December 10, 1936

Dear Mr Fyson,

I am very glad to have your letter of December 9 on the policy of the Eugenics Society. I have belonged now to the Society for many years, and have acted as Hon. Secretary, and since then as Vice President, and there is, I am afraid, no doubt of the truth of what you say as to the ineffectiveness of their policy in recent years. When Major Darwin was President the situation was entirely different, for he had a clear grasp of the current eugenic position, and a knowledge of the scientific work which had been done to throw light on it.

I am afraid you must take Dr Blacker's letter as representing truly the attitude of the group now dominant in the Society's affairs, including the President and the Treasurer, and I have found that criticism based on scientific facts is regarded with suspicion, and perhaps with some resentment. In fact, I feel sure that we must now look elsewhere for the formation of a nucleus of informed eugenic opinion which may aim consistently at bringing about such changes as you suggest.
An independent group has been formed, for research rather than for propaganda, under the name of the British National Human Heredity Committee, and has a very active secretary, Mrs. Hodson. She has been successful in getting the support of the leading authorities in human heredity; but, of course, this, as an organisation, does not exist for the promotion of a social policy, although by keeping its members in touch with one another it may well indirectly serve this purpose.

With respect to income tax, there is, I am afraid, one unavoidable limitation which has long impressed me, namely, that, since a great majority of income tax payers are in the lower income groups — under £600 a year — any attempt to make the remission of taxation commensurate with the cost of the first child would be to exempt the parent from taxation altogether, or nearly so, so as to leave little or no possible further exemption on the appearance of subsequent children. In fact, the present scale may be regarded as encouraging very small families in the smaller incomes from this very cause. A possible modification which I have considered would be to remit 1/5th of the total tax on earned income in respect of each dependent child; but this would mean decidedly less reduction of income taxation for the poorer income tax payers, so that they could justly demand an increase on the amount allowed free of tax or at half the standard rate.
It is, however, my conviction that no possible change in the income tax as such would equalise the standard of living of citizens supporting more or fewer children that has led me to lay more stress on the system of family allowance, regarded as an integral part of wages and salaries, which has been satisfactorily worked, satisfactory I mean from the economic standpoint, in France and Belgium. The equalisation pools make it possible for the employer to fix a wage scale entirely on the merits of the work done, without regard to family responsibilities, while the employee can receive pay equivalent to a standard of living fixed irrespective of the number of children he supports. There is, it seems to me, a very strong case for pressing for this reform in certain chosen employments, for example policemen, selected for qualities likely to be of permanent national value. In this case it would seem also directly in the public interest that a policeman — and the same applies to many officials of the central or local governments — should not, by reason of the number of his children, find himself in sore need and exposed, therefore, to the danger of corruption.

However, this is too big a topic to discuss in full in a letter. If you are ever in London, I should always be happy to meet you at the Galton Laboratory and discuss anything that seems to you worth doing.

Yours sincerely,