

Although the population was four times larger in 1945 than in 1878, the total number of births in 1945 was only 37,007, or only slightly double the number in 1878. The number of women of child-bearing age increased during this period approximately four and a half times, while the number of births had just about doubled. From whatever angle this is considered, the extent of the reduction in births must give rise to serious thought. There is no evidence to show any change in the public attitude to marriage; in fact, there is, if anything, a slight fall in the age of marriage of both sexes over the past three decades. Hence, changes in the birth-rates, in so far as legitimate children are concerned, are due to a reduction in the size of families. The following table shows the number of marriages per 1,000 of the mean population from 1888 to 1945 :—

Table No. 11.—Table showing Number of Marriages per 1,000 of Mean Population from 1888 to 1945

1888	..	..	5·97	1923	..	..	7·90
1893	..	..	6·22	1928	..	..	7·58
1898	..	..	6·91	1933	..	..	7·18
1903	..	..	8·23	1938	..	..	10·09
1908	..	..	8·82	1943	..	..	7·53
1913	..	..	8·25	1944	..	..	8·43
1918	..	..	5·65	1945	..	..	10·06

A picture of more recent trends is shown in the next table, showing marriage-rates from 1929 to 1945 :—

Table No. 12.—Table showing Number of Marriages per 1,000 of Mean Population from 1929 to 1945

1929	..	..	7·80	1938	..	..	10·09
1930	..	..	7·78	1939	..	..	11·12
1931	..	..	6·81	1940	..	..	11·28
1932	..	..	6·81	1941	..	..	8·65
1933	..	..	7·18	1942	..	..	7·91
1934	..	..	7·64	1943	..	..	7·53
1935	..	..	8·23	1944	..	..	8·43
1936	..	..	9·25	1945	..	..	10·06
1937	..	..	9·55				

There was a decline in marriages in 1931 and 1932, but 1933 and 1934 showed improvements. It is probable that the rise from 1936 onward is not directly due to the consummation of marriages postponed because of the depression, but rather to the tendency for higher incomes during the post-depression period to the lower-paid sections of the community and of legislation passed or in prospect easing the burdens of raising families. War marriages undoubtedly came into the picture in 1939 and 1940. Between 1941 and 1943 a large proportion of the males of marriagable age were overseas and the uncertainty of the war situation caused some postponement. The cessation of the war in 1945, accompanied as it was by the return of the troops and buoyant economic conditions, caused an upswing in the marriage-rate, while in 1946 a new record will probably be reached. In the first quarter of 1946 the rate was 28 per cent. higher than in the corresponding quarter of 1945 and was double the 1942 rate.

Taking all the above facts together, the following explanation of the fall in the birth-rate can be given with considerable confidence. Although the proportion of the population marrying has tended to increase, the actual fertility of the marriages has tended to fall. There is a very steady tendency to reduce the size of families. It will be obvious that if a married couple produce only two children, then, ignoring for the time being the death-rate, the population will not be reproducing itself, since only a proportion of people marry; hence, still ignoring the death-rate, it will be necessary for each married couple to produce more than two children if the population is to maintain itself—that is, on the assumption, of course, that there is no immigration.