April 25, 1940

Dear Sir Robert,

Thanks for your letter on the Scottish Scandinavian question. The allusions in the sages stress outlying parts like Orkney and the Hebrides rather heavily, though, in view of the Norse practice of running their ships far up the firths, and in view of the configuration of Scotland, it would seem that, up to the 13th and 14th centuries, there may have been raids and settlements almost everywhere. Political union with Denmark was, I imagine, even less stable than it was in England. The pigmentation characters, fair hair and blue eyes, often taken as marks of Scandinavian relationship, certainly extend in the Eastern Baltic to a much more heterogeneous group of peoples, though this is perhaps more emphatically true of the hair colour than of the eye colour. In fact, these two forms of lack of pigment, though partly, I suspect, due to the same genes, may, apart from this obligatory association, have different racial origins, e.g., in the Gulf of Finland or the British Isles.

I agree with you most emphatically that what is now needed is
is a series of adequate samples from the sparsely inhabited parts of the British Isles. Practically all our data, and everybody else's, come from central urban hospitals, and there is at least the possibility to be excluded that a sample of 1,000 from Skye or Lewis might give a different result. I imagine the doctors in those parts are probably officials under the Scottish Board of Health, or County Council, or Highlands Commission, or whatever is the appropriate authority, and that any enthusiast who wanted to clear the matter up would need official sanction, even if he had an independent source for his research fund. I think, however, a party of three or four, including one native, working on a caravan laboratory, such as has been used extensively for blood groups in England, could make a very wide survey in about six weeks. Ultimately we might get parallel material from Iceland and the isolated dales in Norway; but there also published data almost certainly refers to a big hospital in Oslo.

I imagine the Rockefeller Committee would put up a research grant for such a project, and I think I could raise a team from the group which was taken over from the Galton Laboratory by the Medical Research Council at the beginning of the war. I do not, however, know how the official aspect of the case should be handled.

Yours sincerely