

4 November 1932.

Major L. Darwin, Sc.D.,
Cripps's Corner,
Forest Row,
Sussex.

Dear Major Darwin:

Thanks for your letter. With regard to the arguments in your father's mind prior to the "Origin", I found rather an amusing thing recently, namely Huxley putting forward as one of his main criticisms, on first reading the "Origin", a problem which your father must continually have considered and resolved in his own mind during the previous fifteen years. You ~~would~~^{will} remember that I am inclined to reverse the common conception of your father's attitude towards use and disuse, and other supposed environmentally induced modifications. It is, I think, usually supposed that he accepted these either as probable per se, or on the strength of such evidence as the relative weights of the wings and legs of wild and domesticated ducks, as he subsequently adduced as possible examples of such effects. On the contrary I believe he felt forced to admit that theoretically the environment

~~should~~^{must} be capable of producing evolutionary modifications because it must be immediately responsible for the large amount of variation which can be readily observed, while, practically, he was continually impressed with the conclusion that such direct effects have in fact only been of slight or occasional importance; and therefore that the great mass of mutation produced by environmental causes must be unbiased in direction, "mere variability" as he sometimes says, such as might well arise from the irregularity or disturbance of the working of the reproductive system. Huxley is therefore only raising a ^{very} familiar point, reflecting, one might say, fragments gleaned from Darwin's own argument, when he writes "And second, it is not clear to me why, if continual physical conditions are of so little moment as you suppose, variation should occur at all". This is ^{the} Huxley's "Life and Letters", vol. I, p. 254, but it is almost the only point of scientific interest that I have found in the whole volume. I suppose his son thought the public would not be interested in scientific ideas.

I do not know whether you have formed any view as to the future of the Eugenics Society. I was in the Chair on Wednesday, and raised the question of tenure of the Presidency, rather with a view to preventing a premature discussion of

possible candidates. At present therefore the Executive, or, as I believe Blacker is pleased to call it, the General Purposes sub-committee, is charged to report on the tenure and functions of the Presidency. Blacker, I understand, is anxious to get a distinguished medical man, and has one or two names in mind, but I fancy he has no chance of getting any of them to attend to the affairs of the Society, whether nominally President or not; and seriously I think that a man who could not regularly attend Councils and Executives would never get the Society to do anything worth doing. However, I am writing to learn your opinion, if you have formed one, and not, except incidentally, to express mine.

Yours sincerely,