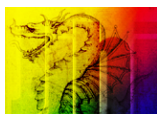


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Lady Welby: Her Support for and Erasure
from the Eugenics Movement

by
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Lady Welby: Her Support for and Erasure from the Eugenics Movement

Thomas Malcomson *

At the turn of the 20th century, gender bias kept women's role in the advancement of science subservient to male researchers and academics. The study of the involvement of women in various areas of science will cast a richer understanding of the development of those domains. One such woman was Victoria Lady Welby, who is best known for creating the field of Significs, within the philosophy of language. She also initiated what grew into a consequential association with Sir Francis Galton and his idea of eugenics. Her deep involvement in this controversial area has not appeared in the historiography of eugenics. Her influence on Galton and eugenics was in a sense erased after her death and more recently denied in current chronicling of her Significs work. Employing her correspondence, this paper reveals Welby's agreement with Sir Francis Galton's eugenic ideas, and her significant contribution to its promotion. After placing her firmly within the eugenic camp the paper will address how she came to disappear from the eugenic story.



In the mid-nineteenth century some British schools for young women educated their pupils in science and math while schools for young men focused on the long esteemed classical education.¹ Patricia Phillips established that Britain's

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¹ Patricia Phillips, *The Scientific Lady: A Social History of Woman's Scientific Interests 1520-1918* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1990), 235-51.

Taunton Commission on Education (1864-68) acknowledged that students in the top tier of schools for females had a better grasp of science than most male school students.¹ But, the classically trained male commissioners ultimately sided with increasing “the quota of classics taught” in the schools and colleges, for girls and young women, pushing science and math off to the side. Historian Claire Jones claims that by the 20th century the idea that a woman could offer original significant scientific insights was largely dismissed. This was especially true if she worked with a man, her contribution being devalued, considered as inferior to the male scientist’s work; what Margaret Rossiter labeled the ‘Matthew Matilda Effect’.²

British women were however, making direct and significant contributions to the sciences in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Medical physicist Edith Stoney (1869-1938), zoologist Alice Johnson (1860-1940), and astronomer Agnes Giberne (1845-1939) were just three of the many women engaged in academic work in the sciences.³ Marsha Richmond pointed out that most women working in academic settings or private labs were given the title of “assistant, technician, stock-keeper” rather than researcher, reducing their professional profile and place in the advancement of their area of expertise.⁴

Female scientists also faced difficulty being recognized by their disciplines formal associations or societies and faced wider societal rejection of their capability to contribute to scientific progression.⁵ The Linnean Society only admitted

¹ Phillips, *The Scientific Lady*, 242-3.

² Margaret W. Rossiter, “The Matthew Matilda Effect in Science,” *Social Studies of Science* 23, no. 2 (1993): 325-341, see pp. 325-6; Claire G. Jones, “Women, Science and Professional Identity, c.1860-1914,” in *Precarious Professionals: Gender, Identities and Social Change in Modern Britain*, eds. Heidi Egginton and Zoë Thomas (London: University of London Press, 2021), 63-85; Nina Gelbart, “Adjusting the Lens: Locating Early Modern Women of Science,” *Early Modern Women* 11, no. 1 (2016): 116-127.

³ Francis Duck, “Edith Stoney MA, the First Woman Medical Physicist,” *SCOPE* 22, no. 4 (2013): 48-53; Louis-Pascal Jacquemond, “Women in Science 19th-21st centuries,” *Digital Encyclopedia of European History*, <https://ehne.fr/en/encyclopedia/themes/gender-and-europe/educating-europeans/women-science>, accessed 18 September 2023; M. Hill and A. Dronsfield, “Ida Freund, the First Woman Chemistry Lecturer,” *RSC Historical Group Newsletter* (January 2011): 14-20, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150924132055>.

⁴ M. Richmond, “Opportunities for Women in Early Genetics,” *Nature Reviews Genetics* 8 (2007): 897-902.

⁵ C. Series, “What Became of the Women?” *Mathematical Spectrum* 30, no. 3 (1997-98): 49-52; Mar-

women as Fellows in 1904, with the election of palaeobotanist Margaret Benson (1859-1936), microbiologist Grace Coleridge Frankland (1858-1946), lichenologist Annie Smith (1854-1937), and ornithologist Emma Turner (1867-1940).¹

A major factor in the reticence to grant women degrees, to teach in particular universities or join the learned societies, was the growing professionalization of science, both the hard physical and the soft social sciences. As Jonathan Topham reminds us this professionalization had been occurring since the early 19th century, with experimentation and observation by members of the wider public giving way to educated specialists using new technologies to explore their topics, publishing their results within the growing specialist journals for the reading public's enlightenment.² Part of this professional shift was the effort to make it a male dominated field of endeavour, enforcing the cultural gender stereotypes around science, academia and work.

Richmond states that areas of science forming at the turn of the century and immediately after were fields more likely to provide space in which women could be engaged.³ One such area was genetics and another related area was eugenics. Richmond found within genetics that the male researcher running the laboratory or department had a significant influence on the opportunities to which women had access. William Bateson's (1861-1926) Cambridge group's Mendelian focus, both new and at first at the edge of genetics, drew in a number of female researchers.⁴ His acceptance of women scientists provided a positive space. Bateson's departure from Cambridge and his work's displacement by new theory reduced this, largely due to the men who assumed his former position not holding his view of the equality of female and male scientists.

garet W. Rossiter, "Women's Work' in Science, 1880-1910." *Isis* 71, no. 3 (1980): 381-98.

¹ Will Beharrell and Gina Douglas, "Celebrating the Linnean Society's First Women Fellows." The Linnean Society of London (27 March 2020). <https://www.linnean.org/news/2020/03/27/celebrating-the-first-women-fellows>, accessed 22 November 2023.

² J. Topham, "Scientific Publishing and the Reading of Science in Nineteenth-Century Britain: A Historiographical Survey and Guide to Sources." *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A* 31, no. 4 (2000): 559-612, see 560-2.

³ Richmond, "Opportunities", 897.

⁴ Richmond, "Opportunities", 900. Mendelian focus refers to the work on genetics performed by Gregor Mendel (1822-1884), which helped to lay the ground work for the current understanding of genetics.

Richmond notes that some of the women in genetics moved into other departments where the male heads were supportive of their work.¹

Historians write that eugenics provided an avenue for women's involvement in science and public debate on social issues.² Eugenics focused on heredity and promoted increasing the number of people deemed to have the positive physical and social qualities needed by British society and to decrease those with the negative characteristics that threatened society's progress. Eugenics dealt with procreation, the raising of children, and social concerns related to the family, such as health, poverty, and birth control, all seen as women's issues. Clare Makepeace demonstrated that feminist social reformers Eleanor Rathbone (1872-1946), Eva Hubback (1886-1949) and Mary Stocks (1891-1975) employed eugenic ideas to varying degrees.³ Rathbone and Stocks focused on family allowance and birth control for women as a way to increase the desirable offspring, and decrease "the undesirable classes," respectively, but their views ultimately took them away from eugenics.⁴ Hubback promoted the sterilization of the hereditary defective, and fell more clearly into the eugenics camp.⁵ Women were employed as field workers collecting the eugenic data, and in the number crunching done in the eugenic oriented labs. A handful wrote reports, papers and books, but often with a male, and as second author.⁶

Richmond states that focusing on the work of women in science "reveals important aspects of the sociology of science, including the part that gender has played in research groups and laboratory practices in science."⁷ Exploration

¹ Richmond, "Opportunities", 901.

² Daniel Kelves, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995), 64 and 90; Richard A. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birthrate in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), chapter 6.

³ C. Makepeace, "To What Extent Was the Relationship Between Feminists and the Eugenic Movement a 'Marriage of Convenience' in the Interwar Years?" *Journal of International Women's Studies* 11, no. 3 (2009): 66-80.

⁴ Makepeace, "To what extent", 69, 70, 75.

⁵ Makepeace, "To what extent", 72-3, 75.

⁶ For example see: Ethel M. Elderton and Karl Pearson, *A First Study of the Influence of Parental Alcoholism on the Physique and Ability of the Offspring* (Eugenics Laboratory Memoirs X) (London: Dulau and Co., 1910); William Whetham and Catherine Whetham, *The Family and the Nation: A Study in Natural Inheritance and Social Responsibility*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1909

⁷ Richmond, "Opportunities for", 899.

of the stories of individual women in the area of genetics, Richmond writes, “promises to broaden and enhance the current historiography of early genetics.”¹ The same is true for the eugenic literature.

This paper is one such study of a significant late Victorian female intellect. It explores Victoria Lady Welby’s (1837-1912) contribution to eugenics and her erasure from the field’s historiography, both in the years following her death and more recently. Lady Welby is better known for founding the philosophic approach to language and meaning known as Significs. An analysis of her letters, held in the Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University, North York, Ontario, reveal her close connection and support for Sir Francis Galton’s (1822-1911) eugenic project.² It will show that Welby supported mainstream eugenics, presenting her ideas on mother-sense and race-motherhood (both explained below) as two additional methods of creating the better race of people eugenics promised. Before turning to the letters, it is important to briefly survey Lady Welby’s back story and Galton’s idea of eugenics. After this introduction, the letters of Lady Welby will lead us through her conceptualization of science, heredity and suffering, her lengthy engagement with Galton on eugenics, and her involvement in his presentations to the British Sociology Association on eugenics and marriage. The correspondence will reveal a very mixed response to Lady Welby by other eugenicists and her omission from the eugenic historiography.

1. Victoria Lady Welby

Victoria Stuart-Wortley-Mckenzie was the daughter of British aristocrats Charles Stuart-Wortley-Mckenzie (1802-1844) and Lady Emmeline Stuart-Wortley (1806-1855). She was given a minimal formal education, basic literacy and

¹ Richmond, “Opportunities for”, 901; see also Emilie Dotte-Sarout, “Pacific Matildas: Finding the Women in the History of Pacific Archaeology”, *Bulletin of the History of Archaeology*, 31 no. 1 (2021):

3.

² Lady Welby Fonds F0443, Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University, North York, ON (hereafter LWF).

numeracy, with the idea that she would marry an aristocrat and run a house.¹ After her father's death, Victoria and Lady Emmeline travelled extensively through Europe, the United States and the Middle East. Her mother died while the two were in Aleppo, Syria. After two years of service as an attendant to Queen Victoria (1819-1901) she married Conservative politician Sir William Earle Welby-Gregory (1829-1898).

As her children became more independent, Lady Welby turned her intellect to such diverse disciplines as philosophy, physics, psychology, religion, and spiritualism. She read the latest works, and numerous journals, writing the authors, scientists, and academics who captured her curiosity.² Her correspondence with these men and women was extensive. She often worked to connect dynamic intellectuals, such as linking the philosophers William James (1842-1910), Ferdinand Schiller (1864-1937), Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), J. Cook Wilson (1849-1915), Giovanni Vailati (1863-1909), Mario Calderoni (1879-1914), and George Stout (1860-1944).³ Her exchanges with the American philosopher Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914) have received the widest attention, with the publication of two books on their letters.⁴

Much of Lady Welby's writing dealt with language, specifically the topics of semantics, metaphor, and grammar. She produced several articles and two books on Significs.⁵ She defined Significs as "the science of meaning or the study of significance, provided sufficient recognition is given to its practical aspects

¹ "Victoria Lady Welby, Obituary," *The Times*, April 1, 1912, 11; Susan Petrilli, *Signifying and Understanding: Reading the Works of Victoria Welby and the Significs Movement* (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2009): 7-14, 21-29.

² H. Walter Schmitz, "Taking Stock of the Published Correspondence of Victoria Lady Welby," *Ars Semeiotica* 36, no. 3-4 (2013): 203-26.

³ Charles S. Hardwick, ed., *Semiotic and Significs: The Correspondence between Charles S. Peirce and Victoria Lady Welby* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1977), xxix-xxx.

⁴ Irwin C. Leib, ed., *Charles S. Peirce's Letters to Lady Welby* (New Haven: Whitlock, 1953); Hardwick, *Semiotic and Significs*. Susan Petrilli discusses this correspondence in, "Sign, Meaning, and Understanding in Victoria Welby and Charles S. Peirce," *Signs and Society* 3, no. 1 (2015): 71-101. For a critique of this assessment, see Schmitz, "Taking Stock," 208-12.

⁵ V. Welby, *What is Meaning? Studies in the Development of Significance* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1903); V. Welby, *Significs and Language. The Articulate Form of Our expressive and Interpretive Resources* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1911); V. Welby, "Significs," in *The Encyclopedia Britannica. A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information*. 11th edition, vol. 25, ed. H. Chisholm (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1910-11), 78-81; Petrilli, *Signifying*, 30-33.

as a method of mind, one which is involved in all forms of mental activity, including that of logic.”¹

Beyond a rich correspondence with leading academics and scientists of the day she held salons in her home. The discussions involved multiple leading thinkers in a field. One such session centred around sensation, realism and idealism with psychologist Edward Titchener (1867-1927), and physiologists Augustus Waller (1856-1922) and John Berry Haycraft (1857-1922).² Another occasion saw historian and politician Sir John Cockburn (1850-1929), economist, liberal politician and Master of the Supreme Court Sir Thomas Barclay (1853-1941), social philosopher Edward J. Urwick (1867-1945), jurist Sir J. Macdonell (1846-1921), among others informally discuss eugenics.³ Welby was involved in the development and diffusion of cutting edge philosophical, biological and social science thought. Regrettably, these sessions were not recorded.

Susan Petrilli has written extensively on Lady Welby, focusing on Welby’s involvement in the Significs movement. In *Signifying and Understanding*, Petrilli touches on Welby’s connection to eugenics. From reading a selection of her writing on the topic, Petrilli concludes that Welby’s idea ran opposite to that of Francis Galton and the other eugenicists. Where eugenicists proselytized selection, removal, segregation and even elimination of groups of people deemed unworthy of participation in society, or life itself, Welby promoted “global responsibility and social justice.”⁴ Petrilli goes as far as removing Welby from any responsibility for how eugenics came to be “the ideology of the perfect race” and the subsequent horrendous crimes committed by eugenicists and their supporters.⁵ This narrative does not fit a wider reading of Welby’s correspondence with Galton and other eugenic promoters, her involvement in the Sociological Society, or her writings about eugenics. Petrilli focuses on Welby’s mother-sense, or race-motherhood and her work tying Significs to eugenics (both discussed below) as the main ties with eugenics, and that they worked against eugenics.⁶

¹ Lady Welby, “Significs,” undated. LWF, Box 13, Folder 1.

² Welby to Galton, 9 December 1892. LWF, Box 5, Folder 16.

³ Welby to Galton, 13 August 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 16.

⁴ Petrilli, *Signifying*, 595.

⁵ Susan Petrilli, “Mother Sense, Language, and Logic,” *Chinese Semiotic Studies* 13, no. 1 (2017): 47-71, see 62.

⁶ Petrilli, *Signifying*, 595, 723, 727-28.

This ignores the fact that some of Lady Welby's remarks on people that eugenicists rejected, generally referred to as the "inferior breed," or "defective," are similar to the most virulent eugenicists of her era. Before laying out Welby's deep level of support for eugenics it is necessary to introduce the subject and the man who coined the word.

2. Sir Francis Galton and Eugenics

The eugenic movement Welby entered was centred around its founder Sir Francis Galton. Galton coined the word eugenics in 1883, defining it as, "the science of improving stock, which is by no means confined to questions of judicious mating, but which, especially in the case of man, take cognizance of all influences that tend in however remote a degree to give to the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable than they otherwise would have had. The word *eugenics* would sufficiently express the idea" (Italics in the original).¹ Galton outlined two approaches to eugenics. One was positive eugenics, where the superior members of society would be encouraged to reproduce, through health care, educational opportunities, and tax incentives. The other was negative eugenics, which entailed restrictions, such as, sex segregated institutionalization, removal of social assistance, and sterilization. The hereditarily superior were healthy, economically self-sufficient, contributors to society, producers of social and political leaders, and the country's cultural heritage. The inferior consisted of those with any disability, chronic illness, the poor, criminals, among other socially devalued people that eugenicists populated the "defective" category with.²

¹ Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development* (London: Macmillan, 1883), 24-25, fn 1. The literature on eugenics is massive. The author recommends the following for an introduction: Edwin Black, *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race* (expanded edition) (Washington, DC: Dialog Press), 2012; Lindsay A. Farrall, *Origins and Growth of the English Eugenics Movement 1865-1925* (London: UCL Department of Science and Technology), 2019; Kelves, *In the Name*; Paul A. Lombardo, *A Generation of Eugenics in America: From the Indiana Experiment to the Human Genome Era* (Bloomington: Indiana UP), 2011; Marius Turda, *Modernism and Eugenics*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan), 2010.

² Francis Galton, "Hereditary Talent and Character," *Macmillan's Magazine* 12 (1865): 157-166; 318-327; Piers J. Hale, *Political Descent: Malthus, Mutualism, and the Politics of Evolution in Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 137.

Strongly influenced by his cousin Charles Darwin's (1809-1882) theory of evolution, Galton wished to discover the laws of heredity.¹ To that end he collected data on families of sundry backgrounds, developing statistics to show that talent/genius was hereditary.² Following Galton, statistician Karl Pearson (1857-1936) and zoologist Walter Raphael Weldon (1860-1906) embraced eugenics. Pearson, in particular, believed eugenics would deliver science-based knowledge to shape a better society by controlling the nation's reproduction, allowing only the fit to reproduce.³ He and Galton formed a strong relationship built around eugenics and statistics.

Lady Welby read, queried, hosted, assisted and promoted the leading British eugenic thinkers, spoke and wrote in its favour, yet her name is missing from the field's vast historiography.⁴ The only current reference this author could find was Chris Renwick's citation of Welby in a footnote towards the end of his paper on Galton and eugenics.⁵ Renwick focuses on Victor Branford's (1863-1930) thoughts, Welby being just the letter's recipient, appearing nowhere else in the paper. As we examine her correspondence her absence from the historiography will become a serious oversight.



¹ Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry Into Its Laws and Consequences* 1869; reis., Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2006); Kelves, *In the Name*, 13.

² Among the statistical formulas he created were the correlation and multiple regression analysis.

³ Karl Pearson, *The Life, Letters and Labours of Francis Galton*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1914, 1924, 1930), vol. 3, vii.

⁴ She is absent from perhaps the three leading books on British eugenics: Kelves, *In the Name*; Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*; Farrall, *Origins and Growth*.

⁵ Chris Renwick, "From Political Economy to Sociology: Francis Galton and the Social-Scientific Origins of Eugenics," *British Journal of the History of Science* 44 no. 3 (2011), 343-369, see fn 95, 365, it is from the Lady Welby fonds.

3. Lady Welby on Science, Heredity and Suffering

For Lady Welby science and reason, would provide answers to humanity's questions and ultimate lead to truths, far "better than religious faith."¹ Welby recommended an article on education and science to biologist and Darwin promoter, Thomas Huxley (1825-1895).² Its anonymous author suggested physical science was the, "stronghold of the truth because no other kind of human knowledge, not even mathematics, is so absolutely dependent upon truth for its value and its applicability."³ From a lecture by Chemist Otto Witt (1853-1915), she noted, "Empiricism investigates without forgone conclusions."⁴ Lady Welby remarked in 1909, that the physical sciences had "mechanically extended the limits of our sense-response, the borders of our knowledge, and our domination of our destiny."⁵ To ignore what science had to offer was to flirt with a "cynical or suicidal impulse."⁶ For Welby science was a sacred tool that would tell no lies.

Her early views on heredity can be seen in a 1885 letter to jurist Sir Frederick Pollock (1845-1937).⁷ She pondered the idea that people were so deeply entwined with the problems they and society faced, that only a total restart could create a better outcome. Welby speculated that society needed, "[T]o peel off or root up all "heredity" and all association; all bias of natural tendency, early environment, historical or theoretical; to denude ourselves of all the "accreted layers" or "evolved complexities" of civilization and start with a clean bill of physical, moral, mental, spiritual health—to be in the fullest sense "born again."⁸ She was unsure how to accomplish this.

Lady Welby wrote to Karl Pearson, in 1887, as she began to explore the "great sciences, or the great systems of thought."⁹ Understanding them was necessary

¹ Welby to Thomas Huxley, 31 May 1884. LWF, Box 7, Folder 22.

² Philalethes, "The Increase in Mendacity," *The Times*, 10 November 1888, 15-16. LWF, Box 7, Folder 22.

³ Philalethes, "The Increase", 16.

⁴ "Unlearned Lessons of Nature," 11 July 1909. LWF, Box 22, Folder 2.

⁵ V. Welby, "Professor Santayana and Immortality," *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 6.24 (25 November 1909), 661-5, see 665.

⁶ Welby, "Professor Santayana", 665.

⁷ Welby to Pollock, 5 August 1885. LWF, Box 13, Folder 2.

⁸ Welby to Pollock, 5 August 1885. LWF, Box 13, Folder 2.

⁹ Pearson to Welby, 24 January 1887; Welby to Pearson, 29 January 1887. LWF, Box 12, Folder 1.

before her own ideas on language and thinking could be elaborated. She asked Pearson to teach her math, but he declined based on her lack of academic background. Welby explained she had gained a great deal by reading widely in religion, politics and moral theories, to which he responded, "I get through life fairly well without religion, philosophy, politics or morality as the world defines them."¹ Nothing was exchanged between them for the next sixteen years.

4. Welby Begins Her Correspondence with Galton

Welby first connected with Francis Galton in 1890 when he commented on a draft of her paper, "An Apparent Paradox in Mental Evolution," to be presented at the Anthropological Society.² She held that the first humans were so interwoven with their environment that their minds simply reacted to threats and rewards around them, in order to survive. As the mind evolved it began to experience and interpret reality around the person in ways which may not have actually matched reality. Dreams, fantasies, misperceptions, the mind's 'invention' of spirits, or irrational explanations of events were understood by the evolving human as real, valid experience. More superstitious people, she claimed, had a greater survival advantage, as a result of being more cautious. The evolving human developed abstract reasoning abilities and formed complex civilizations, dropping their superstitions. Those who still harboured what she saw as superstitious beliefs were archaic humans, and not as civilized as those who had jettisoned such beliefs. They were a degradation in evolution and thus represented a paradox.

The paper was presented by the Society's secretary, as Lady Welby did not attend. Galton was the session respondent, remarking that Welby's ideas were "eminently deserving of discussion."³ Sir Frederick Pollock did not agree. He

¹ Pearson to Welby, 2 February 1887. LWF, Box 12, Folder 1.

² Garson to Welby, 2 October 1890; Welby to Garson, 6 November 1890; and Garson to Welby, 11 November 1890. LWF, Box 5, Folder 27; Welby to Galton, 21 June 1893; Galton to Welby, 22 June 1893. LWF, Box 5, Folder 16. V. Welby, "Is There a Break in Mental Evolution?" read at the British Association of the Advancement of Science, 5 September 1890, and published as, "An Apparent Paradox in Mental Evolution." *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* 20 (1891): 304-29.

³ Francis Galton, "Discussion." *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* 20 (1890/91): 323.

said that superstitions of archaic societies were not a reversal of evolution. He felt superstition would not lead to survival, saying he failed to follow Lady Welby's reasoning on the point. In his view, primitive people reasoned about their environment much like modern people, but that their ideas were simply poorly formed.¹ Doctor J. Wilberforce Smith (?-?) questioned her idea that "a primitive savage" might see their food as "a ghostly" object. He wondered how the scientific thinkers she referenced who held strong religious beliefs meshed with her premise?²

In her response, published with the paper, Welby acknowledged the limited space a short paper had for such a complex topic. Referring to herself as an "untrained outsider," Welby approached her critics with humility as she pressed her points. Referencing the work by Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), on primitive people rejecting the "strange or new," Welby drew a comparison between humans' and animals' responses to the "alien" experience.³ To Pollock's objections she replied that his ideas on superstition did not address "cults of the dead" and their place in primitive thinking.⁴ Welby asserted that primitive humans did not think like modern ones, but were driven by primordial impulses. She remained silent on the other commentators.

Ignoring the critical comments, Galton encouraged Lady Welby to develop her ideas on language and meaning.⁵ He also roped her into joining the Anthropological Institute. She noted her partial deafness made participating in public discussions difficult and if non-attendance was not a problem, she would consider the offer.⁶ It was not, so her name appears as an elected member in the December 1890 journal issue.⁷ The two developed a steady correspondence, becoming close friends.

In 1892 she wrote to Galton about the debate over vivisection of animals in medical research. She favoured the activity and widened the scope of her point, "I am an animal. I feel that if I grudged suffering for such ends I should be

¹ Pollock, "Discussion." *Frederick Journal of the Anthropological Institute* 20 (1890/91): 324-5.

² W. Smith, "Discussion." *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* 20 (1890/91): 326.

³ Welby, "Discussion." *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* 20 (1890/91): 327.

⁴ Welby, "Discussion." *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* 20 (1890/91): 328.

⁵ Galton to Welby, 27 October 1890; 6 November 1890; 20 November 1890. LWF, Box 5, Folder 15.

⁶ Welby to Galton, 7 November 1890. LWF, Box 5, Folder 15.

⁷ Minutes of the Last Meeting, *Journal of the Anthropological Institute* 20 (1890-91): 303.

heartily ashamed of myself. I am an animal and in a different form I feel the same shame at the idea of refusing to suffer for a higher race.”¹ Galton responded that he “admired” her view on vivisection and agreed that suffering for the greater good was something to be done, valued highly and not engaged in, “as Martyrs when performing it.”² In the same letter, Galton remarked about looking for families on which to gather hereditary histories. Lady Welby wrote that her village had twelve interrelated families and would provide excellent data for Galton. She sent her son to the family’s elder member to get their cooperation.³ Galton noted the offer.

Welby commented on Professor George Santayana’s (1863-1952) thoughts on immortality and his rejection of “the cult or even toleration” of all “pain, loss, grief, or privation, for their own sake.”⁴ She rejected what she called “idolized happiness.” For Welby, suffering was a natural part of life that was not to be discarded or ignored, as it contributed towards a healthy experience of life. Writing to Caleb W. Saleeby (1878-1940) in 1905, Welby claimed, suffering and pain could always be re-interpreted to a better, even positive, perspective by those who suffered.⁵ She thought that over time the suffering would be realized as leading to a constructive outcome, and if that benefited the larger group, than it was good.

But suffering had a limit. In a letter to Doctor Frederik van Eeden (1860-1932), Welby questioned the prolonging of life that degraded human beings.⁶ The sick aged person, in decline towards death, and the defective, were described as a “virtual savage, or idiot,” becoming “a mephitic monster of air-poisoning degeneration, or revert[ing] to that very condition of criminal selfishness and disregard of others.”⁷ Prolonging such life at the expense of “the really human

¹ Welby to Galton, 4 November 1892. LWF, Box 5, Folder 16.

² Galton to Welby, 7 November 1892. LWF, Box 5, Folder 16.

³ Welby to Galton, 8 November 1892; Galton to Welby, 9 November 1892. LWF, Box 5, Folder 16.

⁴ Welby, “Professor Santayana”, 663.

⁵ Welby to Saleeby, 25 April 1905. LWF, Box 13, Folder 24.

⁶ Welby to van Eeden, in Nina Cust, ed., *Other Dimensions: A Selection from the Later Correspondence of Victoria Lady Welby* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931), 114-16. The original letter was not among the Welby Fonds in the Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University. Cust did not cite the date with any letter, but this appeared in the section spanning 1902-1904.

⁷ Welby to van Eeden, *Other Dimensions*, 114.

being” was a crime.¹ She complained that human life referred not only to the best people but to “the most disgusting proliferation of vermin and poisonous bacteria, bacilli or spreading slime of canker.” She rejected the “artificial means” of supporting “parasitic forms of ‘life.’” Similarly, she wrote Julia Wedgwood (1833-1913), “it is certainly not a sin - rather a good deed - to take an existence poisonous to normal life.”² Caring for people she saw as defective in body and mind, was not Welby’s answer, euthanasia was.

5. Welby and Eugenics

The correspondence and discussions between Welby and Galton reveal the kind of reading she was doing on science and heredity. It included Karl Pearson’s *Grammar of Science* which she praised and would reread several times, making copious notes.³ She read August Weismann’s (1834-1914) essay “Amphimixis or the Essential Meaning of Conjugation and Sexual Reproduction,” published in 1891.⁴ Weismann’s essay described the process of meiosis. As the ovum and sperm merged, the hereditary material they carried combined. This explained the creation of individual differences between siblings. Weismann was looking for the mechanism of heredity, at the cellular level, while Galton searched for the laws of heredity at the social level. Welby appeared to appreciate the contributions of both approaches, though she felt Weismann’s line of inquiry was “most precarious.” Lady Welby discussed Weismann’s idea of a unit of hereditary information for each characteristic with Sir James Browne (1840-1938), a leading Scottish psychiatrist, eugenicist and a collaborator of Charles Darwin’s.⁵ She hypothesized it as an invisible substance in the germ cell’s nucleus. She read, multiple times, Galton’s *Hereditary Genius* and *Enquiries into*

¹ Welby to van Deden, *Other Dimensions*, 115.

² Welby to Wedgwood, Cust, *Other Dimensions*, 116.

³ “Notes on Grammar of Science” (2) Notes, Extracts, Comments, Abstracts LWF, Box 22, Folder 5.

⁴ For Pearson see Lady Welby to Galton, 20 May 1892; for Weismann see Welby to Galton, 13 December 1892, LWF, Box 5, Folder 16. August Weismann, “Amphimixis or the Essential Meaning of Conjugation and Sexual Reproduction,” in *Essays Upon Heredity and Kindred Biological Problems*, eds. Edward Poulton and Arthur E. Shipley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), vol. 2, 99-222.

⁵ Browne to Welby, 5 September 1889; Welby to Browne, 13 October 1889. LWF, Box 4, Folder 4.

Human Faculty and its Development, from which her clearest understanding of eugenics originated.¹ In 1904 she noted reading John Lionel Tayler's (1874-1930) book on social evolution, which had a eugenic aspect.² Stanley Hall's (1844-1924) study of adolescence was read from a eugenic perspective, which Welby passed on to Galton.³

Lady Welby wrote numerous times to Galton about his technique of composite photograph and its applicability to the study of heredity and personality.⁴ She remarked on a *Pall Mall Budget* article describing his technique, in 1894.⁵ The anonymous writer felt it would be used more widely by ethnologists if "Galton's opinion as to its importance [had] been generally regarded as well founded."⁶ Testing the idea, a series of images was taken of what were described as "intelligent men." The reporter declared the composite did indeed show a general image of intelligence. Comparing tram car drivers and professional men revealed a composite intelligent face for the tram drivers "considerably below that of the professional men."⁷ The article proposed comparing doctors with lawyers in an effort to discover the existence of specific "occupational physiognomy." Lady Welby praised Galton's achievement. Francis Galton wanted to produce multiple photographs of people expressing different moods.⁸ The result would reveal their character by the composite's clear parts being the "prevalent traits" and the "blurred more transient less central traits."⁹ For a race of people, "all individualizing would disappear in the general - a 'common blend'."¹⁰ Lady Welby suggested that he photograph related people over several generations to

¹ Welby to Galton, 29 December 1895. LWF, Box 5, Folder 16.

² Welby to Galton, 3 July 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 16. The book was John L. Tayler, *Aspects of Social Evolution: First Series Temperament* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1904).

³ Welby to Galton, 13 August 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 16.

⁴ Welby to Galton, 9 November 1894; Welby to Galton, 1 February 1895; Welby to Galton, 29 December 1895; Welby to Galton, 26 February 1896. LWF, Box 5, Folder 17. Francis Galton, "Composite Portraits." *Nature* 18.444 (May 23, 1878), 97-100. For the use of multiple exposure photography in eugenics see, Anne Maxwell, *Picture Imperfect: Photography and Eugenics, 1870-1940* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2008).

⁵ "Composite Photographs," *Pall Mall Budget*, 13 September 1894, 17-20.

⁶ "Composite Photographs," 17.

⁷ "Composite Photographs," 17.

⁸ Galton to Welby, 13 November 1894. LWF, Box 5, Folder 17.

⁹ "Composite Photographs," 17.

¹⁰ "Composite Photographs," 17.

reveal the abler classes' composite portrait of genius.¹ Galton sent a detailed description of how he took composite photographs in January 1896. Lady Welby passed them along to a Mrs. HSW who wished to take some images. Welby referred to the method as "one of the most psychological gifts of the future."²

A testament to their friendship, Galton wrote of his wife's death in France, in some detail.³ After Lady Welby's husband died in 1898 the two seemed to spend more time together. Their correspondence was dominated by Lady Welby's work on language, discussing the growing interest in Significs and Welby's work on her book on the subject.⁴ After its publication in 1903, Lady Welby turned her attention back to Galton, with a drive to get the eugenic message into the minds of the public, physicians, social science professionals, and politicians.

In early March 1903, Welby wrote once again to Karl Pearson, praising his *Grammar and Science*.⁵ Significs, she declared, was related to his work. She recalled the earlier exchange of letters and his dismissal. Pearson responded that he had received her note but was too busy to respond. This exchange did not serve to heal the rift between them.

Lady Welby's Letters to Caleb W. Saleeby often noted her conversations with Galton but said little directly on eugenics, though Saleeby was an avid eugenics supporter.⁶ Welby sent Saleeby her thoughts on the 'white race.'⁷ She pondered why the white race ought to be seen as permanently superior. After all, pure white was problematic, sickly, and in the case of "the Albino the genetically defective."⁸ Japan was cast as, "taking up all the white race's special practical and

¹ Welby to Galton, 1 February 1895. LWF, Box 5, Folder 17.

² Welby to Galton, 5 November 1896. LWF, Box 5, Folder 17.

³ Galton to Welby, 9 November 1897. LWF, Box, 5, Folder 18. Louisa Jane Galton died in France on 13 August 1897.

⁴ Welby. *What is meaning?*

⁵ Welby, "Abstract and notes upon the main position taken in The 'Grammar of Science.'" LWF, Box 15, Folder 25. Welby to Pearson, 5 March 1903; Pearson to Welby, 7 March 1903. LWF, Box 12, Folder 1.

⁶ Welby to Saleeby, 4 November 1903. LWF, Box 13, Folder 24. See Caleb W. Saleeby, "Racial Poisons II. Alcohol." *Eugenic Review* 2 no. 1 (April 1910): 30-52 ; "Alcoholism and Degeneration." *British Medical Journal* 1, no. 2611 (January 14, 1911): 112.

⁷ Welby to Saleeby, March 2, 1904. LWF, Box 13, Folder 24.

⁸ Welby to Saleeby, March 2, 1904. LWF, Box 13, Folder 24.

scientific powers, and adding the powers of concentrated 'intuitive' thought and intensity of penetrative contemplation which the 'Eastern' races possess."¹ She suggested that humans, passing from the "brown stages" to the "yellow point" would be dumbfounded to think that "a pallid, pale-blooded, cold, weak race," would become the one having "present supremacy."² Welby held a somewhat different racist perspective than her contemporaries, who viewed the Asiatic races as a significant threat, yet ultimately inferior to the Caucasian race.³ Still it was the Caucasian that she placed on top and in that she did not differ from her eugenic contemporaries.

6. The British Sociological Society and Galton's Eugenic Talk

Lady Welby's involvement in starting the British Sociological Society was acknowledged in one of her obituaries and only more recently by historian Chris Renwick.⁴ She helped Patrick Geddes (1854-1932) and Victor Branford to establish the Society so as to bring together three perspectives on sociology; a eugenics based stance, a civic view and an ethical evolution position.⁵ To start the project, a lecture by Francis Galton on eugenics was deemed essential. Galton rebuffed Branford's request for his participation in the society.⁶ In March 1904, Lady Welby invited Galton to present a "short paper," and informed him that a selection of interested people would comment on his remarks, herself included.⁷ Galton responded with an enthusiastic yes to the invitation, proposing

¹ Welby to Saleeby, March 2, 1904. LWF, Box 13, Folder 24.

² Welby to Saleeby, March 2, 1904. LWF, Box 13, Folder 24.

³ For the racism in the eugenic movement see: Kelves, *In the Name*, 74-5; Farrall, *Origins and Growth*, 298-303; Hale, *Political Descent*, 35, 55, 59, 87-8, 313; Black, *War Against the Weak*, 22, 269-70.

⁴ William Macdonald, "Lady Welby," *Sociological Review* 5, no. 2 (April 1912): 152-6; Chris Renwick, *British Sociology's Lost Biological Roots: A History of Futures Past* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 126. For her absence see, Albert H. Halsey, *A History of Sociology in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004); John Scott and Ray Bromley, *Envisioning Sociology: Victor Branford, Patrick Geddes and the Quest for Social Reconstruction* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2013). Branford to Welby, 22 June 1903. LWF, Box 3, Folder 10, cites her "formal adhesion to the project."

⁵ Scott and Bromely, "Envisioning Sociology", 127 and Halsey, *History*, 9.

⁶ Renwick, *British Sociology's*, 132-3.

⁷ Welby to Galton, 20 March 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

a paper on the definition, scope and aims of eugenics.¹ He expressed concern with current speculation and the focus on the least important issues confronting British society. His paper would set out the known facts of eugenics, along with research ideas on the “most important topics now to be worked out.”² The Sociological Society committee was ecstatic over Galton’s outline and set Monday, May 16 for the paper to be read. He responded, notifying the group he would be unable to attend and respond to comments, because of his deafness.³

Karl Pearson felt it was too soon to present on eugenics to the Sociological Society, with Galton’s comments bordering on speculation.⁴ Galton informed Lady Welby that Pearson saw the society as composed of a “dearth of men engaged intelligently” in the subject of sociology.⁵ Galton felt Pearson was upset over being presently “goaded by incompetent critics in America” and that he feared being involved in anything that approached “wild speculation.”⁶ Galton reminded Lady Welby of his deep respect for the statistician.

Galton requested an introduction to Victor Branford (Sociological Society’s secretary) to talk over the presentation.⁷ Later, Lady Welby wrote Galton that she and Branford wanted Pearson and Galton to help steer the Sociological Society away from unbridled theorizing towards sound research and reasoned argument.⁸ Welby and Galton held several conversations on eugenics in the month prior to his talk.⁹ The discussions helped her recognize that early education of women on eugenics and the “racial sense” was critical in reaching Galton’s eugenic goals. Raising the race would start with increasing people’s reasoning, starting in childhood. Mystical thinking, Lady Welby wrote, caused great damage to

¹ Galton to Welby, 20 March 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

² Welby to Branford, 9 April 1904. LWF, Box 2, Folder 11.

³ Welby to Galton, 6 April 1904; Galton to Welby, 8 April 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

⁴ Galton to Welby, 11 April 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

⁵ Galton to Welby, 11 April 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

⁶ This comment related to Pearson’s clashes with the American eugenicists, see Elof Carlson, “The Eugenic World of Charles Davenport.” in *Davenport’s Dream: 21st Century Reflections on Heredity and Eugenics*, eds. Jan A. Witkowski and Jon R. Inglis (Cold Spring Harbour: Cold Spring Harbour Laboratory Press, 2008), 59-76, see 65.

⁷ Welby to Galton, 11 April 1904; Galton to Welby, 12 April 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

⁸ Welby to Galton, 12 April 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

⁹ Welby to Galton, 25 April 1904; 3 May 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

the race and had to be overcome.¹ It is here that her own work on Significs (specifically clarity in thought, meaning and language) intersected with Galton's eugenics.

Galton gave Lady Welby an early draft for comment.² Her response was written along the first page's side. In a rambling paragraph, with astronomical metaphors, she remarked that Galton would create a Copernican-like shift in humans' comprehension of their evolution. The "highest product" of that evolution was "conscious, sentient, ethical man." She went on to remark on the brevity of life, and that earth was the "moral sun of the universe." Galton's response to these notes is unknown. She queried if it was at all useful to send her remarks to Pearson for comment, adding that, word was, he thought little of female thinkers.³

Welby's personal view was of a practical, positive eugenics that focused on developing "sane and healthy and morally sound" people, "relieved of needless infirmity."⁴ Once human quality was lifted up, she proposed the issue of quantity would settle itself, populations would assume the level required by society to function well. Following this eugenic path, Welby saw humans improving the "standard of living" and employing nature to their benefit.

Lady Welby corresponded with Patrick Geddes, chair of Botany at University College Dundee, co-author with J. Arthur Thomson (1861-1933) of *Evolution and Sex*. He thought Galton had an emotional passion for his work that Geddes wished other scientists would cultivate.⁵ Welby sent along the lecture draft, with which Geddes proclaimed a "general sympathy and agreement."⁶

Prior to the Galton presentation, Welby wrote to G. Lowes Dickinson (1862-1932), a political scientist and philosopher about Francis Galton's work on eugenics. She told Dickinson that she was the one who got Galton to write the piece for the Sociological Society's meeting, and Galton had her comments on

¹ Welby to Galton, 1 May 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

² The comments appear on a typed copy of Galton's remarks entitled, "First typed copy from Mr. Galton MSS April 1904." LWF, Box 34, Folder 9.

³ Welby to Galton, 3 May 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

⁴ Welby, "Quality and Quantity." 5 July 1904. LWF, Box 26, Folder 13, as well as in Folder 9.

⁵ Geddes to Welby, 6 April 1904. LWF, Box 6, Folder 5.

⁶ Geddes to Welby, 24 May 1904. LWF, Box 6, Folder 5.

the draft prior to his presentation.¹ Dickinson responded, “What are Eugenics?”, a telling remark on the lack of a broader awareness of eugenics in Britain, in 1904.² She responded that it was what he supposed the word meant and that “the social conscious wants rousing and educating on that side.”³



7. Galton's Eugenics

Francis Galton did attend and read the paper through a speaking megaphone, to a packed room of attentive men and women.⁴ He began by defining eugenics as, “the science that deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race; also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage.”⁵ While disclaiming the role of morals in the argument, Galton stated that people “would agree that it was better to be good rather than bad specimens.”⁶ That better would be “healthy,” “vigorous,” and “well fitted for their part in life.”⁷ It wasn’t that he wished to create a human stock of supermen and women, but to reap the best of “each class or sect” and then let them decide how to organize themselves into a society. Thus, eugenics could fit any political or economic arrangement, any class or race-based segmented society.

The list of highly regarded qualities would be easy to create, to which Galton claimed only “cranks” would object. Just as dogs and horses could be bred to

¹ Welby to Dickinson, 28 March 1904. LWF, Box 4, Folder 15.

² Dickinson to Welby, 22 April 1904. LWF, Box 4, Folder 15.

³ Welby to Dickinson, 24 April 1904. LWF, Box 4, Folder 15.

⁴ Francis Galton, “Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope and Aims.” Sociological Society Meeting, London University, 16 May 1904 (LWF, Box 34, Folder 9); Galton et al., “Eugenics: It’s Definition Scope and Aims. Remarks and Comments.” *Sociological Papers* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1905), 45-84.

⁵ Galton, “Eugenics: Its Aims,” 45.

⁶ Galton, “Eugenics: Its Aims,” 46.

⁷ Galton, “Eugenics: Its Aims,” 46.

yield desired characteristics, so too humans. The “useful classes” could be increased, the less useful decreased, or eliminated. Galton laid out five essential aims to achieve the eugenic program that groups, like the Sociological Society, could undertake. First would be to disseminate information about heredity to the wider public.¹ Second, explore the role of birth rate among the superior classes in the rise and collapse of past societies.² Fertility among the upper classes dropped, Galton claimed, as societies advanced, leaving the poorer quality classes to overwhelm them and society to lose its creative edge. He proposed finding useful class members whose fertility did not decline and ensuring their reproduction. The third aim concerned the conditions for the existence and thriving of large families.³ Galton wanted to collect information that could guide family formation and family life to yield the next generation of eugenically desirable people. Family genealogies would play a key role in this aim. The fourth element involved studying “influences affecting marriages.”⁴ Eugenic outcome, not love, would become the prime driver of marriage, thus requiring social restrictions on marriage, denying it to the eugenically undesirable. The final aim was to make eugenics a national priority, for which Galton had three avenues of pursuit.⁵ One was to create academic interest in exploring the subject and expanding knowledge. A second, was to make eugenics appear practical and applicable to the issues confronting society. Third, Galton wanted to introduce eugenics, “into the national conscience, like a new religion,” an orthodox religion wed to nature, to create “the fittest races.”⁶ Nature took too long, could be brutal, and created useless mutations, whereas humans could use eugenics to take control and act “providently, quickly, and kindly.” Improving the human stock was, in Galton’s mind, “one of the highest objects that we can reasonably attempt.”⁷

He concluded his talk, cautioning against quick, unfounded action, and repeated the plea to encourage researchers to explore eugenics. But the overrid-

¹ Galton, “Eugenics: Its Aims,” 47.

² Galton, “Eugenics: Its Aims,” 47-8.

³ Galton, “Eugenics: Its Aims,” 48-9.

⁴ Galton, “Eugenics: Its Aims,” 49.

⁵ Galton, “Eugenics: Its Aims,” 50.

⁶ Galton, “Eugenics: Its Aims,” 50.

⁷ Galton, “Eugenics: Its Aims,” 50.

ing aim was to get the eugenic message out into the public domain. Once there, the “principles (of eugenics would) work into the heart of the nation.”¹

8. Welby and Others Respond

After Galton concluded written responses were read out. Four agreed that eugenics was important, one of whom stressed that environmental aspects also influenced human behaviour.² Another suggested using Mendel’s approach to understanding heredity rather than the actuarial work of Galton.³ George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) proposed that total strangers be allowed to have children, “without loss of honour.”⁴ Galton considered his comments as “Absolute rubbish.”⁵ Social reformer, Charles S. Loch (1849-1923) doubted current knowledge was enough and that the lower order would not understand eugenics.⁶

Sociologist Benjamin Kidd (1858-1916) declared, that social reformers seemed eager to put people into “lethal chambers if our minds and bodies did not conform to certain standards,” a remarkably insightful comment given what would occur in the future.⁷ On the galley proof Galton penned a dismissive, “Irish as G.B.S” (George Bernard Shaw). The writer H.G. Wells (1866-1946) suggested, that if humans wished to take over from nature the only thing to do was sterilize the unfit and let the others make their way naturally.⁸ Galton wrote “yes” beside this paragraph.

¹ Galton, “Eugenics: Its Aims,” 50.

² J. Robertson, “Comments, Eugenics: Its Aims,” 72-4.; W. Bateson, “Comments, Eugenics: Its Aims,” 64-5.; H.G. Wells, “Comments, Eugenics: Its Aims,” 58-60, Wells wrote of the influences of social position, what he referred to as “pull” that gained for people access to a better upbringing, education and employment opportunities, see ; G.B. Shaw, “Comments, Eugenics: Its Aims,” 74-5; G. Reid, “Comments, Eugenics: Its Aims,” 68-72, stressed environment as well.

³ Bateson, “Comments, Eugenics: Its Aims,” 65.

⁴ Shaw, “Comments, Eugenics: Its Aims,” 75.

⁵ Note by Galton on manuscript proof for publication: Francis Galton, “Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope and Aims.” Sociological Society, 16 May 1904. LWF, Box 34, Folder 6a.

⁶ C.S. Loch, “Comments, Eugenics: Its Aims,” 65.

⁷ B. Kidd, “Comments, Eugenics: Its Aims,” 60-62, see 61; The ultimate eugenic expression was the Nazi Germany euthanasia program, see Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: ‘Euthanasia’ in Germany c.1900-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994).

⁸ H.G. Wells, “Comments, Eugenics: Its Aims,” 60.

Lady Welby's remarks were read second, by her assistant Miss. Carter (?-?), for Welby did not attend the meeting due to her deafness.¹ Welby focused on women's "mission to conceive, to develop, to cherish and to train" the next and subsequent generations. Welby asserted that women had "lost the discerning guidance of Eugenic instinct and the inerrancy of Eugenic preference which has given us the highest types of man yet developed." She described her idea of race-motherhood, in which women had intuitive and natural ways of bearing and raising children, which she held were suppressed by the "artificial conditions" of current society. Contemporary society viewed women as less than men, and elderly women as weak and unstable, undercutting the proper role of women in shaping the race's next generation. Welby claimed women were the centre of primitive cultures leading the development of language, social bonding and race strength. She noted that current women had adopted the modern notions of women, and shaped their natural strengths into "absurd misrepresentation," such as fortunetellers and Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910), the founder of Christian Science.² She ended with a call for men to assist women in training young girls in the "power of race-motherhood," for "the benefit of humanity."³ Knowledge of eugenics, and the developed sense of personal responsibility to the race, would lead women in the unfit groups to do the right thing and not reproduce.

After the prepared remarks a general discussion opened, chaired by Karl Pearson.⁴ Psychiatrists Henry Maudsley (1835-1918), Charles Mercier (1851-1919) and Francis Warner (?-1926) urged caution or rejected Galton's ideas.⁵ Professor Raphael Weldon countered the criticism, defending the statistical method as appropriate for comprehending hereditary and making predictions of repro-

¹ Welby, "Comments at S.S. meeting 16 May 1904." LWF, Box 34, Folder 9; see Welby, "Comments, Eugenics: Its Aims", 76-8, these published comments were an abbreviated version of those read at the meeting.

² Welby, "Comments at S.S. meeting 16 May 1904." LWF, Box 34, Folder 9; Welby, "Comments, Eugenics: Its Aims", 78.

³ Welby, "Comments at S.S. meeting 16 May 1904." LWF, Box 34, Folder 9; see Welby, "Comments, Eugenics: Its Aims", 78.

⁴ Karl Pearson, "Comments, Eugenics: Its Aims," 52-3.

⁵ H. Maudsley, "Comments: Eugenics: Its Aims," 53-4; C. Mercier, "Comments: Eugenics: Its Aims," 55; F. Warner, "Comments: Eugenics: Its Aims," 56. Galton felt Maudsley and Mercier were forty years behind in their thinking. Welby to Allbutt, 23 May 1904. LWF, Box 1, Folder 7.

ductive outcomes.¹ Doctor Alice Drysdale Vickery (1844-1929) stressed nutrition as playing a significant part in shaping healthy citizens, if not genius.² Vickery expressed concern for worldwide overpopulation.³ She believed that women were excluded from the male dominated eugenic idea, much to its loss. Everyone present seemed to agree that to improve the race the “physically and mentally unfit” needed to be weeded out, and not allowed to reproduce or influence the fit.

The press covered the presentation reprinting all, or parts, of Galton’s paper.⁴ Some stressed the controversial nature of Galton’s remarks, the discussion, and that others agreed with him. *The Times* and the *St. James Gazette* summarized Lady Welby’s remarks, without comment. Wells’ proposal of sterilizing the unfit was highlighted in all the articles.

Persephone Harbin suggests that Welby and Vickery were “speaking back to Galton” with their criticism, pushing for the equal role of women in the study of eugenics and shaping future generations.⁵ While Vickery did critique Galton, Welby’s remarks ought not to be seen as a criticism but as a parallel line of eugenic activity. Race motherhood was an inherited quality, developed by education in mother craft and the knowledge of eugenics, that the better baby be bred and then developed through childhood. For Welby, women had a natural role in the eugenics Galton was proposing.



¹ W.F. R. Weldon, “Comments: Eugenics: Its Aims,” 56-8.

² R. Hutchison, “Comments: Eugenics: Its Aims,” 58.

³ Petrilli suggests that only Lady Welby took part in the discussion of Galton’s paper, but here we see Alice Drysdale Vickery did as well. A.D. Vickery, “Comments, Eugenics: Its Aims,” 60.

⁴ “Mr Francis Galton on Eugenics.” *The Times*, May 17, 1904, 14; “Bettering Mankind,” and “The Science of Eugenics Dr Galton’s Theory.” *The Globe*, May 17, 1904, 1 and 8, respectively; “The New Science: Eugenics Expounded to the Sociological Society.” *Daily Express*, May 17, 1904, 2; “Good Breeding: Dr. Galton on the Science of Eugenics.” *Daily Graphic*, May 17, 1904, 1; “Eugenics.” *Daily Graphic*, May 17, 1904, 3; “Men and Women.” *St James Gazette*, May 17, 1904, 5. All in LWF, Box 34, Folder 9.

⁵ Persephone Harbin, “Transforming the Race-Mother: Motherhood and Eugenics in British Modernism” (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2008), 2-3.

9. Galton Criticizes Lady Welby's Response

Galton criticized Lady Welby's remarks, especially her suppositions on primitive cultures and her thoughts on women's "leading part in language evolution," with men as simply action oriented and relatively nonverbal.¹ While women should join in the eugenics campaign, Galton wrote, the sense that race-motherhood would play an essential role was "fanciful." Lady Welby apologized profusely, arguing that her poor grasp of writing skills jumbled her thoughts and that he ought to be assured of her total support of his goals.²

Within the month she wrote to Galton, that professors Conwy Lloyd Morgan (1852-1936) and Cook Wilson (1849-1915), doctors J.H. Philpot (1850-1939), Clifford Allbutt (1836-1925), and Caleb W. Saleeby, civil servant Sir Alfred Lyall (1835-1911), and a Berman (?-?) (a biologist), all wanted to discuss and contribute to his eugenic work.³ She closed her 19 May letter with the remark, "let me tell you how profoundly grateful to *you* the true woman in the coming days will be" (emphasis in the original).⁴ Welby saw Significs as influencing the development of "inborn qualities of a race to the utmost advantage" and therefore "must be part of the idea which Eugenics sets before us."⁵ Lady Welby reaffirmed the environmental impact of a rigorous, deep education in language and rational thinking as necessary in drawing out the child's hereditary qualities; not something exactly in line with Galton's emphasis on heredity's primacy. But, it did reflect the second part of his definition of eugenics at the Sociology Society talk, namely that which developed the positive inherited aspects, "to the utmost advantage."

Welby's efforts to stir Sir Alfred Lyall to write on eugenics met with rejection.⁶ He felt selective mating would fail to produce what the eugenicists claimed. The authoritarian system to enforce it would, in his mind, "reduce mankind to a sort of domestic servitude and do much more harm than good."⁷

¹ Galton's comments appear on a proof for publication, LWF, Box 34, Folder 9.

² Welby to Galton, 19 May 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

³ Welby to Galton, 4 May 1904, 6 June 1904, 8 June 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20; Welby to Morgan, 28 July 1904. LWF, Box 10, Folder 40.

⁴ Welby to Galton, 19 May 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

⁵ Welby to Galton, 19 May 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

⁶ Lyall to Welby, 5 June 1904. LWF, Box 9, Folder 24.

⁷ Lyall to Welby, 5 June 1904. LWF, Box 9, Folder 24.

Such a system would have to sterilize all those deemed unfit, a process he deplored. Eugenics would lead to “intolerable slavery.” Welby apparently misrepresented Lyall’s desire to help Galton with eugenics.

Joseph Henry Philpot liked Galton’s paper but informed Lady Welby that he used the term first, in the novel *Stephen Brent*.¹ He also thought it should be “eugeneics.” Reminded that his book was published in 1885, two years after Galton coined the term, Philpot responded that he had written the book years before, therefore he saw the word as “my child” though he was willing to let Galton adopt it.² Philpot praised Lady Welby’s contribution to the May presentation. Over the next year she urged him to join the eugenic struggle, but Dr. Philpot declined, claiming a busy practice, the sense he had little to contribute and a growing despair it was too late.³

Galton felt the post-presentation discussion had been too negative. Lady Welby wrote the society’s secretary Branford, lamenting Galton’s disappointment.⁴ She saw him as bringing a new way of thinking which the current authorities could not accept, just as happened with earlier revolutionary ideas. Welby remarked that Pearson should have selected more positive discussants, much like “Huxley and Hooker arranged for Darwin at the Linnean Society,” when the latter presented his theory on evolution.⁵

In reviewing the presentation and discussion with Sir Frederick Pollock, Lady Welby mentioned Galton’s appreciation of Reid’s comments.⁶ She dismissed Shaw’s remarks with the line, “I am not concerned to defend G.B.S.!” Welby also dismissed criticism of Roberts and Loch as being full of “sense” and not based on reason. Welby praised Weldon’s defence of Galton in the general discussion.

¹ Philpot to Welby, 17 May 1904. Box 12, Folder 12. Philpot wrote under the pseudonym Philip Lafargue. The books protagonist develops the theory of eugenics, applying it to his own life only to see it produce a failed marriage. The two volume fiction was actually published in 1898 and panned. See Constable, Review of *Stephen Brent*, by Philip Lafargue, *The Academy* 55, 17 September 1898: 271.

² Philpot to Welby, 25 May 1904. LWF Box 12, Folder 12.

³ Philpot to Welby, 5 February 1905; Philpot to Welby, 24 October 1905; Welby to Philpot, 25 October 1905; Welby to Philpot, 1 November 1905; Philpot to Welby, 9 November 1905. LWF Box 12, Folder 12; Welby to Galton, 3 July 1905, LWF, Box 5, Folder 21.

⁴ Welby to Branford, 22 May 1904. LWF, Box 2, Folder 11.

⁵ Welby to Branford, 22 May 1904. LWF, Box 2, Folder 11. Sir Joseph Hooker (1817–1911).

⁶ Welby to Pollock, 17 June 1904. LWF, Box 13, Folder 1.

She ended the letter bemoaning that “the faddists and dealers in ‘fancy’ and ‘conjecture’ will have none of it [that is eugenics], nor will certain self-called ‘advanced’ theorists.”¹ To Dickinson, Welby referred to Galton’s presentation as an “epoch making message to the Race,” claiming it was “virtually the echo from the Gospel, ‘Ye must be born anew.’”²

Welby sent a missive to Pearson two weeks after Galton’s presentation. She confessed that she knew he, “consider[ed her] no worker but a useless proponent of futile ideas and waste of precious time.”³ She then criticized Pearson’s introduction of Galton, as he failed to stress Galton’s role in leading Britain to the “development of biological potency.” Pearson’s curt response offered his regret for not saying all he felt about Galton and that he would correct the print copy (which he did not).⁴

Welby regaled Galton with the news that his paper received critical acclaim in *The Nation*.⁵ She placed herself at his disposal “anxious to do anything I can toward inoculating the social body with your virus!”⁶ She proclaimed composite photography as an essential tool in eugenic research, suggesting a massive collection of photographs from across Britain and abroad. Once the world understood, “that Eugenics really ought for practical reasons become ‘religion,’ the ‘rite’ of photography will take on a sacramental character raising the human level.”⁷ Galton’s response was less than encouraging. It would prove too difficult to get enough images, he wrote, as even taking the images comparing six people was labour and time intensive.⁸ Instead, he asked to meet with her and discuss an idea he had for research, cautioning her that, “it is important to choose wisely.”

¹ Welby to Pollock, 17 June 1904. LWF, Box 13, Folder 1.

² Welby to Dickinson, 15 June 1904. LWF, Box 4, Folder 15.

³ Welby to Pearson, 19 May 1904. LWF, Box 12, Folder 1.

⁴ Pearson to Welby, 23 May 1904. LWF, Box 12, Folder 1; Pearson’s comments in the draft of the published article (Article proof for publication, LWF, Box 34, Folder 9) and the published article (“Eugenics: It’s Definition Scope and Aims. Remarks and Comments.” *Sociological Papers* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1905), 45–84, see 52–3), do not differ and they do not address Welby’s concern.

⁵ Welby to Galton, 24 June 1904; Galton to Welby, 25 June 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20. It was later published in the *American Journal of Sociology*, 10, no. 1 (July 1904): 1–25, with selected comments.

⁶ Welby to Galton, 27 June 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

⁷ Welby to Galton, 27 June 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

⁸ Galton to Welby, 1 July 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

Lady Welby wrote Pollock, again, in June, 1904, requesting his attendance at a Sociological Society meeting.¹ Pollock, working on editing the *Law Reports*, responded that he was too busy to attend a “pretended science of Sociology” gathering.² He wrote, the papers on eugenics which she had passed along were interesting, but discussion of solutions to social problems “in miscellaneous gatherings of mostly incompetent people” was a waste of time. She pressed the point, remarking on the growing interest not only in Britain but also America.³ Galton and Pearson wanted to keep the topic away from “ignorant people” and she thought Pollock’s views might help. As Pollock did not attend, Lady Welby sent copies of Galton’s remarks and the written responses.⁴

10. Welby’s Continuing Support for Galton and Eugenics

Francis Galton’s article on success and natural ability in families of Royal Society members appeared in *Nature*, in August 1904.⁵ Here again, as in his early efforts to study the heredity of genius, he found that exceptionally gifted families held a hereditary edge that reproduced their giftedness. Lady Welby congratulated him, but suggested that some families might be gifted to promote themselves commercially, with “social posters and effectual ads” rather than “intrinsic merit and ability.”⁶ She felt the self-promotional talent could be unconscious, hard to identify, yet hereditary, an idea that Galton was not advancing. His response is unknown. In the same letter she reminded Francis that women’s involvement was absolutely fundamental for eugenic’s success.

At the end of September, 1904, Galton asked to meet with Welby. Galton brought a draft of an article he was writing, for her opinion and suggestions.⁷ She queried if Pearson would join them. She claimed to admire the statistician

¹ Welby to Pollock, 5 June 1904; 13 June 1904. LWF. Box 13, Folder 3.

² Pollock to Welby, 6 June 1904. LWF. Box 13, Folder 3.

³ Welby to Pollock, 9 June 1904. LWF. Box 13, Folder 3.

⁴ Welby to Pollock, 17 June 1904, LWF, Box 13, Folder 3.

⁵ Francis Galton, “Distribution of Success and of Natural Ability Among the Kinsfolk of Fellows of the Royal Society,” *Nature* 70, no. 1815 (11 August 1904): 354-6.

⁶ Welby to Galton, 13 August 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

⁷ Galton to Welby, 29 September 1904; Welby to Galton, 3 October 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

and had many questions on the subject of eugenics for both men. Welby ended by declaring eugenics was in the “interest of the Child and therefore of the Race.”¹

Welby sent comments for the introduction of Galton’s paper two days after their meeting.² She added that a Mrs. J Grey (?-?) could introduce him to more elite families for his study. The following day Galton sent a note agreeing with her edits and that others agreed with her that he ought to use the term “ancestor.”³ He declined Grey’s offer, his half dozen families were enough to keep him busy. Galton thanked her for letting him visit.

Patrick Geddes wrote Welby suggesting that whatever she and Galton were thinking about eugenics they include Branford in their plans.⁴ Geddes taught sociology at University College, finding the Sociological Society’s interference a force to be reckoned with. He saw Branford leaning towards a more “imaginative and cultural outlook” along with other society members, including H.G. Wells. Geddes saw his and Thomson’s biological orientation being combined with Galton and Pearson’s statistical approach to explore heredity. He suggested having Branford write on eugenics and its problems combining both perspectives, providing “a good starting point for future work on the subject.”⁵ Unfortunately, Branford’s health, which was often poor, was deteriorating and Welby thought he could contribute little.⁶

At year’s end Branford asked Lady Welby if Galton would weigh in on a debate he was having with Dr Robert R. Rentoul (?-1925), who wanted to read a paper at the Sociological Society on sterilizing the unfit.⁷ Branford thought it was too provocative and would cause outrage. Rentoul had already read such a paper at the Medico-legal Society without incident, but Branford felt this was a different audience. Galton did not mince his words when replying to Lady

¹ Welby to Galton, 30 September 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

² Welby to Galton, 3 October 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

³ Galton to Welby, 4 October 1904. LWF, Box 5, Folder 20.

⁴ Geddes to Welby, 22 October 1904. LWF, Box 6, Folder 3.

⁵ Geddes to Welby, 22 October 1904. LWF, Box 6, Folder 3.

⁶ Welby to Geddes, 8 November 1904. LWF, Box 6, Folder 3.

⁷ Branford to Welby, 17 December 1904. LWF, Box, 2 Folder 15. Robert R. Rentoul passionately promoted sterilization of defective, deficient and insane people, writing *Race Culture: or Race Suicide?* (London: Walter Scott Publishing, 1903), with an enlarged second edition in 1906.

Welby. Under no condition was the paper to be accepted. He deferred any further discussion until he met with her the following day. Unfortunately, that discussion remains between them, but Rentoul did not present his paper at the Sociological Society.

Welby's correspondence with Edward Talbot (1844-1934), the Bishop of Southwark is extensive. In December 1904 she invited him to read an article on eugenics in the magazine *The World's Work and Play*.¹ She wrote: "For it means the physical side of the Coming of the Kingdom of God; it means the coming of the Harvest to which the fields are already white".² The Bishop was encouraged to not be critical but open to the possibility eugenics brought for "this new Race-Birth, or rather its necessary conditions".³ The Bishop's response to this idea is not known.

Lady Welby read Saleeby's book *Evolution: The Master Key* making two tightly typed pages of scrupulous notes.⁴ She wrote Saleeby about his views of regulating propagation. She felt it was too soon to do that, given the current state of knowledge about heredity.⁵

At the start of 1905 Welby and Galton celebrated the University of London's confirmation of a "Fellow of Eugenics," a step forward for research and education on the topic.⁶ In May, Galton sent a paper he wrote on the feeble-minded on which Welby gave comment.⁷ He found the feeble-minded "a very hopeful field of inquiry" on the defective's heredity. Lady Welby told Galton she knew a Miss Anderson who ran a home for the feeble-minded and "was greatly struck by her testimony."⁸ They could visit it together if he wished. She also arranged a meeting with Saleeby and Philpot to discuss feeble-mindedness since both had studied the problem. It is unknown if Galton took up any of her invitations.

¹ Welby to Talbot, 29 December 1904. LWF, Box 17, Folder 9. There are fifteen Folders of letters between Welby and Talbot.

² Welby to Talbot, 29 December 1904. LWF, Box 17, Folder 9.

³ Welby to Talbot, 29 December 1904. LWF, Box 17, Folder 9.

⁴ Caleb W. Saleeby, *Evolution the Master Key* (London: Harper and Brothers, 1906); Welby's notes see LWF, Box 13, Folder 24.

⁵ Welby to Saleeby, 15 June 1906. LWF, Box 13, Folder 24.

⁶ Welby to Galton, 3 February 1905; Galton to Welby, 6 January 1905. LWF, Box 5, Folder 21. Edgar Schuster was the First Fellow of Eugenics.

⁷ Galton to Welby, 24 May 1905. LWF, Box 5, Folder 21.

⁸ Welby to Galton, 25 May 1905; 3 July 1905; 17 August 1905. LWF, Box 5, Folder 21.

11. Galton on Marriage and Welby's Response

Francis Galton was scheduled for another talk at the Sociological Society, this time about the success of marriage restrictions across a variety of cultures and religions.¹ Once again he asked Lady Welby to read through the draft of his paper. She suggested removing the comment “like those of good stocks of cattle,” which he did.² With an audience of 200, he reviewed every type of marital relationship from monogamy and polygamy through endogamy, exogamy, taboos, to prohibited marriages, and even included enforced celibacy.³ In each case he demonstrated how people adopted the local restrictions unconsciously, being born into the system. Galton called again for eugenics to become a new national religion, shaping society to the “needs of the present time.”⁴

Twenty-seven prepared responses and notes were read out, twenty-four in favour of Galton's eugenics. Dr. Alice Drysdale Vickery spoke about limiting the number of children for all families and that women needed to be economically independent from men for the eugenic restrictions to really work.⁵ Author, Alfred Huth (1850-1910) mentioned the Spartans' use of eugenics and an effort by Frederick I of Prussia to restrict marriage.⁶ He wrote, people resisted the restrictions, and would continue to do so with any new order. Sir Richard Temple focused on the dangerous power possessed by those making the decisions that would suppress others.⁷ German biologist August Weismann agreed that eugenics was needed to improve the race, but felt that hereditary defects within a family needed to be thoroughly investigated before drastic action was taken to restrict marriage.⁸

Lady Welby's response supported her friend, but pointed out the tension between attempting to improve the race, which focused on children to come, and

¹ Francis Galton, “Restrictions in Marriage,” *Sociological Papers* 2 (1906): 3-13, 18-48, 49-51; Galton, “Studies in Eugenics: 1. Restrictions in Marriage,” *American Journal of Sociology* 11, no. 1 (July 1905): 11-20. The British journal published all the comments, the American journal printed none.

² Welby to Galton, 3 February 1905; Galton to Welby, 6 February 1906. LWF, Box 5, Folder 21.

³ E. Schuster to Welby, 15 February 1905. LWF, Box 14, Folder 11.

⁴ Galton, “Restrictions”, 13.

⁵ Vickery, “Comments, Restrictions”, 21-2.

⁶ A. Huth, “Comments, Restrictions”, 28-30.

⁷ Temple, “Comments, Restrictions”, 38-40.

⁸ Weismann, “Comments, Restrictions”, 42-3.

the relationship between the individual parents of those children.¹ She sought a balance between the two thrusts of eugenics. Most of her response dealt with the shift required in people's thinking, the "creation of a eugenic conscience [...] a restoration of the human balance."² Conscious, directed, and gradual education would bring out, "the eugenic loyalty shown in instinctive form on the sub-human plane."³ In closing, she warned against the, "the two cults of Self and Happiness," writing, "The true eugenic conscience will look upon self as a means, and an instrument of consecrated service; and happiness not as an end or an ideal to strive for, since such striving ignobly defeats its own object, but – as sorrow or disappointment may also become – a means or a result of purifying and energizing the human activities to an extent as yet difficult to speak of."⁴

Lady Welby thought the nation was ready for Galton's eugenics. She saw despair and pessimism everywhere, an "indispensable prelude to a great reawakening of mental and moral force and courage: the birth-pangs which to the sufferer seems deadly and nothing else..."⁵ Eugenics (along with her Significs) provided the necessary uplift, giving people the tools to overcome the decay around them. Educating people from infancy forward on eugenics would lead "ultimately [to] the transfiguration by *voluntary selection*, of the Race" (emphasis in the original).⁶

12. Welby's Thoughts on Eugenics 1906 to 1910

After 1906 Lady Welby's attention returned to Significs. Though she still wrote on eugenics, most remained unpublished. Welby worried that humans had forgotten the laws of heredity.⁷ When a "taint" entered a family, society allowed its expression and left the person with the "pathological tendency" to

¹ Welby, "Comments, Restrictions", 43-5; see also LWF Box 34, Folder 9.

² Welby, "Comments, Restrictions", 44.

³ Welby, "Comments, Restrictions", 44.

⁴ Welby, "Comments, Restrictions", 45.

⁵ Welby to Galton, 25 October 1905. LWF, Box 5, Folder 21.

⁶ Welby, "Relation of 'Significs' to Eugenics," 24 May 1905. LWF, Box 30, Folder 15.

⁷ Welby, "A Study in Heredity," 6 November 1906. LWF, Box 26, Folder 9.

marry, most likely a person with the same, or another “evil.” But preventing them from reproducing was premature as not enough detailed multi-generational family pedigrees had been compiled. She noted that many tuberculin people had good qualities, some “the flower of the mental and moral world.”¹ A mindset had to be created among the population to deny marriage and procreation to the “unmistakable, glaring[ly] diseased stock.”² Welby understood nature had always worked to the advantage of humans in the past, through promoting the fittest, healthiest’s survival. Lady Welby saw eugenics creating the day, “when ‘men shall be as gods’ and each shall become himself a race [...] learning above all to reign over space and time [...] and to be easily Master of all their racial treasure-house and the progenitor of yet greater races.”³

Eugenics and Significs were parallel developments; sharing the same conditions that would promote their acceptance.⁴ “Good breeding” would improve the race, by increasing the “well-bred.” Heredity would supply the potential while a nurturing environment, informed by Significs, would draw out and shape the superior human. After reading Thomson’s *Heredity*, Welby saw that Significs was needed to clarify language used by eugenicist.⁵ An example of this problematic use of language was the disagreement between Thomson, Bateson and Pearson over the terms reversion and atavism. Thomson and Bateson held that reversion had amassed around it “false ideas” and should be dropped from the lexicon, and atavism only be employed. Pearson felt both reversion and atavism were important but wanted Darwin’s usage to be adhered, with atavism becoming a synonym for reversion. Lady Welby questioned whether synonyms truly existed, as each word is impacted by the context, association, the person using the word and common understanding at the time of use. Until such a time that a lexicon could be agreed on, eugenics would have difficulty moving forward in research and application.

Most of her thinking on eugenics centred on mother-sense, mother-mind, or race-motherhood, the idea premised on Lady Welby’s idea that women natu-

¹ Welby, “A Study in Heredity,” 6 November 1906. LWF, Box 26, Folder 9.

² Welby, “A Study in Heredity,” 6 November 1906. LWF, Box 26, Folder 9.

³ Welby, “Opposite Forms of Insanity,” 27 May 1907. LWF, Box 24, Folder 1.

⁴ Welby, “Relation of ‘Significs’ to Eugenics,” 24 May 1905. LWF, Box 30, Folder 15.

⁵ Welby, “The Bearing of Significs on Heredity,” April 1908. LWF, Box 22, Folder 3.; J. Arthur Thomson, *Heredity* (London: John Murray, 1908).

rally, intuitively understood the world around them, sensing, and interpreting that world, thus shaping a worldview.¹ Developing the idea over three decades, the major focus of this mother-sense was child bearing and rearing. Men had a “father reason,” where their intellectual power could be used to advancing society. She held that men’s brain and muscular power provided for the female while she expressed her race-motherhood endowment to raise the next generation.² Welby believed that both the masculine father reason and the feminine mother-sense potentially resided in all people. In the male, father-reason had the stronger presence.³ Women, though endowed with both, were only able to engage with their mother-sense. Modern civilization had encouraged women to forsake their motherhood role for industrial work, formal educational pursuits, frivolous activity, and new practices of education and human development.⁴ Men tended to gain the most notoriety as geniuses only because women had appropriately cared for them from conception through childhood, in particular teaching them language. Petrilli writes that Welby believed, “mother sense [was] a necessary condition for the evolution of the human race both ontologically and phylogenetically and, therefore, for the full development of historical and social practices.”⁵ Welby warned against encouraging all women to have children, for some did not know their mother-sense, or had other characteristics that impaired their race-motherhood.

Her 1907 writing on ‘Life,’ reveals her acceptance that some people born defective qualify as, “venomous Human Parasites, the offspring of all foulness.” She wondered if they “account[ed] for the ‘devil’ idea?”⁶ Welby explained, that this wrong is compounded by medical advances that allowed for the defective’s survival and inclusion into society, further degrading the human race. She lamented that society encouraged a mother to, “ignorantly [...] conceive the tainted thing which masquerades as life.”⁷ She believed humans needed to

¹ Susan Petrilli, “Mother Sense,” 54.

² Welby, “The Eugenic Contribution of the ‘Race-Motherhood,” July 1904 (corrected June 12, 1907). LWF, Box 26, Folder 9

³ Welby, “The Eugenics of the Mind,” 22 November 1907. LWF, Box 26, Folder 9.

⁴ Petrilli, “Mother Sense,” 62.

⁵ Petrilli, “Mother Sense,” 58.

⁶ Welby, “What Do We Mean by Life,” LWF, Box 24, Folder 12.

⁷ Welby, “What Do We Mean by Life,” LWF, Box 24, Folder 12.

take “control and exploit all living energies as [they are] already learning to control and exploit mechanical ones.”¹ Leaving nature to determine the direction of human development, or to allow humans to continue activities, such as wars, which reduced the superior stock, were equally unethical.

In March 1906, Galton confessed to Lady Welby that his photographic work on inherited resemblance was not going well.² He was trying to connect familial and racial likeness and organize them into types. Two months later he questioned the soundness of his method, but had many photographs as a result of a request he had made in *Nature*.³ In October, disappointment that eugenics was not “more vigorously pushed,” Galton bemoaned that, “nothing grows fast except the mania for gold and bridge.”⁴ Lady Welby countered with encouragement, declaring that eugenics was moving forward more than he thought.⁵ For the next three years, her own work on Significs would take her away from the eugenic battle. The publication of her book and its favourable reception lead to an increase in correspondence and meetings with leading philosophers.⁶ Welby expressed her support for Galton’s pending autobiography in 1907, and wrote of breeding intelligent animals, such as dogs, horses and rabbits. Galton responded with tongue in cheek that she would have the universities offering courses in “scholarship of dogs.”⁷

In late 1908, Lady Welby returned to the subject of composite photography, sending Galton a new imaging method developed by William Caldwell (?-?).⁸ Galton did not respond, but Lady Welby persisted with more details. Galton struck back with an angry response, “he is totally wrong in supposing that his brief exposure is valid in respect to my method.”⁹ Galton said it was impossible given the photographic plates used in cameras. Welby informed Galton

¹ Welby, “The Bearing of Significs on Heredity,” April 1904. LWF, Box 22, Folder 3.

² Galton to Welby, 7 March 1906; May 4, 1906. LWF, Box 5, Folder 21.

³ Francis Galton, “Measurement of Resemblance,” *Nature* 74 (4 October 1906): 562–563.

⁴ Galton to Welby, 19 October 1906. LWF, Box 5, Folder 21.

⁵ Welby to Galton, 19 November 1906. LWF, Box 5, Folder 21.

⁶ Bertrand Russell LWF, Box 13, Folder 19; Charles S Peirce LWF, Box 6, Folder 6.

⁷ Welby to Galton, 25 December 1907; Galton to Welby, 27 December 1907; Welby to Galton, 29 December 1907. LWF, Box 5, Folder 22.

⁸ Welby to Galton, 18 September 1908; LWF, Box 5, Folder 23.

⁹ Galton to Welby, 20 September 1908. LWF, Box 5, Folder 23.

that new plates had been developed that could be employed for the purpose.¹ The subject reappeared in their correspondence once more, in August 1910, as Welby asked if it was being used anywhere to study eugenic issues.² She thought it would not only reveal the “secrets of heredity,” but how one person might hold sway over another. Galton proposed, with the Eugenetic Records Office’s support, an in-depth study of British families with at least 200 photographs of each participant’s significant life events across their life time, in a variety of specific emotional states, along with detailed written family histories.³ This mammoth undertaking did not go forward.

In 1909, both Welby and Galton’s health declined. Welby was restricted to living entirely on the first floor of her home, unable to walk up stairs.⁴ Galton found he had far less energy and ability to concentrate, to do his work. Lady Welby told Pearson of Galton’s declining health.⁵ She once again asked Sir Francis (he was knighted in 1909) if she should write to Pearson for help with mathematics, and noted its place in her Significs. He must have encouraged it as Pearson responded amiably, thanking her for the report on Galton, whom he seldom saw. Pearson was busy but took some time to begin responding to her specific questions on math, in particular the pattern of occurrences in groupings of three.

In October 1910, Welby, in a letter to Eva Biggs (Galton’s great-niece who took care of him), remarked on Galton’s importance to science.⁶ Her own work was being read at Oxford and Cambridge and she hoped it would continue after her death. She thanked Galton for his never ending support and friendship. She wrote sociologist J.W. Slaughter (1878-?) after visiting Galton, having passed on Slaughter’s “educational syllabus” on eugenics, which Galton only glanced at. She informed him that Galton was, “uneasy about the prospects of Eugenics,

¹ Welby to Galton, 9 November 1908; Galton to Welby, 11 November 1908; Welby to Galton, November 12, 1908. LWF, Box 5, Folder 23.

² Welby to Galton, 29 August 1910. LWF, Box 5, Folder 24.

³ Francis Galton, *Eugenics: Proposed Modes of Statistical Inquiry* (undated). LWF, Box 5, Folder 26.

⁴ Welby to Galton, 16 January 1909, LWF, Box 5, Folder 24.

⁵ Welby to Pearson, 4 April 1909; Pearson to Welby, 7 April 1909; Welby to Pearson, 12 April 1909. LWF, Box 12, Folder 1.

⁶ Welby to Biggs, 30 October 1910; Welby to Galton, 2 November 1910; 13 January 1911. LWF, Box 5, Folder 24.

and can't bear the line and tone Saleeby is taking."¹ On the topic of photography, Lady Welby told Slaughter that Galton felt, "very strongly [...] about the amazing neglect of so powerful a psychological and eugenical ally."² He complained that people had failed to grasp the, "inexhaustible resources of his method for solving problems of heredity."³ She closed the letter noting the precariousness of Galton's poor health.

13. Galton's Death and Welby's Erasure from Eugenics

On 18 January 1911, Lady Welby received a telegram informing her of Sir Francis Galton's death, the day before.⁴ Galton left his fortune to University College, London to finance the Galton Eugenics Laboratory and a Chair in Eugenics.⁵ The laboratory's purpose was "the study of those agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial faculties of future generations physically and mentally."⁶ Within a year Pearson took over running the laboratory and became the first Galton Chair of Eugenics, held until his retirement in 1933.

As the Eugenic community memorialized Sir Francis Galton, Karl Pearson informed Lady Welby that he and others had privately raised £1,600, towards a goal of £2,000.⁷ He didn't tell her what the money was for, but it's clear she was not part of this project honouring the man with whom she held an intellectual but also personal affinity. In her response Welby wrote, "Eugenics represents the guardianship and transfiguration of life."⁸ She added, "if Eugenics would have been appreciably facilitated and its success indirectly promoted" just ten years sooner, it would be far more advanced.⁹ Welby sent along a cheque for £5. Pearson's short response thanked her for the contribution and declared "We all

¹ Welby to Slaughter, 30 October 1910. LWF, Box 14, Folder 29.

² Welby to Slaughter, 30 October 1910. LWF, Box 14, Folder 29.

³ Welby to Slaughter, 30 October 1910. LWF, Box 14, Folder 29.

⁴ Biggs to Welby, 18 January 1911. LWF, Box 5, Folder 24.

⁵ Kevles, *In the Name*, 38-9; Farrall, *Origins and Growth*, 132-3.

⁶ "Francis Galton Laboratory," *British Medical Journal* 2, no. 2650 (October 14, 1911): 938.

⁷ Pearson to Welby, 22 September 1911. LWF, Box 12, Folder 1.

⁸ Welby to Pearson, 30 September 1911. LWF, Box 12, Folder 1.

⁹ Welby to Pearson, 30 September 1911. LWF, Box 12, Folder 1.

are working for the same goal on different paths.”¹ The two did not exchange letters again.

Welby wrote a short piece for *Nature*, a month after Galton’s death, advocating the use of composite photography.² She claimed that Galton had seen it as an important tool and advocated for its use in advancing sociology and heredity research. She related that he often spoke of it, with Caldwell’s “original contribution” to the technique in mind, a slight misrepresentation of Galton’s feelings about Caldwell’s suggestion (noted above). Welby claimed that in conversations just prior to his passing Galton reported “sensational results” with images of families, another alternative truth. Lady Welby’s involvement in eugenics ended with Galton’s death. She died just over a year later on 29 March 1912, at Denton Manor, in Lincolnshire.

Eugenics did not have the impact in Britain that it had elsewhere in the world. In 1913, Parliament passed the Mental Deficiency Act, the only piece of legislation that was influenced significantly by the eugenic movement. The 1920s and 30s debates over sterilizing the unfit ended with its rejection. Galton’s eugenics appeared to decline in the country where it originated, while the statistics he created to do the number crunching laid the foundation of statistics in today’s social sciences. Pearson edited Sir Francis Galton’s papers into a three volume biography.³ This biography served as a key source in all subsequent studies of Galton and eugenics. It was a tome of praise by Pearson for the man with whom he felt a remarkable bond. In the first volume’s preface, Pearson stated that Galton’s ideas would lead the way to race-efficiency and the use of Darwin’s ideas “to the directed evolution of man.”⁴ Seeing the Mendelian school of thought as the enemy to truth, Pearson wrote, that Galton’s ideas would be the saviour of Darwin’s theory of evolution, offering proof and application. But the biography of Galton was not just an academic exercise for Pearson. The third volume’s preface reveals he produced the biography because, “I loved my friend and had sufficient knowledge to understand his aims and the meaning of his life for the science of the future.”⁵

¹ Pearson to Welby, 5 October 1911. LWF, Box 12, Folder 1.

² V. Lady Welby, “Sir F. Galton and Composite Photography,” *Nature* (9 February 1911): 474.

³ Pearson, *The Life, Letters and Labours*.

⁴ Pearson, *Life and Letters*, vol. 1, vi-vii.

⁵ Pearson, *Life and Letters*, vol. 3, v.

In Volume Three (published in 1930), Lady Welby appears twice as a subject of discussion between Pearson and Galton, in April of 1909. In a letter on eugenic matters, Pearson noted receiving a question from her about groupings of three being more common than others. Pearson asked Galton if he should instruct her to “make a frequency curve of the odds at the principle race-meetings during the year” to test her idea.¹ Galton’s response did not remark on this but simply said, “Lady Welby is irrepressible in her inquiries. She was with us at Lyndhurst for more than a week, full of mystical triads, etc. and much else. Socially she is very charming and good.”² It leaves the reader with the notion that she was nothing more than a flighty, shallow socialite for whom neither men entertained much liking. Certainly, that would be true from Pearson’s perspective, but after an examination of Lady Welby and Francis Galton’s correspondence it is clearly not what Galton entertained. Perhaps Pearson had a personal problem with Lady Welby being close to Galton, having Sir Francis’ mind open to her ideas. For whatever reason, Pearson could not give her positive space within the story of his mentor and hero.



As this paper has shown, Welby was a significant eugenics supporter. Apart from her personal connection with Galton’s research, she promoted eugenics to academics, scientists and intellectuals. She helped organize the British Sociological Association with eugenics in mind, and wanted Galton and Pearson to be involved in pushing this agenda forward in the society. Welby’s absence from the historiography of eugenics underlines the era’s rejection of women’s involvement in scientific study.

As raised at the outset, Claire Jones noted how the notion of women contributing to science was simply dismissed, even though women were advanc-

¹ Pearson to Galton, 6 April 1909. Pearson, *Life and Letters*, vol. 3, 378. Welby does not appear in volumes 1 or 2. Pearson’s response to Welby is found in Cust, *Other Dimensions*, 319. The letter panders to her inquiry, ultimately dismissing her ideas as untestable, implying they were useless.

² Galton to Pearson, 8 April 8, 1909. Pearson, *Life and Letters*, vol. 3, 379-80.

ing science.¹ Because of this gender bias Welby's work facilitating Galton's eugenics could not receive recognition. Galton did not mention her at all in his auto-biography, naming only females with whom he had a familial or social connection with their husbands or fathers.² A woman contributing to his work was something he privately appreciated but apparently could not publicly acknowledge.

In addition, as noted at the outset, the late Nineteenth Century through the 1920s saw science shifting into the academic institution, away from 'scholars' working at home. It became a profession leaving behind the former philanthropic-like activity. Independently wealthy aristocrats (such as Galton and Lady Welby) engaged in intellectual pursuits were having their authority wrestled away by the laboratory-bound and/or academic researcher, such as Karl Pearson. This sea change doubled down on the reduction of women to assistant roles, if not outright exclusion.

The erasing of Lady Welby's contribution to eugenics was ultimately due to several factors, including: Pearson's personal animosity towards her, the prevalent gender bias at the time and the professionalization shift occurring within the various fields of science. This led to her exclusion from the sources that governed the direction that historians took in understanding Galton's eugenic project and his supporters. In the case of Lady Welby, that means historians have missed a significant player in British eugenics.

14. Welby's Eugenics

As noted at the outset, Welby has recently been portrayed as not supportive of eugenics. This does not appear to be the case after an exploration of her correspondence and her own writing on the subject. She promoted the imperative to foster a healthy, morally sound race, free of hereditary infirmities. She wrote about ridding the race of "the unfit," of promoting the hereditarily "superior."

Lady Welby accepted Galton's goals of more research on heredity, and public education about eugenics. She saw race-motherhood as being *essential* to this

¹ Jones, "Women, Science," 63-85.

² Francis Galton, *Memories of My Life* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1909).

last point. Galton's goal of making eugenics the new public faith was completely acceptable to her. Getting the population to deny marriage and procreation to the "unmistakable, glaring diseased stock" was a righteous objective.¹ As noted above she accepted that some people were born defective, "venomous Human Parasites, the offspring of all foulness."² She wrote of mothers conceiving children that were a, "tainted thing which masquerades as life."³ Welby engaged in public debate over critical social issues with a eugenic perspective. Though it was not her main area of academic pursuit, it was one she significantly effected, by her connecting Galton to like minded academics, politicians and literary figures, and co-founding the British Sociological Society to advance Galton and Pearson's eugenic agenda.

Like other eugenicists, including Galton and Pearson, Lady Welby believed that controlling the hereditary quality of humans was a noble, ethical goal. Welby even supported the idea of euthanizing those deemed severely defective, as she saw them as only suffering in a pointless existence. She heard the predictions that such efforts could lead to horrific acts against humans (which it did in the years following her death). Like many of her fellow British eugenicists, Lady Welby urged caution until further research revealed the laws of heredity, but she never spoke against eugenics.



¹ Welby, "A Study in Heredity," 6 November 1906. LWF, Box 26, Folder 9.

² Welby, "What Do We Mean by Life." LWF, Box 24, Folder 12.

³ Welby, "What do we mean by Life," LWF, Box 24, Folder 12.

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