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Population Problems and the American Eugenics Society

GROWING world concern with population problems gives special emphasis at this time to the significance of the American Eugenics Society. The position of eugenics today is fortified by such markers as the increasing interest in medical genetics, the formation of a eugenics section in the 1954 World Population Conference, the Pope's recent endorsement of positive eugenics, and the need to balance the concern over size of population with concern for the quality of that population.

For the first time, negative eugenics seems to be moving toward its goal with respect to the most severe diseases mainly due to heredity. The medical profession is increasingly interested in problems of medical genetics. The Eugenics Society is actively promoting publications and research in this field and the establishment of additional heredity clinics.

Even if all injurious mutations were destroyed immediately as they appeared, there would be no change at the upper levels of human activity. Improvement lies in changing the distribution of births among normal people, so that the proportion of children at the higher levels of normal capacity will be increased. This would raise the average level of the whole. The Eugenics Society has developed a working hypothesis for advance in this field and is encouraging research to test the hypothesis.

The position of the Eugenics Society is that the largest families should be found not as a characteristic of particular races or social or economic groups but among all couples who give evidence of socially valuable qualities and a full acceptance of responsibility for their children. There can be no arbitrary decisions on who should and who should not have children. The parents alone must make the choice. The process of selection must come as the spontaneous response of individual couples to the pressures and aspirations of their environment. Recent American

population studies have indicated certain favorable trends in this direction. Every economic and social change, every change in the psychological environment that tends to a better distribution of births will improve the environment and average genetic capacity of the next generation. The Eugenics Society is, therefore, working with leaders in the biological and social sciences, education, medicine, family life, and related fields.

In the past several years the Eugenics Society has been concerned with education as well as research. It has raised funds for a handbook on genetic defects for the practicing physician under the sponsorship of the New York Academy of Medicine. The society has made a grant for the formulation of plans for a major study of twins, to be in the hands of a joint committee of the National Research Council and the Social Science Research Council.

The publications program is expanding rapidly. A new journal, *Eugenics Quarterly*, was begun in March 1954. This is intended as a meeting ground for the geneticist, demographer, psychologist, and family-life consultant. Nearly 9000 pamphlets and reprints were distributed in 1953, and the demand for this material is increasing.

A joint symposium was conducted with the American Society of Human Genetics in Boston in conjunction with the 1953 AAAS meetings. Plans are also being formed to organize eugenics sections in some of the larger meetings of scientific and family-life groups.

The society is interested in strengthening its membership and inquiries should be addressed to the secretary.

FREDERICK OSBORN
Secretary

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