

May 21, 1937

Dear Sir James,

Thanks for your letter. The situation in respect of our knowledge of the birth-rate has not, I think, at all changed since I wrote on the subject in The Genetical Theory of Natural Selection, 1930.

I there was concerned to stress that, though existing knowledge was adequate in respect of the total population, our registration machinery was in some small particulars defective in such a way as to throw some doubt on what could be stated in respect of differential fertility. The most obvious difficulty, and one which the Registrar General declared to me his intention of remedying as early as 1929, is the absence of age of parents in the birth register. A second serious weakness, however, is that the occupational columns used for birth registration does not tally with that used in the census, the latter having been much improved since 1911. It is in consequence of the first defect that comparisons made in the past of the number of births ascribed to a given occupation with the census number of persons so occupied have had to use some such unsatisfactory denominator as "the number of married males under 50", i.e., a quite arbitrary basis, not necessarily comparable between different occupations. The second defect shows itself when we find that

the birth rate ascribed to agricultural labourers (sans phrase) is nearly three times that ascribed to stock-men, presumably because those who appear in the latter class at census usually appear in the former class at birth registration.

These are, of course, administrative details which the Department concerned could, I think, remedy, if sufficiently pressed to do so. What a Royal Commission could ascertain is that, until they are remedied, we cannot have any complete knowledge of the distribution of reproduction in the population as regarded from the occupational aspect.

I imagine, however, that the main duty of a Royal Commission would be to consider the motives of policy which should incline us to desire more or fewer births in the public interest, and the means by which, having regard to foreign experience, the most desirable number can be obtained. The capacity of different classes to support additional children without hardship would, of course, seem to me extremely relevant.

Yours sincerely,