

Correspondence

One Swallow for Summer

SIR,—In the interests of accuracy which one expects from a scientific journal, may I correct your statement (“One Swallow for Summer”, *Nature*, 221, 4; 1969) that I “led marching strikers” before the war. If I had, I would not disavow it. In my own union, the National Union of Journalists, however, I never had the occasion, and the implication of your remark is that I was an *agent provocateur* interfering in the affairs of other unions. This is untrue.

There is a recurring film-clip and photograph of me, with Miss Ellen Wilkinson, MP, in the front rank of the column of the Jarrow Marchers. They were not strikers. This, by all-party vote in Council, duly minuted, was a town presenting a petition to Parliament for desperately needed help. My presence on that 300 mile march was the test of my stamina (and sympathies) as a reporter.

The comment (like this explanation) is curiously irrelevant to the chairmanship of the Metrication Board.

Yours sincerely,

RITCHIE-CALDER

House of Lords.

New Constitution for British Physicists

SIR,—In this letter I do not attempt to set out the case for an application by the Institute of Physics and the Physical Society for a Royal Charter. That has been pursued within the Institute and Society and has resulted in an overwhelming response in favour of an application. There are, however, a few points in Professor Blackman's letter to *Nature* (221, 105; 1969) which, I think, require comment.

I do not doubt Professor Blackman's sincerity in stating his views against the Institute's and Society's proposals, but it is, I think, regrettable that he should do so with implied charges against the motivation and even the integrity of the council of the Institute of Physics and the Physical Society.

The first aim of the organization (present and future) is to promote the advancement of knowledge and education in the science of physics. In this respect it is generally accepted that all those activities carried on by the Physical Society, prior to amalgamation in 1960, have been even more effectively pursued since amalgamation. Indeed, as stated in your article in *Nature* (220, 952; 1968) “The organization has in the past eight years been able to accomplish many things beyond the reach of the constituent bodies”. There is no question of the “Physical Society” being “sacrificed” as Professor Blackman suggests, so far as the aims of the Institute of Physics and the Physical Society are concerned. Those aims will remain as firm as before. The years since amalgamation have surely demonstrated that it has been and is now no part of the council's intention to see the role of the organization as a learned society being emasculated. In any case, the Physical Society is not an organic entity apart from the present Institute of Physics and Physical Society and there can be no question of the organization sacrificing any part of itself. It is, and has been, an illusion if any members of the former Physical Society have refused to recognize this fact of amalgamation in 1960 and have chosen to regard the organization since that date as a “parallel co-existence” or a “federation”. By amalgamation, the new organization became an organic union incorporated as a limited company with the Board of Trade, as pointed out in your article.

In referring to the Physical Society being “sacrificed”, one wonders whether Professor Blackman is really attack-

ing a change in the name of what *Nature* recently described as “the quaintly named organization” known as the Institute of Physics and the Physical Society. In this respect it must be said that the name of the organization has been under serious consideration for some time and completely independently of proposals for a charter. Indeed, internally, recommendations on the lines now proposed had already been put forward. The change of name is one single element in a package of proposals which has now been approved overwhelmingly not only by the corporate members of the institute and society as a whole, but also by a very large majority of those who had confined themselves to the grade of fellows of the Physical Society. Nevertheless, the council of the IPPS is anxious to respect the views of small groups such as those represented by Professor Blackman, and is now examining whether any amendments might be possible which would not only take account of such views but which would at the same time have full regard to the views endorsed by the institute and society as a whole.

Yours sincerely,

R. PRESS

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An Unhonoured Biologist

SIR,—Historians of seventeenth-century science, and literary scholars of the period who have given any attention to Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, will be equally astonished at Mr A. Brownlee's eulogium of Burton as an “unhonoured biologist” (*Nature*, 219, 125; 1968).

The quotations from the *Anatomy* cited by Mr Brownlee do not, as he claims, show on Burton's part “a deep understanding of many aspects of biology . . .” They illustrate, rather, both the variety and superficiality of Burton's reading in many scientific fields; they also typify his well known technique of patching together the pros and cons of an argument—whether culled from classical, mediaeval or contemporary sources—for the purpose of giving his readers all the available data.

It must be noted, further, that Burton's lucubrations on “evolution” are cast not in the form of authoritative statements but as questions and tentative judgments on problems that remained to be solved. Lacking scientific method, his “answers” were a product of his imagination only. Certainly, the anatomist had an inquiring mind; that he was either an original thinker or a specialist in biology must be seriously questioned, however. And considering the length of his great treatise, biology can scarcely be included as even a minor concern.

Mr Brownlee's evidence, then (as in the case of his theory adumbrating Burton's “extensive contribution” to the works of Shakespeare), bears little connexion with his conclusions.

Yours sincerely,

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ERRATUM. In the “University News” section of the January 4 issue of *Nature* (221, 106; 1969) we should have stated that Dr G. A. Gilbert had been appointed to the newly designated chair of biochemistry in the Department of Biochemistry in the University of Birmingham.

CORRIGENDUM. In the communication “Experimental Multivalent Ionic Radii” by K. S. Chua (*Nature*, 220, 1317; 1968), the ionic radii of Rh^{3+} , V^{4+} (in Table 1) and Ra^{2+} (in Table 2) should be 0.93, 0.90 and 1.77 Å respectively, and the value of Nb^{4+} : 1.00 Å should be added to Table 1.