of the above Boards are not recognised by the authorities in Wellington and Christchurch. As the examinations held by the Wanganui and Napier Technical Schools are thorough, both in the practice and theory of plumbing, the attitude of the Wellington and Christchurch authorities seems hardly reasonable. I believe that there is every chance that the Wellington Plumbers' Board of Control will reconsider its objection at an early date.

THE MILK-SUPPLY OF THE COLONY, NOTABLY OF WELLINGTON AND THE LARGER CENTRES.

"No mention is made of infant-feeding, and looking to the thoroughness of the rest of the memorandum, we are tempted to hope that the milk-supply of New Zealand is in a more satisfactory state than that of Great Britain."

In these words the editor of the *British Medical Journal* concludes his review on the pamphlet on "Child-life Preservation," issued last year by the Right Hon. the Premier.

Last September circulars were issued to District Health Officers directing them to report on the milk-supply of the larger towns of their respective districts. I personally inquired into the milk-supply of Wellington.

The Secretary of the Agricultural Department kindly placed the services of some of his Inspectors at the disposal of the above-mentioned officers. The Chief Veterinarian also gave all possible assistance.

Specimens of milk were forwarded by the District Health Officers to the Bacteriologist of the Department.

You will note that the milk-supply of Wellington is worse than that of any of the other large towns. This is largely due to the fact that as compared with the other towns, there is little land surrounding the city available for dairy farms; hence milk has to be brought into town from long distances.

The best supply is that of Christchurch, where dairy farms are within a few miles of the city, and, without exception, are provided with an excellent and abundant supply of water.

With the commercial importance to New Zealand of a milk industry conducted under the best possible conditions this Department has no direct concern. There are, however, four cogent reasons why the Department should advocate substantial reform in the treatment of milk for human consumption—viz., (1) the decline in the birth-rate; (2) an infantile death-rate largely due to diarrhoeal and dietetic diseases; (3) the infection of certain diseases being undoubtedly milk-borne; (4) an increasing disability on the part of mothers to suckle their young.

(1.) *The Decline in the Birth-rate.*

Not only do statistics show a serious diminution in the birth-rate of the United Kingdom, but also in the majority of her more important colonies. So serious is this diminution in the birth-rate regarded by authorities in New South Wales, that the Government of that colony recently appointed a Royal Commission to inquire into the decline of the birth-rate. It is not necessary here to go into the report of this Commission and dwell on its findings. It is enough to state that the chief causes of the decline were stated to be (1) a decrease in the fecundity of marriage; (2) a decrease in the proportion of married women at fertile ages.

There is unfortunately no reason to doubt that similar reasons are the causes of the diminution in the birth-rate of other parts of the British Empire, including, I regret to say, this colony. At the present rate it must be inferred that apart from immigration the population of the United Kingdom will become stationary, if not diminish, and it behoves us in the colonies to recognise that the population to open up our colonies must come from the colonists, and no reliance must be put on the stream of immigration which has in the past, and is now to some extent, flowing towards these shores.

The reduction in the Australasian birth-rate is indeed striking and fraught with extreme danger to our Empire, and I cannot do better than quote the following extract from the report of the New South Wales Commission:—

"174. From time to time in recent years public men, seeing in the establishment of the Australian Commonwealth the first step in the construction of a great nation, and anticipating therefrom a rapid increase of national prosperity and progress, have referred hopefully to the day when Australia with her teeming millions will hold a commanding place among the peoples of the world. The patriotic ardour inspired by this hopeful anticipation is, however, destined to be cooled in the contemplation of the fact that, while Russia and Japan, prospective rivals of Australia for supremacy in the Western Pacific, are already seeking outlets beyond their own borders for the energies of their ever-growing people, it will be forty-six and a half years before Australia, with her three and three-quarters millions of inhabitants, and dependent alone on her natural increase (if this even be maintained at its present rate), will have doubled her population: 113 years before she will have twenty millions of people; and 168 years before her numbers will have reached the present population of Japan.

"175. In whatever way the waning birth-rate of New South Wales is viewed, whether in its effects on the health, character, or social worth of individuals; on the value of the family as the basis of national life; on the quality and dignity of civic life; on the character of the people; on their social, moral, and economic progress; on their national aims and aspirations; or on their capacity to survive in the rivalry of nations; and whether it is viewed in the light of history or of science, it is seen as a grave disorder sapping the vitals of a new people, dispelling their hopes, blighting its prospects, and threatening its continuance."