

The Decline of Population

A DEBATE on the prospective decline of population took place in the House of Lords on June 21. Lord Samuel pointed out that whereas the number of live births per 1,000 women of child-bearing age was 129.8 in 1891, at the census of 1931 it had fallen to 64.3, that is, almost exactly half in the forty-year period. In the earlier period one out of every four married women between the ages of fifteen and forty-five years gave birth to a child in any particular year, while in 1931 this was only true of one in eight. Counterbalancing effects, the fall in the death-rate and the change from emigration to an inward movement of people, was far from equalling this decline in the birth-rate. He advocated family allowances as a means of diminishing the cause and desire for small families. Other measures suggested were housing estates for larger families and removal of the marriage bar in certain occupations such as bank clerks and women teachers. He advised the appointment of a Royal Commission to inquire into the whole question. Lord Snell said that the real problem is qualitative rather than quantitative and that the question of age proportion is most important. Lord Dawson of Penn said the prospective fall in population is too great even if we have regard to quality, as the country has failed to reproduce itself since 1925 and to-day 100 mothers only produce 76 girl babies or future mothers. Contraception is a specialized example of man's gradual control of natural sources and is spreading to all classes and creeds. It should be seen that parents willing to bear their quota of children should not be penalized. In tenement blocks there should be crèches, nursery schools and other necessities, and the health services should be linked up into a connected whole.

LORD STAMP said there is little popular apprehension on this subject because we are still living under the delusion of continual expansion. He pressed for a quinquennial census to provide the necessary information for a Commission. Boys between the ages of thirteen and eighteen years in England and Wales in 1938 numbered 2,100,000. In seven years this will fall to 1,787,000. The effect of this tendency is already being felt in schools. The Bishop of Norwich remarked that his predecessor a century ago had thirty-seven children while that Bishop's two brothers each had thirty-two children. Households of the better stock now have small families, for one reason, because of the necessity for domestic help in rearing a family. Lord Derwent said family allowances would be inadequate without propaganda, and that the birth-rates of France and Italy continue to decline. This is principally from uncertainty regarding the future. The Archbishop of York said that while the older men who have been out of work prefer to get back to work even if their wages amount to less than their relief, this is by no means true of the younger men. They should ensure in some way that a man in work always obtained more than a man without work. Lord Templemore put forward the view that some forecasts anticipate

an earlier decline of population than appears justified. For the first time since 1873, the birth-rate began to rise in 1934 and this has continued for the last five years. But too great value should not be placed on that. As regards family allowances, public opinion has not yet crystallized. The Population Statistics Act, 1938, would supply information which should throw light on the incidence of fertility in different sections of the population.

Students and Military Training

THE adoption in Great Britain of the principle of conscription and the calling up for registration of youths between the ages of twenty and twenty-one years for a period of military service has raised the question of the position of university students. As regards those proceeding to universities after October next, Mr. E. Brown, Minister of Labour, stated in the House of Commons on June 22, that at a meeting held under the auspices of the Ministry between representatives of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Headmasters, together with representatives of the departments concerned, it was agreed unanimously to recommend that such boys should be given the option of postponing or anticipating their liability to undergo military training. Mr. Brown said he intended "to put this agreed conclusion into operation, subject to reviewing the position in twelve months' time in the light of experience, when I propose again to seek the advice and assistance of the representatives of the universities and the schools". He also agreed to bear in mind the further recommendation that those under the age of eighteen years on January 1 of the year in which they wish to take their training should not be allowed to anticipate their military service.

Biological Expedition to Jamaica

A LARGE expedition is leaving the University of Cambridge for Jamaica this summer. It is financed by the Royal Society, the Royal Geographical Society, Mr. J. A. Steers, Gonville and Caius and St. Catharine's Colleges, Cambridge, and the Universities of Cambridge, Manchester and Sheffield. The members of the expedition are Dr. V. J. Chapman, the leader, university demonstrator in botany, Cambridge; Dr. H. Hamshaw Thomas, reader in plant morphology, Cambridge; Mr. J. A. Steers, lecturer in geography, Cambridge; Mr. J. S. Colman, lecturer in zoology in the University of Sheffield; Mr. W. R. Philipson, of the British Museum (botany); Mr. K. R. Sporne, of Downing College; Mr. J. Lofthouse and Mr. D. J. Crisp, both of St. Catharine's College. The main party is proposing to examine shore-line development in relation to the formation of coral reefs and cays and also to the salt ponds, and it is intended to make a comparison of the cays and the mode of their formation with similar structures in the Great Barrier Reef. This will be facilitated by the presence of two members of the Great Barrier Reef Expedition—Mr. Steers and Mr. Colman. Dr. Chapman will examine the botanical side of this problem, and is intending to devote particular