

PART II.—PUBLIC HYGIENE.

I have the honour to submit my report for the year ended 31st March, 1938.

SECTION I: VITAL STATISTICS.

(Exclusive of Maori unless otherwise stated.)

POPULATION.

The mean population of the Dominion for 1937 was estimated to be 1,504,826, an increase of 12,482 over the corresponding figure for the previous year.

BIRTHS.

The births of 26,014 living children were registered during 1937, as against 24,837 in 1936 and 23,965 in 1935. The birth-rate per 1,000 of mean population was 17·29. The general course of the rate during the past five years is shown in the following table :—

Births (Number and Rate) in New Zealand, 1933–37.

Year.				Total Number of Births registered.	Birth-rate per 1,000 of Mean Population.
1933	..	..	..	.. 24,334	16·63
1934	..	..	..	.. 24,322	16·51
1935	..	..	..	.. 23,965	16·17
1936	..	..	..	.. 24,837	16·64
1937	..	..	..	.. 26,014	17·29

From 1920 the birth-rate declined year by year until it reached its lowest level in 1935 (16·17). For 1936 the rate showed an increase to 16·64, and in 1937 a further increase to 17·29 per 1,000 of mean population. It is not to be expected that the rate will ever again approach that obtaining in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, as the percentage of women of child-bearing age in the population is to-day much less than it was at that time. The decline in the birth-rate is, however, not due solely to the altered age-distribution of the population, but also to a decline in the fertility rate, a decline the extent of which can only be viewed with disquietude. It is to be hoped that the rising tendency of the past two years will continue.

DEATHS.

The deaths registered during 1937 numbered 13,658, an increase of 602 over the figure for 1936 (13,056).

Crude Death-rate.

Year.				Crude Death-rate per 1,000 of Mean Population.	Year.				Crude Death-rate per 1,000 of Mean Population.
1932	..	..	..	8·04	1935	..	..	..	8·25
1933	..	..	..	7·99	1936	..	..	..	8·75
1934	..	..	..	8·50	1937	..	..	..	9·08

It will be seen that the crude death-rate reached its lowest level in 1933, and that it now shows a definite rising tendency. This is to be expected with an ageing population. Causes of death chiefly associated with the later decades of life (heart-disease, cancer, cerebral hæmorrhage and apoplexy, senility, and diseases of the kidneys and of the arteries) account for more than two-thirds of the increase in the number of deaths during the year.

Still-births.

A still-born child is defined as one “ which has issued from its mother after the expiration of the twenty-eighth week of pregnancy, and which was not alive at the time of such issue.” Still-births have been compulsorily registrable in New Zealand since March, 1913. In 1937 still-births numbering 761 were registered, an increase of 29 over the figure for the previous year.

Still-births (Number and Rate) in New Zealand, 1933–37.

Year.				Total Number of Still-births registered.	Rate of Still-births per 1,000 Live Births.
1933	..	..	..	.. 722	29·7
1934	..	..	..	.. 687	28·3
1935	..	..	..	.. 738	30·8
1936	..	..	..	.. 732	29·5
1937	..	..	..	.. 761	29·3

(NOTE.—Still-births are not included, either as births or deaths, in the various numbers and rates given elsewhere in this report.)