

No. 23

so that there might be fresh openings for those who hold

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VITAL STATISTICS.

We have received the *Administration Report* for 1895 on the above subject. It was prepared by Mr. P. Arumchalam, the Acting Registrar-General of Marriages, Births and Deaths. A vast amount of labor was evidently required for preparing the various tables, and much information of "vital" importance to all the community is contained in the publication. Attention is first attracted by the large map of Ceylon colored to represent the relative healthfulness of the different districts as indicated by their death-rates. The most part of Jaffna comes under the lightest color as the healthiest, i.e. up to 20 deaths per 1000 persons living. The most part of the Western Province is the same. This is the more remarkable from the fact that these two localities are among the most thickly settled in the Island. The two things no doubt react on each other. The places are thickly settled because they are healthy naturally, and on the other hand they are more healthy because they are well populated.

The water says, "That so densely populated a district should maintain so good a standard of health is creditable to the inhabitants, who have by their energy and intelligence succeeded in overcoming unfavorable physical and climatic conditions." But if the conditions were so unfavorable why did they congregate there? We read further on about Jaffna. "The second and third quarters" (of the year) "are the hottest periods of the district. The south-west monsoon blows there as a warm land wind, the heat, however, being tempered by the sea-breeze (Jaffna possessing a more extensive sea-frontage than any other district of the Island), which renders the climate very healthy."

As we might expect, the highest death-rates, i.e. above 60 in 1000, is found in two districts in the North Central and North Western Provinces. There is no doubt but that these will become healthier when opened up by railway communication, and by irrigation works, thus attracting settlers. It is interesting to notice that another healthy district is on the hills almost coincident with the locality of greatest rain fall, where 15 feet, or more of rain falls in a year, though the Report says "a result due chiefly to European enterprise." The next to the highest death-rate is found in the south-eastern part of the Island, and in the Northern Province, the two places where the death-rate is the least.

The death-rate for 1895 was 27.1 per 1000, which is a decrease of 1.1 per cent. from 1894. Interesting tables and diagrams are given comparing the death-rates of different years, and from different causes, in the various localities. The rate for the Tamils, 23, is considerably less than for the Sinhalese, 33, though more than for Europeans and Burghers. This may in part be due to the fact that many of the Tamils are immigrants and perhaps also indicates that they are a more vigorous race.

The immigrants are one third of all the Tamils, and of the remainder, 62 per cent live in the Northern Province, and 18 in the Eastern. The increase of population for the year was 18 per cent, of which 14 was due to immigration, and only 4 to natural increase by the excess of births over deaths. This brings the estimated population up to 3,298,342, or more than three and a quarter million, which is an increase of 37 per cent in a quarter of a century.

The value of the diagrams is greatly lessened by the fact of incomplete registration. Much effort is being made in various ways to make it more complete. But in the matter of marriage there seems to be liability of a backward step.

Marriage Laws. More than one fourth of the births in the Island are where the marriage of the parents has not been registered. Amongst the Tamils this proportion rises to two fifths. The Report says, "A large number of people are content with the customary or religious ceremonies, and do not think it necessary to register their marriages, and such marriages are apparently not invalid." In 196 a Bill was passed in the Legislature making registration essential to the validity of a marriage. The Tamil Representative opposed it, and when it passed, appealed to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, when it was ordered to be repealed. The Report says that a Bill for this purpose is before the Council. On another page it says:

"Uncertainty on subject of such vital importance" (the ceremony essential to marriage) "is fraught with the gravest consequences." The Royal Commission of '68 stated "A good marriage law ought to embrace the maximum of simplicity and the maximum of certainty; of simplicity, because it affects every class, and almost every person, the most humble and illiterate as well as the most educated and learned; of certainty, because it affects a contract, a social relation the most important that can arise between human beings, because it affects the foundations of society itself, and influences the fate, it may be the eternal fate, of innumerable individuals."

These words are none too strong. Admitting

their truth we see the necessity of some definite legal element in a valid marriage. Certainly nothing can be simpler or more definite than registration. It is true that the State does not take as much responsibility as this in all civilized countries, but marriage in such places is safeguarded in other ways. It would be sufficient to allow religious ceremonies only, if the one who performs the ceremony has a recognized standing before the law, and if the ceremony is such that it can be definitely certified to in case a legal question arises. It would however be very difficult to definitely determine these, and registration is much simpler, and answers all the necessities of the State. Moreover we imagine that the neglect of registration is not due to the greater regard for religious services, but to the fact that these ceremonies do not make a legal liability. So far as we have observed the working of these customs it seems as if the contracting parties regarded marriage as a sort of lottery in which the chance of drawing a prize was not very great, and therefore they wished the possibility of withdrawing. This element of uncertainty is very mischievous. It might be said that marriages being arranged by parents or others, the parties ought to have opportunity of breaking up a bad match. But the fact is—Love is largely a matter of the will. If the two parties sincerely yield themselves to each other, as is done in many cases, if not in most, there is as true love and affection, as if they arranged the matter themselves. And if the marriage is an indissoluble bond, care will be taken in arranging, and incompatibility will not be more frequent than as if the arranging were done by young and inexperienced parties themselves. Of course mutual acquaintance and true love before marriage is the ideal, where it is possible, which hardly seem to be the case here at present. If the new law makes registration optional it is very important that the authority of the State, and its interest in marriage be made manifest in some other way.

The Report says also, "The marriage-rate is found in some European countries to fluctuate with the value of exports and imports, and often with the price of food, and to be a fairly accurate measure of a people's well-being—a barometer, as it has been called." It being difficult to note any such correlation, simply because of the varying stringency of the rules for registration. We fear that the new legislation will make this matter worse yet. Other matters of interest in this Report must be left for the present.

THE GOVERNOR'S ADDRESS.

The Legislative Council session was opened by His Excellency Sir Joseph Ridgway on the 26th ult. A large number of Officials and prominent residents were present on the occasion, and the Governor in an able address outlined his policy for the future. All are pleased with his enunciation of principles. He expressed his desire to hold the scales of his administration evenly balanced and to guard the interests and promote the welfare of all classes whatever their race or creed. He showed his prudence in carefully studying the situation on all sides for these months past before declaring himself. And even now his declarations are guarded, though he shows a progressive spirit.

He discussed the Railway question at some length, and said among other things "As an administrator I am naturally in sympathy with railway extension to the North. I wish to see the thickly populated districts of the North brought into communication with the rest of the Island. I wish to see the intervening districts now for the most part, waste and jungle, developed and populated." "If we decide on railway extension, my advice is—push on as quickly as possible, and not allow the grass to grow under our feet."

This looks as if the Railway to Jaffna might soon be decided upon.

It is true that he dwelt on the need of money, and yet seemed to favor a loan for railway construction. The finances of the Colony are certainly in a flourishing state as reported by His Excellency, even if all is needed for regular expenditure.

THE AMERICAN ELECTION.

There has been much excitement in the United States over the Election which took place on the 3rd inst. The result is that the Republican candidate, Major Wm. McKinley was elected by a very large majority. This is a very satisfactory for many reasons. The election of a President does not necessarily determine the policy of the country. He is only the head of the executive depart-

ment of the Government. He does not make any laws. Congress decides on the laws, and he is asked to sign them. If he refuses to do this, Congress can still pass them, if a two thirds majority favor, which, however, is not often the case. The importance of the election is largely in the fact that it indicates the will of the people in reference to important public matters. When a candidate is nominated some four months before the election a statement of principles is made which is called the platform of the party. For many years now the leading principle of the Republican party has been Protection, while that of the Democratic party has been Free Trade. We shall discuss these on another occasion. This year the question of money quite overshadowed these, though they were not forgotten. A new party called the Populist has been lately rapidly increasing in strength, and the delegates to the Democratic Convention were so infected by their principles, that their platform and their candidate Mr. Wm. Bryan, were in reality Populist. The point specially brought out was Free Silver. This means that they demanded that any one should be allowed to bring silver to the Mint and have it coined into dollars free of charge. Silver is now so abundant and cheap that the metal in a silver dollar is worth only about half of a gold dollar. If the Government passed a free silver law the value of the silver dollar would quickly drop to the value of the silver in it, which would probably rise a little to meet it. It is true that the prices of much of the produce in the States have fallen a considerable within three years, and the farmers find it very difficult to live, and if money were more plenty and cheaper they might find a little relief. But this sudden change of standards would cause great disturbance in all kinds of business, and great losses because of the uncertainty, and the state of the country would be much worse than before.

Many of the Democrats disliked the idea of Free Silver so much, although they preferred Free Trade, that they called another Convention and nominated another candidate, while Mr. Bryan was called in ridicule the "Populist" candidate. The owners of silver mines favored Free Silver, because by it their profits would be greatly increased. On the other hand the bankers and leading business men, who are more numerous in the Eastern States, favored the gold standard.

The President is not elected directly by the vote of the people, but by electors for certain periods called Electors. These will later meet and elect the President. But certain electors have each promised to vote for a certain man, so that it is nearly the same as if the President were directly elected by the people. The Congress, which makes the laws, is composed of the Senate, two persons from each state, or 90 in all, who are chosen for six years, and the House of Representatives (about 200) chosen according to population, for two years only. Thus only a part of the members of Congress are now elected. But the results indicate that a majority in both houses will be Republican, and this is quite as important as the choice of President.

The Bubonic Plague. This dire disease, which has caused so great alarm in Bombay, well deserves its reputation. It first appeared in Europe in A. D. 1344, and since that time 25,000,000 have died of it. Last appearance there was in 1911, but it has not prevailed much in this century. It results in high fever. It begins with weakness of mind and body, followed by shivering, headache, vomiting, high fever, great prostration and then unconsciousness. Other symptoms are blood from the bowels, the appearance of lumps, or inflammatory enlargement of lymphatic glands in the groin, under the arm, etc., and purple patches. Overcrowding, but ventilation, uncleanliness, deficient food, and resistance to damp, marshy soils are considered predisposing causes. But the disease is strictly caused by germs which are carried in air, or water, or by contact. In these respects it resembles cholera, but the proportion of fatal cases is greater. Since the outbreak in Bombay up to the 3rd inst. there have been 342 cases of which 371 have been fatal. Many of the residents of the city are panic-stricken and thousands are leaving the city, both by rail and by sea. There is great danger that the disease will be communicated to other places. There have been several cases of fever in Calcutta which were thought to be the plague, but it has been decided that they were not that.

Dr. & Mrs. Rockwood celebrated their Silver Wedding on the 26th Oct. by an *Evening* in the Public Hall, Colombo. A large number of friends were present and two presentations, each of the value of Rs. 2000 were made, the one by the Hon'ble Dr. K. J. S. on behalf of the Medical Department and the other by Sir Harry Dues on behalf of the general public.

Dr. Loos in an address referred to the high estimation and reputation in which Dr. Rockwood is held by the Government and the public at large. Sir Harry Dues in presenting the address on behalf of the general public referred to the great estimation the Doctor had achieved throughout the length and breadth of this Island, and to the many good social qualities of the couple which had made them so very popular. Dr. Rockwood's many Jaffna friends also may well tender their congratulations.

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