September 25, 1940

My dear Fraser Roberts,

I agree with you very strongly as to the probability of bad, or inadequate, schemes of family allowances being put through during this war, and I am impressed by the great difficulty of reforming or systematising them later, as we are a conservative people, unwilling to make changes except to meet immediate practical issues.

It is particularly disappointing that Glass's book should be so largely concerned with irrelevancies instead of stressing, as, writing for the Eugenics Society, he well might, the advantage of proportional against flat rate allowances. Judging from the notice in Nature he has also made very absurd estimates as to the actual cost of children: 22% of the basis wage per child, which he seems to think applicable also in France, although the Code de la Famille which is certainly not likely to underestimate the cost, arrived at only 15%, even for urban families. The important point in such estimates seems to be that the cost changes greatly as the child grows up during the period of dependency, and that this period is not only greater for children entering occupations requiring longer training, but is greater at the more expensive end. If this were the only consideration, the cost of children would increase more than proportionally to income over the
important range of, say, £3 to £6 a week. I think, however, it is partially counterbalanced by the fact that basic requirements in food and clothing can be met at more nearly the same cost than the general standard of living indicates by the exercise of good sense and a sense of proportion among those at the higher standard of living, so that I doubt if the burden of maintenance departs far from proportionality over quite a wide range.

Systems which cease at a given salary level seem to me likely to be more noxious eugenically, besides introducing very embarrassing discontinuities in rates of pay, than systems which are only defective in fixing a flat rate for different wage groups. However, the inconveniences and latent injustices are qualitatively the same in all systems which fail to recognise (1) that the aim of allowances is to equalize standards of living between parents and non-parents performing equivalent services, and (2) that expenditure on behalf of children does in fact vary with the standard of living, whether rightly or wrongly being quite irrelevant to the issue.

The greater variability of boys than girls on the Otis test is most remarkable and should, I think, be brought prominently to the notice of psychologists. I do not know whether it would be possible to explain it through temperamental differences disturbing the measurement of intelligence at different levels.

I have been wanting for some time to hear whether you have been able to make any progress with the Army blood group data which you had some hopes of in Bristol earlier in the year. I am returning your chart herewith.

Yours sincerely,