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)

that all-or-none conduction was developed chiefly under the necessity of action over distances in organisms whose parts became separated by reason of size and complexity and where graded response and consequent decremental conduction would be inadequate for central-nervous-system control of peripheral organs; and (iii) that the chief characteristic function of nervous and other excitable tissues are performed by means of graded responses.

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Meetings

Southwestern and Rocky Mountain Division

The Southwestern and Rocky Mountain Division of the American Association for the Advancement of Science held its 35th annual meetings in Laramie, Wyo., 5–9 May 1959. Most of the sessions were conducted jointly with those of the 30th annual meetings of the Colorado-Wyoming Academy of Science.

Featured sessions at the meetings included an address by Chauncey D. Leake, president-elect of the AAAS, on "Standards of measurement and nursery rhymes"; a report on the activities of the association by Paul D. Klopsteg, president; and an invited paper, "Physical constants as standards of measurement," by A. G. McNish of the National Bureau of Standards.

Programs of the sections of the division and of the Colorado-Wyoming Academy of Science included 137 individual papers. Two symposia consisting of invited papers were conducted. One of these, sponsored by the division's committee on desert and arid zones research, was presented by eight specialists in the fields of agriculture, on the subject "Agricultural problems in arid and semi-arid environments." At the fourth in a series of symposia on improvement of science teaching, some problems of college teaching were discussed. After a stimulating talk on "Graduate training for the college science teacher," by Robert H. Bruce, dean of the Graduate School of the University of Wyoming, discussion groups, divided according to scientific discipline, considered their special problems.

On the final day of the meetings a large group of members of the Colorado-Wyoming Junior Academy of Science attended sessions featuring a chalk talk on the evolution of the Rocky Mountain area, by Samuel H. Knight of the University of Wyoming, and presentation of student papers.

The division's annual John Wesley Powell memorial lecture was presented by Hershel K. Mitchell, professor of biology of the California Institute of Technology, who spoke on "A perspective of biochemical genetics."

Retiring divisional president Albert R. Mead, professor of zoology of the University of Arizona, delivered the presidential address, on "Science and extremism."

The newly elected officers of the division include Lora M. Shields (New Mexico Highlands University), president; Alan T. Wager (Arizona State University), president-elect; and Earl D. Camp (Texas Technological College), member of the executive committee. Marlowe G. Anderson (New Mexico State University) will continue as executive secretary-treasurer and council representative.

Sul Ross State College at Alpine, Texas, was chosen as the site of the 1960 meetings, and an invitation from Arizona State University to hold the 1961 meeting in Tempe, Arizona, was accepted.

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