THE STATISTICAL METHOD: A REPLY

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The longer one lives, the more one is impressed with the infinite capacity of the human mind for misunderstanding and the great difficulty in expressing one's thoughts in a way that will not be misconstrued. The paper in question lay on the writer's desk a year before it was submitted for publication and was read and approved by several persons well acquainted with his viewpoint regarding statistical methods. Yet in spite of several inferences and one specific statement to the contrary, Dr. Harris appears to believe that it was the writer's intention and purpose to criticize the statistical method as such. He apparently acquired this impression by selecting examples which were intended as illustrations of particular errors rather than as illustrations of a misuse of the statistical method as a whole. Thus, in my paper, reference was made to the correlation between age at marriage of two groups from Who's Who to show that Pearl, in arriving at a conclusion, had depended upon his preconceived (and correct) opinion rather than upon the statistical method. If the illustration is faulty because not analogous to experimental data, the fault would seem to lie with Pearl rather than with the writer.

It seems unlikely that anything useful will result from attempting further to answer Dr. Harris' criticisms. If he has "no ghost of an idea" as to the meaning of portions of my paper, it is at least doubtful whether a second attempt on my part would clarify the situation. It is decidedly important, however, that the issue be clear cut and definite. Agronomists are responsible for the expenditure for research of large sums of public money. The farming public is looking to them as never before for reliable information on every conceivable subject having to do with growing crops. If there is anything "dangerous" in the viewpoint expressed by the writer, agronomists certainly will be interested to know about it and to have the evidence that it is dangerous placed before them for their study and evaluation.

What, then, is the issue involved? Merely, (a) Is it true that field experiments "are not of sufficient practical value" to justify their expense? (b) Are such experiments "discreditable to agronomic science" if not interpreted statistically? (c) Is "an experiment

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