

Cripps', Corner. July 31-93

(1)

Dear Fisher

Here are some random remarks on family allowances in answer to yours which may or may not be worth reading.

I see a flaw in one of my arguments about family allowances which I should like to point out myself, though you have probably seen it all along.

My contention ran as follows: - All who are quite economically reckless would have families as large as possible. There has, I believe, been an enormous decrease in the number of large families, though I have no figures by me to prove this to be so. Therefore enormous numbers might have more children than they do have, and are, therefore, thus proved not to be economically quite reckless. But here, I think, are two points which I did not consider. (1) To have as many children as possible does not imply having a large family. (2)

My argument implies that it is only the economic motive which lessens the size of the family, whilst there really other motives. The economically reckless wife, who has become pregnant, may wish to avoid parenthood in regard merely to the ^{invariable} troubles of child birth; and the same may be true to a less extent before pregnancy. The spread of knowledge in recent years amongst the poor, largely through greater facilities for travel, ability to read, advertisements, ^{etc.} has probably spread more widely a knowledge of the methods of abortion and ^{of} birth

and also of child rearing

control; and this has been a cause of a fall in the birth rate. Even amongst the economically reckless. This consideration makes my argument count for less. The recent proofs of the uncertainty of certain birth control methods may have tended to obscure the probability that even very imperfect methods may have had material effects in lowering the birth rate. In short I do not see how we can get a ^{good} statistical clue to the numbers of those quite uninfluenced by economic motives, and can only say that my experience makes me believe it to be very small.

though I think not for nothing

If I have grasped one of your arguments rightly, it runs somewhat as follows. Being out of work causes such a mental strain on a worker, as to lessen his attention ^{when given to} all other matters, including the size of his family in the future. If this be so, family allowances, by lessening this dread, will increase the effect of prudential motives amongst the poor, and be Eugenic in their effects. It should be noted that unemployment and accident-insurance and old age pensions must have a similar ^{Eugenic} effect, all three as a rule involving some transfer of rich to poor.

The anti-politic
of

Here is a broad consideration which I want to suggest. Even if we take the most hopeful view of the ^{of family allowances} relational effects on the fertility of the upper and lower halves of our race, my belief is that without pressure of some sort, tending to promote infertility, being applied to considerable numbers of the lower half, it will be impossible to prevent gradual racial decay through the increasing natural infertility of the upper half. To suggest such pressure may at the moment be imprudent - except by some irresponsible advance guard. But we should certainly not close the door to such pressure in the future. And if we now press on with regard to family allowances as hard as we can, even if some harm is done by their introduction where racially undesirable, we shall be moving into a position from which a further advance can be made with good results.

In all such campaigns we must pay some regard to expediency. Now I do believe that the arguments in favour of family allowances, which are based on questions of immediate fertility, are those which are much most easily grasped, and they may, therefore, settle the question of success or failure. We should, therefore, press such arguments as forcibly as our consciences permit,

Racial

The foregoing remarks apply to the more public propaganda, and not to the more scientific discussions.

~~Reply~~ I am still of the opinion that it would be wise to consider, as it were amongst ourselves, what amendments to a widespread compulsory system of family allowances would make it less dysgenic. Should they be limited to 3 or 4 children? I think you would say 'no', but I am not sure myself. Or should they diminish with increasing size of family? There will be a tendency for the same kind of rule to be applied all round, and family allowances, in so far as applicable to big families, will anyhow have little effect in the upper half, since, because such big families are few in number. I confess I am puzzled by these problems, which require calm thought. On the other hand should families of one or two, which do not preserve the race, have any encouragement in the upper half?

In yours of July 22 you said that no one believes, and there is no reason to believe, that the diff. b.v. has come about through children being a greater economic burden on the prosperous than on the poor; and this remark struck me much. But you must remember that there are

Other reasons for the d. v. v., besides those based on economic motives. There are the absence of juvenile labour & the expenditure on education amongst the well-to-do, the earlier age of marriage of the labourer, and the expensive habits of bachelors. There are, I believe, comparatively unimportant; but they point to an argument to be faced.

Again you are more confident than I am that the majority of the Council understood this question when they framed the Outline of Policy. I guess the majority were thinking of more obvious considerations.

Here, to conclude, is a bit of family history which I had forgotten. E. Darwin wrote in 1803, or rather it was then published in the Temple of Nature, as follows:—"As many families become gradually subverted by hereditary diseases, as by scrofula, consumption, epilepsy, mania, it is often hazardous to marry an heiress, as she is not infrequently the last of a diseased family". I wonder if F. Galton quoted this from his grand father's works. I have not checked it, as I do not possess them!

Yours sincerely

J. Darwin

No answer expected.

I may write to later concerning the Statistical Inquiry I spoke of.