

MAORI HYGIENE.

Information as to the health of the Maori race is obtainable from two main sources, namely :—

- (a) Vital statistics compiled by the Government Statistician ; and
- (b) Reports of occasional special surveys and of routine medical and nursing work carried out by departmental officers.

A study of the data thus made available can lead only to the one conclusion—namely, that the standard of health of the Maori is much below that of the European who is living in close contact with him and under the same natural conditions.

Vital Statistics.

The vital statistics of the Maori race are necessarily incomplete and inexact because many Maori births and deaths go unrecorded. One of the greatest difficulties in obtaining accurate records of Maori deaths is that a large number of the Maoris are not attended during sickness by a medical practitioner. The regulations that were formerly in force allowed two months as the time in which any death could be registered, and also did not insist on a medical certification of the cause of death prior to burial. This difficulty was partly met in 1934 by advising all Registrars of Maori Births and Deaths that if a death was registered without any cause of death or with only an indefinite cause they should report the facts and supply all particulars available to the nearest District Nurse, who in turn would make inquiries. The cause of death supplied by the District Nurse would, failing one supplied by a medical practitioner, be acceptable for registration and statistical purposes.

Following on recommendations made by the Health Department, the regulations governing the registration of births and deaths of Maoris were revised, and the new provisions came into force on the 1st May, 1935. The amended regulations provide for the registration of Maori deaths within seven days if in the South Island and fourteen days if in the North Island, and also do not permit burial unless there has been furnished—(1) A medical certificate of cause of death ; or (2) a Coroner's order to bury, or (3) a Registrar's certificate that the death has been registered. It is yet too early to state whether there is a greater accuracy in the vital statistics of the Maori, but it is felt that the new regulations are a definite step in the right direction.

The following tables with comments show that, apart from the birth-rate, the Maori compares most unfavourably with the European. Confirmatory evidence of this has been obtained from the reports of departmental Medical Officers. It has been established, for instance, that while the Maori child shows superiority in the absence of severe malnutrition, in the incidence of perfect teeth, and in posture, yet he is definitely inferior to the European child in certain respects, particularly as regards his proneness to skin diseases and his susceptibility to bronchitis, pneumonia, influenza, and other respiratory infections.

Population.—The Maori population as at the 31st December, 1934, was 73,289, an increase of 1,729 over the figure for the previous year.

Birth and Death Rates.—The following table shows a comparison between the Maori and European birth and death rates per 1,000 of the respective populations for the past five years. It will be noted that, whereas the Maori birth-rate is almost two and a half times that of the European, the death-rate is over twice that of the European. Nevertheless the difference between the number of Maori births and the number of Maori deaths is considerable (1,698 for 1934), thus giving the Maori race the satisfactory natural increase of 2.32 per cent. of the whole population, which is much higher than the European natural increase of only 0.80 per cent.

Maori and European Birth and Death Rates per 1,000 of Respective Populations.

Year.				Birth-rates.		Death-rates.	
				Maori.	European.	Maori.	European.
1930	..	..	..	31.56	18.80	14.06	8.56
1931	..	..	..	33.74	18.42	14.81	8.34
1932	..	..	..	39.28	17.09	17.06	8.02
1933	..	..	..	41.20	16.59	16.22	7.98
1934	..	..	..	40.67	16.47	17.51	8.48

Infant Mortality.—The following table gives the Maori infantile death-rate per 1,000 live births each year for the ten-year period 1925–1934 :—

Year.			Death-rate.	Year.			Death-rate.
1925	..	..	107.23	1930	..	..	88.51
1926	..	..	117.19	1931	..	..	95.59
1927	..	..	157.86	1932	..	..	95.45
1928	..	..	118.16	1933	..	..	92.61
1929	..	..	78.52	1934	..	..	93.59