

ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENTS.

A NUMBER OF SUBSCRIBERS.—If you signed the order, or other signed it on your behalf, you are responsible, and by awaiting legal proceedings you only throw away good money after the bad. We are sorry we cannot give you better comfort. We have issued repeated warnings regarding this class of itinerant vendors. We can only give good advice. We wish we could give good sense as well. However, you will know better what to do next time.

DEATHS.

HANLEY.—On the 2nd September, 1899, at her residence, Knapdale, Maria, beloved wife of Matthew Hanley; aged 63 years.—R.I.P.

TANGNEY.—On the 1st June, 1899, at his residence, Clashatlea County Kerry, Ireland, William, beloved husband of Johanna Tangney, and father of Patrick Tangney (Nelson), David Tangney and Mrs. T. Dowling (Owaka), Mrs. J. O'Leary (Otakaia), and Mrs. James Conaghan (Balfour, Southland); aged 80 years. Deeply regretted.—R.I.P.

The New Zealand Tablet.

FIAT JUSTITIA.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 1899.

THE CRADLES OF NEW ZEALAND.



MR. COGHLAN'S recent comparative statistics of the birth-rate of the various Australasian colonies have set our secular contemporaries a-moralising from Auckland to Otago. They have treated the subject with a becoming delicacy which is in marked contrast with the reports of divorce court proceedings and similar happenings which appear from time

to time in their news columns. They have viewed the problem almost exclusively from its economic and social aspect. And this phase of the subject has given them cause for much foreboding and head-wagging. Now, the economical and social aspects of the question are real points of view, but they are dominated by the moral standpoint. It lies at the root of the evil; and if we are to deal with causes and not quack-drug symptoms merely, that way, too, will lie the remedy. A lay sermon on the subject from the writers of the secular Press would have been instructive, perhaps useful. We can only express our sense of disappointment that they shut their eyes to the biggest aspect of a state of affairs that bodes ill for the future of this young Colony. As a matter of fact, they have trifled sadly with their subject. Their quack remedies for the nation's disease remind us that, as social physicians, they ought to know better than to treat a cancer with sprayings of rose-water, or cholera morbus with pink pills.

The outlook disclosed by Mr. COGHLAN is far from roscate. There has been during the past twenty years a marked decline in the birth-rate in all the seven colonies of the Australasian group. But in New Zealand the decrease has been phenomenal. It presents several features which, taken together, look, in all reason, sufficiently startling. Thus (1) in 1882, New Zealand stood at the head of the Australasian list with a birth-rate of 37.32 per thousand of her population. In 1897 she stands at the very bottom, with her figures reduced to a poor 25.96 per thousand of the population, as against 26.44 for South Australia, 26.63 for Victoria, 26.82 for West Australia, 27.72 for Tasmania, 28.48 for New South Wales, and 29.92 for Queensland. Again (2): the decrease in the New Zealand birth-rate has been absolute as well as relative. It fell from 19,846 in 1884 to 18,737 in 1897. (3) In 1886 there were in New Zealand 18,355 children under one year of age. The population then numbered 578,482 persons. In 1896 the population of the Colony had risen to 708,360; but the number of children under one year of age had dropped to 17,070. In the meantime there had been a substantial increase (4) in the number of marriages, and (5), according to MULLHALL'S *Dictionary of Statistics* for the present year,

the ratio of married adults in New Zealand is greater to population than in any of the sister colonies except South Australia and Tasmania. Moreover (6) the ratio of births per marriage has fallen off alarmingly. In 1880 it was 5.72; at the close of 1897 the proportion had fallen to 3.86. This is a perilously close approach to the figures of the two European countries where the population is almost at a standstill—Denmark with its 3.55 and France with its 2.98 births per marriage.

Thus it appears that, in the full flush of its youth and vigour, with a fine climate, a fertile soil, a wealth of mineral and forest resources, and the struggle for existence reduced to a minimum, this promising new land is evidently treading the fatal path that is leading fast to the extinction of the decadent descendants of the sturdy Puritan settlers of the New England States of America. Three years ago the *Providence Journal* wrote of them:—

The first generations of New England were thrifty both in an agricultural and domestic sense. From the records of six generations of New England towns it was found that the families composing the first generation had on an average between eight and ten children; the next three generations averaged about seven to each family; the fifth generation less than three, and the generation now on the stage is averaging still less. In Massachusetts, the average family now numbers less than three.

A fearsome picture of the depravity and decay of Puritan New England was given in the *New York Medical Journal* of August 17, 1895, by Dr. LINDLEY, professor of gynaecology in the University of Southern California, and formerly President of the State Medical Society. The Puritan strain of New England is withering up. Their towns, their farms and farmsteads are fast falling into the hands of the sturdy Irish and German Catholic immigrants that have been making up for the empty cradles of the old stock. New Zealand has no such resource to fall back upon. The whole trend of our legislation is rather to discourage immigration. Its proportions are insignificant—the excess of arrivals over departures in 1897 being represented by a paltry 2753. In all the circumstances those who are interested in the welfare of the Colony must view with grave uneasiness the steady and continued decline in its birth-rate. For if the present marked tendency continues—and on statistical theories its continuance is practically certain—we shall become a decadent people and New Zealand in its early youth a decrepid State.

In his report on the Michigan statistics of 1894 the Hon. WASHINGTON GARDNER gives the following as the probable reasons for the diminution of the birth-rate in the United States:—

- (1) The great diffusion of physiological information; (2) lessening of restraint from religious and social opinion; and (3) the greater cost of family life, which leads to the desire to have fewer children in order that they may each be better provided for.

It will be obvious to any reflecting person that the lessening of religious restraints lies at the root of all the other reasons set forth by the American statistician. It permeates and affects them so that they are in reality not, so to speak, originating but subsidiary causes of a lessening birth-rate. Religion is the chief cohesive force that holds people together in communities under forms of law and authority. The only real, permanent and final deterrent from evil-doing is a well-rooted belief in personal responsibility to a Creator Who sees and judges, rewards and punishes. Destroy religious influence among the masses, remove the restraints which faith in GOD and practice of virtue from supernatural motives place upon the lower passions and evil tendencies of human nature, and animal feeling and selfish personal interest become the sole or chief guides of conduct. Now, unfortunately, the forces which tend to destroy or reduce the beneficent sway of religion have long been and are still in active operation in this and the neighbouring colonies—some of them under the aegis of the State. They are chiefly (1) the godless schools; (2) the loose teachings of the non-Catholic denominations regarding the nature and obligations of the marriage tie; (3) divorce legislation; and (4) the operations of the sets of social parasites who minister to and aggravate the low ideals which the other three causes combined have served to make rampant in our midst.

It is manifestly impossible, in the course of a brief newspaper article, to point out the full action, re-action, and