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Sex Economics.

IN his presidential address to the Section of Economics of the British Association at the recent meeting at Hull, Prof. F. Y. Edgeworth did not hesitate to plunge into the midst of a raging current controversy. "Should men and women receive equal pay for equal work?" were his opening words, and his conclusion is that they should "with some reservations and adjustments."

This conclusion is reached in two stages as follows. In a first approximation Prof. Edgeworth relegates dependants to limbo, and shows—we think conclusively—that, granted that freedom of competition for jobs is generally conducive to the best possible distribution of labour, then there is no reason why such competition should be confined to one sex; though it must be a regulated competition, controlled by collective bargaining, in which "the oppressive action of male Trade Unions" is "counteracted by pressure on the part of women acting in concert." The overcrowding of women into those occupations which are open to them, which has resulted from restrictions upon their freedom to compete on equal terms with men in all spheres, is in fact socially uneconomic as well as unfortunate in its effect upon the women's own wages. Prof. Edgeworth goes on to surmise that given substantial freedom of competition we shall find (a) occupations almost wholly male, (b) occupations into which both men and women enter freely, and (c) occupations almost wholly female. He submits that the average of weekly earnings in (a) will continue to be above the average of weekly earnings in (c), while in (b), though the rate of pay for a unit of work will be the same for both sexes, the average weekly earnings of the male will continue to be above the average weekly earnings of the female.

Prof. Edgeworth does not offer any particular evidence of these suggestions, which rest upon an assumption that at present, or rather "for a short period in the immediate future," the industrial efficiency of women must be generally inferior to that of men. In point of fact, practically no scientific investigation has yet been made of the relative efficiency of men and women in different occupations. Nor, in view of the close and long-standing restrictions upon the field of women's labour, does the actual distribution of the sexes between different occupations throw much light upon the problem. In quoting the usual examples of telephony, typewriting, textiles, and nursery duties as the female *fortes*, Prof. Edgeworth seems to be allowing convention rather than science to be his guide.

Wise advocates of women's rights will, however,

agree with Prof. Edgeworth when he points out where other things are equal an employer is likely to have a preference for the male owing to the "secondary" drawbacks of the female. Prejudice and restricted opportunities may be responsible for what truth there is in the charge that "a woman is not so useful in the case of a breakdown or a runaway." But it is quite indisputable that the probability of her early marriage is a real drawback to a woman's industrial efficiency. These secondary differences, however, are so difficult to measure accurately that the reduction on their account of the woman's rate per unit of work below that of the man is not a wise or scientific policy. It is better to allow them to make their influence felt upon the occupational distribution of the sexes rather than upon their pay. Of the "tertiary" differences also (of which the illustration given is "the presence and influence of a master—as contrasted with a mistress—in dealing with the bigger boys") the same is true; but there is no evidence to show whether these tertiary differences predominantly favour the male rather than the female.

We now restore the abstracted circumstances of family life. A man normally has, or expects to have, a family to support; a woman normally has not. While the average number of dependants supported by a woman from her earnings has often been greatly underestimated, there is certainly no disputing the general result of Messrs. Rowntree and Stuart's figures, which show that this average is much higher for a man than for a woman. The candid will admit that here is the real obstacle to equal pay for equal work; the logical will consider the possibilities of endowment of motherhood as a way out of the difficulty. Prof. Edgeworth summarises the *pros* and *cons* of State endowment of motherhood as follows. The proposal is attractive because (1) it would for the first time make competition between the sexes both free and fair; and (2) it would make possible the distribution of resources in such a way as to meet the requirements of the larger family better than is done at present, when the wage paid to a man tends to be adjusted to the presumption that he maintains a family of approximately 4.4 persons, which he quite certainly does not. Against these advantages Prof. Edgeworth sets the following: (1) the scheme is socialistic and bureaucratic, (2) it would almost certainly involve a transference of resources from the rich to the poor and would therefore probably check saving, (3) the effect on the contributor would be "depressing," and there would be (4) a great stimulus to population, and (5) no security for the improvement of the race, but only a prospect of "the ruin of the great middle class to which England owes so much."

We gather that Prof. Edgeworth regards these disadvantages as conclusive. He turns from the State endowment of motherhood to consider one or two other suggestions, the principal of which is his own proposal that the members of Trade Unions might themselves contribute a quota of their earnings to a fund to be distributed among the wives of members in accordance with the size of their families. In regard to this proposal Prof. Edgeworth does not commit himself beyond the canny statement that it would be much less open to objections than the endowment of motherhood by the State.

Prof. Edgeworth's address is open to little criticism from those who grant his premises. All will applaud his careful analysis of his subject. It is, however, at least open to question whether his whole treatment of the matter does not suffer immensely from the limitations which he has imposed upon himself. In his first approximation the assumption that "regulated competition" (a very vague concept) is a royal road to ideal distribution is open to serious criticism. Secondly, any discussion of endowment of motherhood which assumes outright that (a) transferences of resources from rich to poor would be entailed, and that (b) these are objectionable, rests on questionable ground. To the present writer this double assumption appears fatal to Prof. Edgeworth's conclusions regarding the right relation of the basis of payment to family circumstances.

BARBARA WOOTTON.

### Fishing and Fishing Lore.

*Fishing from the Earliest Times.* By W. Radcliffe. Pp. xvii + 478. (London: J. Murray, 1921.) 28s. net.

THE literature connected with fishing is already so extensive that a new volume is liable to be subjected to scrutiny to see whether it can justify its birth by furnishing new matter or new ideas. As the more obvious gaps in the literature of the subject become fewer, the tests will necessarily become more searching. Mr. Radcliffe's book, fortunately, can claim a definite *raison d'être*, and may receive an enthusiastic welcome as filling a decided gap, one which it is curious should have so long remained void. His aim has been to provide a history of the fishing art and craft from the earliest times down to about A.D. 500. The title scarcely does justice to the contents of this versatile volume, which is far from being restricted to the consideration of actual fishing practices. These, indeed, probably occupy but a third of the book. The remainder is very largely concerned with what may be classed as the folk-lore associated with fish, fishing, fishermen, and fish-consumers, and with other details