

## Going on about race

CONSTANT LAMBERT was an opinionated but highly readable commentator on the musical scene of the 1920s and 30s, of which he himself was a part. In *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline*, he wrote thus of Russian symphonic music based on folk origins—'. . . the whole trouble with a folk song is that once you have played it through there is nothing much you can do except play it over again and play it rather louder!' The conflict between those who see a genetic component in white/black IQ differences, and those who do not runs some risk of becoming in science what the folk song became in symphonic music. The latest action replay of the controversy was performed in London last week at the Institute of Biology's seminar on Racial Variation in Man.

The conflict is actually a three-cornered affair between those who say 'nature' dominates, those who say 'nurture' dominates, and those who cry racism. These last who vilify the 'nature' proponents as racists—and they managed a modest demonstration outside the hall last week—should be aware of some dangerous pitfalls.

- It is no good simply decrying the IQ test as such. There is no doubt a substantial degree of disaffection with IQ as a valuable measure of anything useful. Fun can be poked at the skills which it seems to encompass; much can be made of the success of those with modest IQs, and the failures of those with astronomical ones; it can be accused of dividing children at too early an age into sheep and goats, but the fact remains that it is a widely used measuring rod. Further, as Professor Thoday put it in *Nature* last year, 'concerning within-group differences . . . relative performance in IQ tests correlates with relative performance in aspects of education that are highly relevant to success in, and the needs of, modern societies.'

- It is no good denying the existence at present of between-group differences in mean IQ. They are real and it serves no useful purpose to pretend that they are the result of errors of measurement or that they are trivial.

- Lionisation of those who have found a low degree of heritability of IQ is wishful thinking and an utterly unscientific approach. It would do the cause of social responsibility no good to be wedded to an attractive but maybe wrong conclusion.

In short, catch phrases such as 'Smash the racist IQ test' and 'Nurture not nature' are no way to approach the problem. But problem there is. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that those who go on saying that heritability is high are feeding racist tendencies, however inadvertently and seemingly innocently, and are supplying an apparent scientific basis for those who wish to justify racial discrimination. Many scientists would, of course, contend that the evidence on which the present

debate is being conducted is not such as could correctly be termed scientific, but the general public, unlikely to appreciate the finer points of the internal squabbles of science, will in the end absorb the message that is repeated most frequently and with the most crescendo.

Educational policy-makers may then be under considerable pressure to introduce some sort of *apartheid* system which tries to partition off by racial group in the interests of uniformity. However neat and justifiable such a system might seem on the face of it, it would be going in the wrong direction in two distinct ways: the educational experience should be more than just intellectual pump-priming, it should now more than ever help to reduce societal divisions; and to educate on the basis of group membership rather than individual capability is to waste the diversity of talent which sometimes seems the main asset of society.

The scientist faced with a discovery which is controversial and maybe unpalatable to some has an awesome responsibility to handle it correctly, and he should be prepared if necessary to devote the rest of his scientific life to ensuring that the proper use is made of the discovery. Would racial segregation in education be a proper use for apparent high heritability of IQ?

It is simply not possible, having unearthed a potentially explosive piece of information to sit on the fence in the name of scientific objectivity. Those who do not take every opportunity to minimise the risk of the subsequent explosion are actually helping it to come about. And those who keep raising the inflammatory issue must be presumed to want to speed the explosion.

## A hundred years ago



### Mist Bows

ON Sept. 14 I was driving from the Lizard just after sunrise with Mr. Lugg of Manaccan. A thick mist covered the fields and moorland. The tops of the farm buildings and corn stacks and the church towers were visible above the sea of mist which, matted on the ground, gave the entire country the appearance of being covered with snow. About 6.30 A.M. the sun was bright on our right hand, and on the left we saw a halo of prismatic colours forming a distinct circle of rainbow at a little distance from and encircling the shadows of our heads, and only broken where the shadows of our bodies interposed. This appearance lasted for ten minutes, and our shadows with their attendant bow showed brightly against the mist background as we passed hedges and fields, and kept pace with us like "the mist raised from the plashy earth" by the hare in Wordsworth's poem,

"That, glittering in the sun,  
Runs with her all the way wherever she doth run."

We afterwards opened a valley terminating in an extensive moor, when the mist appeared as a sea of prismatic colour extending to the horizon. About 7 A.M. we saw a perfect bow free from any prismatic colour, both ends of which terminated in the field immediately to our left.

My companion, who is constantly driving about this district in early morning, says he never before saw similar phenomena.

Lizard Signal Station, Sept. 16

HOWARD FOX

From *Nature*, 10, 438, October 1, 1874.