

CORRESPONDENCE

THE PROBLEM OF POPULATION.

To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS.

SIR,

In his otherwise courteous review of my book, *The Problem of Population*, Mr. Denis Gwynn makes a statement which is so inaccurate that I hope you will permit me to correct it. He says that Mr. Harold Cox 'declares emphatically for the compulsory sterilisation by State-appointed practitioners of large classes of mankind.' To support this charge he quotes the following words from my book: 'Those persons who, as the result of physical or mental defects are unfitted to produce children, should be sterilised, with their consent or with the consent of their guardians, at the expense of the State.' These words by themselves seem to me sufficiently to indicate that I was not advocating compulsory sterilisation. In addition, however, I had on previous pages made it clear that I was opposed to compulsion. After describing American legislation and practice, I said (p. 148): 'It is satisfactory, however, to note that comparatively little use has been made of the compulsory powers conferred by this legislation.' Again (p. 149): 'There is indeed no necessity to seek compulsory powers in such a matter. The large majority both of men and women, whether suffering from mental or from physical infirmity, would welcome an operation which would relieve them of the risk of producing a child to carry on the taint which curses them. In the case of persons so mentally deficient that they could not even give assent to the operation, the question does not arise; for in any case it would probably be necessary to keep these persons under permanent restraint; alternatively the assent of their parents or guardians could be sought.'

I think these passages sufficiently dispose of Mr. Gwynn's curious fancy that I am in favour of compulsory sterilisation.

Yours obediently,

HAROLD COX.

GRAY'S INN,
May 21st, 1923.