

12th March 1934.

Major Darwin,
Cripps's Corner,
Forest Row,
Sussex.

Dear Major Darwin,

It was good to get your letter. I thought it exceedingly silly of the Editor to accept Duften's article without consulting the editorial Committee, as Duften made himself a good deal laughed at at Leicester where the B.A. met last year. But I was still more disappointed at his failure to take advantage of the notice the daily and weekly papers were taking of the Sterilisation Report, as a number dealing specifically and authoritatively with the subject would certainly have sold during that fortnight, and I had thought that the date of publication of the Review had been postponed for this very purpose.

Did you notice that we carried out a suggestion which I remember your making years ago by ascertaining the mental condition of a large group of children of mental defectives. I put in some work on the results, though they came to me very late in

our deliberations, and they struck me as really remarkable. I was especially struck by the proportion of children from defective fathers and normal mothers being the same as that from defective mothers and normal fathers, since the environmental conditions in the home, especially for infants and young children must be materially different in these two groups. But perhaps the most remarkable result of all was the actual incidence of defect in these families, which is more, I think, than could be anticipated on any theory of inheritance without strongly assortative mating. I should judge, in fact, that though carriers may well be more numerous than defectives they must bear to them a much lower ratio than we have all been inclined to suppose.

The editor wanted me to answer Duften, but I am not going to. The difference in average age on which his whole case is based is only 2 or 3 years, and I should think, if he would take any notice of criticism, he would find just about this difference between non-eminent members of the same groups of families.

I think the factor you mention would work in the same direction, but, if it would, I doubt if it would amount to much quantitatively. One of the large effects of the fall in the birth-rate is that the average age of maternity is considerably lower than it used to be, and I suppose this contrast applies also between the larger

and the smaller families in each generation. This would tend to counteract the effect you suggest. Again, though the member of a small family has obvious advantages during adolescence, affecting things like clothes and amusements, as well as prolonged education, and better opportunities of obtaining a well-paid post, so that there is every reason to think that children from small families will, on the whole, marry better, there is not so much reason to think that they will appear more often in the Dictionary of National Biography, for example, especially as the very amenities they enjoy do certainly in some cases diminish the probability of serious work being undertaken. I mean that a man who considers early in life that it is a privilege, or perhaps a duty, of his position to cultivate leisured tastes, in art, perhaps, or sport, or to dabble in politics, may conceivably make a name for himself in these pursuits, but is more likely to be distracted by them from cultivating his real talents.

I should much like to know if you agree with this, i.e. that there is a fairly considerable waste or, shall I say a hidden reserve, of ability owing to the attitude of mind engendered by inherited wealth.

Yours sincerely,