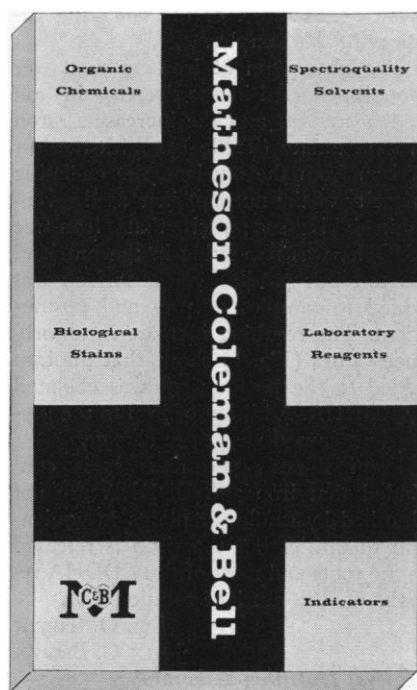


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Letters

Ashkenazic Jews

The article by P. H. Saldanha and W. Beçak, "Taste thresholds for phenylthiourea among Ashkenazic Jews" [*Science* 129, 150 (1959)] is a good presentation of data relating to thresholds and correlated information. The data obtained appear to be highly selective insofar as the groups discussed are concerned. The comparison is poor, since the Danish and English groups representing Europeans (Caucasian race) are in no way related. The Jews were not permitted in the Scandinavian countries until 1904; they were in England for approximately 200 years, were expelled in the 12th century, and were later readmitted in the 18th century. This may appear to justify the comparisons.

Historical facts exist to show that the Polish Jews did intermarry with their neighbors and did change their faith to intermarry later. Strong evidence in support of these facts may be found by examining heraldic symbols of the Polish nobility. A closer relation can be found between the German Ashkenazic Jews and the German people, since intermarriage occurred more frequently.

The specific problem of racial difference or similarity, which occupied the German racial theorists from 1933 to 1945, may be indicated by a comparison of the neighbors of the Ashkenazic Jews, as well as by comparisons with the Chinese and Japanese (Mongoloid race). This still leaves unanswered the question of the relation of the Mediterranean peoples (Spanish, Italian, and Greek) to the Jews.

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The comments by Lasser are in accordance with my own views of the problem of Jewish relationships with Europeans as far as I have understood Lasser's criticisms. I think Jewish intermarriage with European people has varied to a great extent according to the country considered. Available historical data could indicate that Ashkenazic Jews from Central Europe (including the Polish ones) have received appreciable genetic contributions from Europeans other than Mediterranean, but the invasions of Europe by Mongols [see Carleton S. Coon, *The Races of Europe* (Macmillan, New York, 1939)] at several times (especially the Tartar invasion in the 7th century, when the upper class of a khazar group was converted to Judaism) could have injected some admixture into Western Jewish communities (mainly into those from Poland and Russia). Since there are no available data on taste ability to PTC obtained by the same technique among

non-Jews from Poland, it appears reasonable to me to compare Polish Jews with English and Danish peoples who could represent typical non-Mediterranean Europeans, in order to know how great the Jews depart from the latter. Moreover, as is pointed out in the article, the relationship of Ashkenazic Jews to Negro groups on the grounds of Rh blood type (see Mourant; see references in the article) must be considered too. Efforts will be made to collect data on other Jewish groups elsewhere.

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The Green Ray

In his review of O'Connell's *The Green Flash and Other Low Sun Phenomena* [*Science* 129, 1218 (1959)], Charles H. Smiley bemoans the fact that hardly anybody knows of the existence of the green ray. This is not true. Any red-blooded youngster of a generation ago has read Jules Verne's *The Green Ray* (which is listed in O'Connell's bibliography). Scottish belief has it that only one who has seen this phenomenon knows whom he or she truly loves, and Verne's heroine, a capricious lady of Edinburgh, refuses to marry until she has beheld it. All concerned set out on an expedition to the island of Staffa, famous for Fingal's cave. Eventually everyone sees the green ray except the lady and her lover, who are busy looking into each other's eyes.

My own search for the green ray, which has led me, too, to the island of Staffa, has been fruitless (nevertheless, I married). The green ray can be seen only when one views the horizon from an elevation, and this—plus factors of latitude, season, and weather—probably explains why few sea captains are familiar with it.

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Response in Nervous Tissue

In his excellent article "Neuron doctrine and electrophysiology" [*Science* 129, 997 (1959)], T. H. Bullock surprisingly does not refer to Bishop's earlier summary and conjectures on nerve physiology [G. H. Bishop, *Physiol. Revs.* 36, 376 (1956)]. Much of Bullock's thesis was proposed by Bishop as a unitary concept for the seemingly paradoxical evidence for both graded response and all-or-none response in nervous tissue. Bishop's major points were: (i) that the all-or-none response is a special case of the general property of excitability; (ii)