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SCIENCE AND POLITICS WON'T MIX

A DISTINGUISHED scientist in the field of zoology and genetics, Dr. Richard Goldschmidt, who has been in the United States for the last 11 years, is at present visiting New Zealand, partly on his own initiative, and partly at the invitation of the University Colleges and the Royal Society. *The Listener* had the opportunity to interview him after he had been about two weeks in the Dominion and had been, as he put it himself, "in all the usual places where foreigners go." That is to say, he had not yet seen the South Island.

Dr. Goldschmidt will be here until May, and will lecture to the Royal Society's branches in New Zealand. At the time when we saw him, Dr. Goldschmidt had "just looked around as a tourist," but as a zoologist he had been amazed by the glow-worms at Waitomo, and was hoping to be able to devote a little time to trying to understand them.

Mr. Greenbie's Genetics

When we asked if he knew of Sydney Greenbie's account of New Zealanders as a "biologically standardised" people with "brown hair and blue eyes," Dr. Goldschmidt recalled having heard of the article: "Everyone talked about it, and the New Zealanders whom I know in California—Professor Condliffe and Professor Turner—they were very wild about it. But I didn't read it. Because I don't care what journalists say. They don't write to tell the truth, but only to make what they call 'a story' and to please the public. Considering Americans—it doesn't matter that Mr. Greenbie wrote that article. Because Americans read and then in three minutes they forget what they have read. The *Saturday Evening Post* readers are not the intellectuals of the United States. The paper has an immense distribution of course—but I cannot stand it myself."

"Had you any special interest in New Zealand that brought you here?"

"Relic-Creatures"

"Of course any new country has interest for me—any country that I have not seen. I had always heard of these relic-creatures you have here, and to be in the land of the kiwi now has much interest for me. Also the glow-worms at Waitomo are amazing. Otherwise, I am interested in a new country which has kept up the traditions of the mother country in a strange way—unlike America. I see that you have kept many things. But on the other hand you are not reserved like the English. New Zealanders are willing to talk and be friendly straight away. It is a most pleasant friendliness. And it makes me very prejudiced towards your people."

We asked Dr. Goldschmidt about the practical application of his sciences to the material problems of the world as it is, and he first of all said that he was not strong on practical matters and didn't like to make predictions, but—"here as elsewhere, progress in applied science is possible only on the basis of fundamental research. They know that now in America. Formerly they didn't know it. But your own very great country-fellow, Lord Rutherford, made a discovery which was pure fundamental

research. It had no practical application at all. Yet without it, atomic energy would not have been possible to develop."

"Can discoveries in genetics offer the possibility of similar practical advances?"

"Genetics is the study of plant and animal breeding, and of course therefore it leads to knowledge which is of practical value. And the discovery of blood-groups came from a piece of pure genetic research. Geneticists have given the explanations on which all the knowledge of blood-groups is based. The same goes for knowledge of inherited diseases and disabilities. But often we are asked: 'What's it worth in terms of practical application? Can you make us bigger sheep?' Yet no one asks that question about astronomy. Astronomy is a study that satisfies the human mind, and elevates men, independent of whether it is worth money. People ought to realise that, but they don't always."

When we asked what view he took of the situation created in Russian science by the use of political power by Lysenko, the Russian geneticist (a topic discussed by Professor Eric Ashby in his recent broadcast talks on Education in the USSR), Dr. Goldschmidt first asked us whether there were many Communists who would throw stones at him.

Russia on the Wrong Road

"That is a very sad story," he went on. "Lysenko has introduced the process of Yarovisation, and has been able to increase the yield of wheat. So he



T. D. LYSENKO

"That is a very sad story"



DR RICHARD BENEDIKT GOLDSCHMIDT, an interview with whom appears on this page, is Professor of Zoology at the University of California, at Berkeley, California. He was born in 1878, and took his Ph.D. at Heidelberg. He has been Director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute (Berlin) and Professor of Zoology at Tokio, and has been in California since 1936.

was a good practical breeder. But unfortunately this man went in for theories and wild, impractical ideas, which are based upon unrecorded experiments and are worthless to science. And unfortunately he got political power and was able to suppress completely applied genetics in the USSR, and so everybody works only according to Lysenko's ideas. Now, it is only a question of time before the Russians discover that they can't do anything if they work that way. It hasn't happened yet, but it will happen.

"It may be that there are similar conditions in other sciences in Russia—I do not know. But this is a good example of what happens if politics get mixed up with science. There can only be disaster. Politicians are usually very ignorant in science, and open to quackism of all kinds. This happened in the United States, when William Jennings Bryan, a very famous politician, opposed the theory of Evolution."

Last Word

"I HAD an amusing experience one evening at a famous fishing hotel in North Uist. I had landed that night, with two large sharks tied up to the side of the ML, and in the hotel I met a crusty old retired colonel who asked me whether I had been fishing. He meant for salmon or sea trout. I said 'Yes,' and he said: 'What was your best fish to-day?' I had the great pleasure of replying: 'Oh, somewhere about 26,000 lb.' And with a snort of disgust he left us. He was just the sort of colonel to whom I had always wanted to make that sort of remark."—From a talk by Major Maxwell on shark-hunting in a recent BBC broadcast.