The figures for the twenty-year period 1887–1906 show a decline in the proportion of births to every marriage in the preceding year from 5·31 to 3·21, as below :—

Year.				Marriages.	Legitimate Births.	Proportion of Births to every Marriage solemnised in the Preceding Year.
1886	...	...	...	3,489	...	...
1887	...	...	...	3,565	18,518	5·31
1888	...	...	...	3,617	18,325	5·14
1889	...	...	...	3,632	17,845	4·93
1890	...	...	...	3,797	17,675	4·87
1891	...	...	...	3,805	17,635	4·64
1892	...	...	...	4,002	17,283	4·54
1893	...	...	...	4,115	17,514	4·37
1894	...	...	...	4,178	17,824	4·33
1895	...	...	...	4,110	17,711	4·24
1896	...	...	...	...	17,778	4·32
1896	...	...	...	4,843	...	...
1897	...	...	...	4,928	17,911	3·70
1898	...	...	...	5,091	18,154	3·68
1899	...	...	...	5,461	18,006	3·54
1900	...	...	...	5,860	18,640	3·41
1901	...	...	...	6,095	19,554	3·34
1902	...	...	...	6,394	19,734	3·23
1903	...	...	...	6,748	20,835	3·26
1904	...	...	...	6,983	21,737	3·22
1905	...	...	...	7,200	22,600	3·24
1906	...	...	...	...	23,120	3·21

If the average result be taken out for the ten years 1887–96, it will be found to represent 4·67 births to a marriage. Dealing similarly with the figures for 1897–1906 the result is an average of 3·38, so that regarded annually or decennially there is a decided fall to be observed.

In the Australian States a similar decrease is noticeable.

New Zealand had in 1880 the highest birth-rate (40·78) ; in 1900 the case was reversed ; but in 1906 the New Zealand rate was higher than that of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia.

The movement over ten years is calculated as under :—

Birth-rates per 1,000 of Population.

State or Colony.	1897.	1898.	1899.	1900.	1901.	1902.	1903.	1904.	1905.	1906.
Queensland	29·92	28·28	27·31	30·21	28·28	27·68	24·71	27·12	25·92	26·31
New South Wales ...	28·42	27·14	27·10	27·43	27·60	27·17	25·28	26·73	26·73	27·04
Victoria	26·59	25·72	26·71	25·82	25·77	25·23	24·46	24·65	24·83	25·14
South Australia ...	26·97	24·98	25·51	25·78	25·39	24·85	23·43	24·70	23·82	23·54
Western Australia ...	25·82	29·35	30·64	31·46	30·32	30·09	30·27	30·34	30·30	30·02
Tasmania	27·73	26·24	25·98	28·25	28·40	28·95	28·61	29·59	29·32	29·52
New Zealand	25·96	25·74	25·12	25·60	26·34	25·89	26·61	26·94	27·22	27·08

This table shows that although New Zealand had in 1900 the lowest birth-rate in Australasia, the rate in this colony for 1906 was higher than that of New South Wales, Victoria, and some others.

A declining birth-rate is noticeable in many civilised countries, and attention has been drawn by statisticians and political economists to the serious consequences that may result. That fertility among women in New Zealand is decreasing, from whatever causes, further facts will tend to show.

Taking the number of married women in New Zealand at what may be considered the child-bearing ages (*i.e.*, from 15 to 45 years, inclusive) as shown by each census since 1878, and for the same years the number of legitimate births (excluding plural) registered, the birth-rate per 1,000 married women of the above-stated ages is easily found, and is shown to be steadily declining. In 1878 the rate was 337 per 1,000, in 1896 it had fallen to 252, in 1901 to 244, and in 1906 to 228 ; or, in other words, in 1878 one married woman of the ages specified in every three gave birth to a child, while in 1906 the rate was less than one in four. The figures for each census year are given below.