

fitted into the scientific officer scale. This means that, unlike the directors of other national museums, the director is graded as a chief scientific officer. This does not seem to affect his salary one way or another; he will get a salary of £5,375, which seems to be the same as the salaries of the directors of, for example, the Science Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum. The director and principal librarian of the British Museum naturally receives a little more—he gets £5,550, and is responsible to the trustees for managing the £2,460,000 for this year.

## Brains and Behaviour

EUROPEAN students of the brain tend to meet each other most often at conferences held in the United States. There is at present no organization equipped to convene regular symposia on the brain in Europe, where meetings would be cheaper and more frequent, and Europeans who work in the field have come to feel out of touch with one another's work.

To repair this lack of communication it is proposed to form a European Brain and Behaviour Society. The present intention of the society is "to further scientific enquiry within those fields that bear on the interrelationships between brain and behaviour"; to this end it will hold meetings for discussion and the reading of papers and disseminate information. A study group is to meet in Rotterdam early next year to define further the aims of the society and to elect its first membership. All persons interested in joining are invited to write to Dr A. Cowey at the Institute of Experimental Psychology, South Parks Road, Oxford, stating their field of interest and qualifications, together with any suggestions they may have about the general aims of the society.

The idea of the society originated in a meeting of scientists called by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) last year to discuss the field of the neurosciences. The opinion at the meeting was that organizational facilities in Europe were poorly equipped to support the expansion of what is considered to be a fast growing subject. The sponsors of the proposed society are K. Akert (Zurich), A. Cowey (Oxford), M. Frankenhaeuser (Stockholm), H. G. J. M. Kuypers (Rotterdam), J. Paillard (Marseilles), D. Ploog (Munich), J. Scherrer (Paris) and L. Weiskrantz (Oxford).

## Spectacles for Life

A PAIR of variable refraction spectacles has been developed by Dr B. M. Wright of the Engineering Division at the National Institute for Medical Research at Mill Hill. Instead of the conventional solid lenses of existing spectacles, the lenses are hollow, with thin flexible walls, and are filled with a nearly saturated solution of calcium bromide which has a suitable refractive index. The volume of the lenses is changed by pumping the liquid in and out in order to change the curvature of the flexible wall. This is accomplished by means of a simple cylinder and piston with a rubber ring seal. The piston is operated by a slide in one side piece of the spectacles, the cylinder being housed in a cavity on the inside. Because these spectacles can be continuously adjusted as the need arises, one pair should, in theory, last a lifetime, and should therefore

be much cheaper than existing spectacles. Dr Wright has been wearing a pair of these spectacles for more than three months with no complaints, but their durability remains to be proved.

This was one of the exhibits at a recent visit to the institute. In the Division of Parasitology, Drs S. R. Smithers, R. J. Terry and D. J. Hickley claim to have discovered how the parasite causing schistosomiasis avoids rejection by the human body. Using immunological techniques, they have shown that the parasite somehow sticks host antigenic material onto itself so that it is not recognized as "non-self" by circulating antibodies. According to the three research workers, this "disguising" phenomenon may explain why the parasite can persist in the human body for up to 20 years in what ought to be an immunologically hostile environment.

An interesting proposal for the structure of ribosomes was put forward by Dr R. A. Cox, who illustrated his talk with models built within the department. Sir Peter Medawar, director at Mill Hill, hopes to see a department at the institute which correlates physiology of the central nervous system with behaviour. Because, however, different animals have been used so far for behavioural studies from the ones used for physiological studies, Dr B. Delisle Burns has a difficult task ahead. At present, he and other members of the Division of Physiology and Pharmacology are studying the way in which neurones in the brain respond to patterns of light falling on the eyes. Information about the disturbance set up in the brain in this way could prove useful to the practice of ophthalmology, particularly in connexion with the treatment of strabismus—or, put more plainly, squint.

## Accident Prevention

MORE than 7,000 people died in traffic accidents last year in Britain and nearly 94,000 were seriously injured, with the numbers increasing more quickly than the mileage travelled. The causes and possible preventive measures were the subject of a recent conference at Cranfield on vehicle and road design, sponsored jointly by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers and the Advanced School of Automobile Engineering. This is one of the few occasions on which vehicle and road designers have met to discuss their common problem—the car and its driver.

A police traffic superintendent is reported to have said that the defect which causes nearly every accident lies in "the nut holding the wheel". One contributor pointed out that road engineers should not assume that drivers are omniscient. "If asked to make more than one decision at a time, they will fail; if faced with a situation which can be misinterpreted, someone will eventually find the wrong meaning."

The effect of human fallibility is easily apparent in the statistics for traffic accidents during the last three months of 1967 in Britain, after the breathalyser test came into operation; during this period, driver and passenger casualties fell by 19 per cent, motor cyclist casualties by 16 per cent and pedal cyclists by 14 per cent. But drivers are not altogether to blame; nearly half of all serious accidents in Britain take place at uncontrolled junctions, and at some intersections accidents have fallen by 40 per cent when traffic lights have been installed. Professor R. J. Smeed of University