My dear Fisher

I read your Reclus article yesterday into some care, though I have not yet fully absorbed it. You know that I agree heartily with all the family allowances part, and the whole of it makes me think hard. At first I decided not to write to you because I feel my views are not fixed, but, on second thoughts I decided to do so, as it is probably now or never.

I have been in the habit of regarding things as follows. The use of machinery has enabled one man to produce more food. Hence men had to leave the country, this movement being increased by the manufacture of agricultural tools in towns. Conservatism resulted in wages being lower, the country, a difference compared to town wages, which is slowly lessening. Everything became cheaper in like manner, but all men sought and generally got employment. The number of men employed in agriculture as compared with the numbers in other callings is an index of the expenditure of other things beside food, and therefore of the standard of living. If you turn your diagram on
p. 45 upside down, it seems to me to give a rough measure of the rise in the standard of living. Looked at thus it does not seem an "excess of demand" as you make it to be. Looking to the future it will go on. The advantage of cheap nitrogen will be, besides more productive, less labour for what is produced. I forget to say above that I see far more desire to go from country to town than vice versa.

On p. 54 you think it would be wise in the interest of placing cultivators to restrict the area of growth — as was attempted with sugar in India. This is true, but it is protection and like all protection it injures others. It may or may not be true as regards labour, which I think becomes apparent if rent is taken into account. The men turned out of work by the restrictive area, or not getting work, would tend to keep down wages. The rise in prices would raise rents. The net result might be no rise in the standard of living of labour and a greater differentiation of wealth. I don't know what it would be.

We have to face the fact that town life is going to predominate, and to try to make it everywhere as healthy and cheerful as it is.
in our best form.

I have been trying to think what meaning I should attach to certain expressions. The over-production of goods would generally mean, I think, the production of goods which had to be sold at a loss. That would always be due to a mistake in estimates. It would never be a permanent situation. It would be the same in regard to food, if our production is used in this sense. If the phrase means production such as tends to lower price, I see nothing to say where it begins or ends.

To over-population I can give a certain but no definite meaning. If we imagine a population increasing from zero, I suppose at first on the principle of increasing returns as explained in textbooks, price would fall. They would go on falling up to a point, and then begin to rise; and the standard of living would rise and fall similarly. Where the change took place would be the optimum population. I assume knowledge not to change. But with a change in knowledge it is probable that the optimum for today would not tend to produce the optimum in the future. How to take the future into account theoretically.
do not see.

You speak of the development of the British Empire, and I think some of my father's words in (?!) the Descent of Man could be quoted to support your view.

I cannot make up my mind how much I would sacrifice our present standard of living for this object. I could go some way. But if we do so, let us be open, and declare plainly that over-population is what we want, so much to have numbers ready to go abroad.

On a few minor points. White men have know and inhabited tropical West Africa for 400 years. Why has not their potential food-supply area been developed? I think there must be some solid reason. Chinese and Indian civilisations have for far longer been close to undeveloped tropical areas. Do coffee, cotton, tobacco flourish in the Belt of Thickets? I think not.

My manufacturing firm and the speculator beyond what was well in sight when considering capital expenditure. I think few firms are built on or longer expectations.
As to p 56, I regard the fall in the death rate as the most potent cause of the fall in the birth rate, contraceptives having made the coincidence take place much more rapidly, and have a little more at addition - I guess you would agree.

With regard to over-population, it seems to me that, accepting my definition, all Europe is probably much over-populated. By cutting off the industries producing lowest returns and turning the worst land over to cultivation, would our standard of living rise?

When the coal gives out, then we shall certainly be over-populated. How will this begin to show itself? Will it be by unemployment? That seems to me the best rough test we can get for over-population, and I am sorry to see it disregarded. Waves of unemployment will occur always, but how can we tell it is only a wave? Is it our best to keep this practical test before our eyes?

No more boring you today. This all may show that what you say has set me thinking hard.

No answer needed. Your success,

[Signature]