

Cripps's Corner. Forest Row - Sussex

Jan 11. 31

My dear Fisher.

You will get sick of the sight of my writing, but this letter needs no answer. It is indeed an answer to yours of Dec. 8., in which you sent me the enclosed diagram. I can make no use of it, but I hope you will. The idea of there getting the proportion of children who are feebleminded is so obvious that no merit attaches to it. The whole difficulty lies in working out the results, which I am quite incapable of doing. I hope you will seriously consider attacking the problem, for I think some interesting points might emerge.

I shall jot down some half baked thoughts that are in my mind, very likely erroneous, mainly for my own interest. I suppose we here assume that mental defect is due to many factors, and that the curve of distribution is normal. Both these are pure assumptions, so it should be said that the results are illustrative and suggestive rather than rigid deductions; otherwise your conclusions might be fully utilized.

By estimating the curve by eye, your diagram seems to indicate that with an incidence of 16 per thousand 16% of the children would be f. m.,

whilst with 2 per 1000 only 7% would be affected, roughly one half. These figures may possibly represent what occurs in the labouring and the professional classes respectively. Let us assume it is so.

The man in the street considers the f.m. in all classes to be identical, and he may be right. But he argues falsely if he concludes that the offspring of these f.m. will all be alike also. Here it comes out that it is far more important to look to the stigmatization of the f.m. in certain districts than in others. (We want a new word - infertilization?).

Is it right to assume that the f.m. are alike in the different classes? I suspect this depends on how you make your calculations. To take an analogy, are you finding the number of offspring over 6 ft high from parents all exactly 6 ft high; or from all parents over 6 ft in height? If you want to include idiots and imbeciles, who cannot breed, I suppose what is wanted is some intermediate method. If you deal with parents exactly 6 ft high, then I suppose the percentage of f.m. offspring depends on the class in which they mate. I take it that it may be assumed that they mate in their own class.

If you take the f.m. as comparable to all over 6 ft., is not there a difference between the f.m. in the different classes? I cannot think it out.

Here is another point. Doctors dealing with the well-to-do seem to me to deny the heredity of f.m. The main reason is that they never find an f.m. child who has an f.m. parent amongst their clients. The reason of that is that amongst their clients no f.m. are allowed to procreate. But may not the fact that the f.m. child in the professional class is twice as likely to have a normal parent as in the labouring class also count for something?

Again, suppose we could <sup>get</sup> the facts in regard to the percentages of f.m. in a given class, and the percentage of f.m. children of f.m. parents, should we not get something to indicate that f.m. is or is not hereditary in character?

There is another point I cannot put very clearly. Could you calculate what would be the result of a certain <sup>de</sup>crease in the professional classes, balanced by an increase amongst labourers, on my supposition, as to the increase in f.m. children who are descended from normal parents and from f.m. parents? Could you

get in this way any idea of the relative importance in this respect of sterility, mental defects, and of preventing the relative increase of the labouring class? It may be of course dangerous to so ridicule any theoretical class.

Does the way of regarding matters, that is, <sup>either</sup> assuming many factors ~~instead of~~ or a single factor, lead to different results? Would you 17% emigration have also on the right supposition? If not, why is there a difference, and does it point to any interesting conclusions? Do we know that the distribution is not lopsided in such cases?

I have put these all in question. But these questions only mean that here seems a point to be, I hope, turned over in your mind, and no answer sent to me. I shall bury the subject as beyond my powers

Yours sincerely,  
J. Dawson.