MOLECULAR BIOLOGY

Living with Shortage

from our Cell Biology Correspondent

LOCAL millionaires and the US cancer charities have not been falling over each other in the rush to give funds to the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, as everyone hoped they might when Professor J. D. Watson achieved a personal ambition and succeeded Dr John Cairns as director of the laboratory. Nevertheless, at a time when everyone else is finding federal funds hard to come by, Watson has persuaded the National Science Foundation to give him a large grant, roughly \$1.5 million spread over five years, to set up the nucleus of an animal virus group. And by all accounts, recruiting is in full swing. In addition, Cairns has received lifetime support from the American Cancer Society and an experienced administrator formerly at an American university in Istanbul has joined the laboratory.

In the past, the annual Cold Spring Harbor symposium volume has, of course, brought cash as well as reputation to the laboratory and Professor Watson is intent on expanding the book publishing side of the business for both reasons. The first step, a new abstracting service covering meetings held at Cold Spring Harbor and elsewhere, was announced recently. So far, apart from the annual symposium volume, which is the best \$20 worth a molecular biologist can buy, booklets containing the abstracts of the other meetings held each year at the laboratory have been given to participants and anyone who wrote asking for them. The problem, however, has been that only those in the know have realized that this service is available. Now the laboratory's abstracting service is offering to anyone, for \$12 a year in the United States and \$15 a year overseas, a complete set of abstracts produced in the familiar format. Between now and June 1970, each subscriber will receive abstracts of the August 1969 tumour virus meeting, the 1969 phage meetings and the lactose operon meetings, all held at Cold Spring Harbor. These three abstracts are available immediately and at least two others are to come, the European phage meetings being held this year at the University of Sussex and, of course, the 1970 Cold Spring Harbor symposium abstracts. If it does nothing else, the new service should put an end to the queues in the world's less affluent laboratories for the one copy of the abstracts that the local star brought back with him from Long Island.

While Cold Spring Harbor and US molecular biology flourishes, the Kendrew Report and the British Biochemical Society's commentary on it (*Nature*, 223, 989; 1969) point to the comparatively unhealthy state of the industry in Britain. A one-day meeting of the British Biophysical Society, to be held on September 22 at Queen Elizabeth College, London, has the gloomy task of discussing the future of biophysics in the United Kingdom. Professor R. Burge, who is in the process of grafting an undergraduate biophysics department to his physics department, makes no secret of his concern for the future of the subject in British universities. The topics to be covered—EMBO, undergraduate and postgraduate teaching courses, job prospects in industry, the universities and the research councils, and biophysics in the United States (several of the participants have been at the recent Boston biophysics meeting)—underline

this. And judging from the very impressive list of participants, most of Britain's leading molecular biologists and biophysicists, especially those who are sticking it out at the universities rather than retiring to the seclusion of a research council laboratory, share Professor Burge's unease. Perhaps if enough of them stand up to be counted they will not go unnoticed by the universities and, more importantly, by the UGC. That, after all, is probably the chief object of the exercise because the submissions for the 1972–77 quinquennium are now being drafted.

SOIL SCIENCE

Soil Surveys Continue

THE Soil Survey of England and Wales, with headquarters at Rothamsted Experimental Station in Hertfordshire, aims to describe and classify the different types of soils in selected areas of 38 square miles in each county. Maps at a scale of 1:25,000 are then published and are accompanied by memoirs or bulletins which describe the properties of the soils and the geography, geology, climate, vegetation and land use of the district surveyed. According to the Soil Survey's latest annual report, surveying is now in progress on eighteen maps in fifteen counties. Work carried out in 1968 included a start on the first three 1:25,000 maps representative of Cheshire, a survey of 20 square miles in the south of Westmorland, the preparation of a map of Buckinghamshire at a scale of 1:250,000, and the completion of the mapping of the Eccles North area of Norfolk.

Other investigations included a calculation of the extent of the occurrence of the principal soil types in England and Wales. Of the six principal soil types in lowland areas, brown earths are by far the most important, especially in southern England, and they cover more than two-fifths of the area. Gley soils come next in importance, especially in northern England and Wales. Calcareous soils, organic soils, podzols and alluvial soils occur much less often.

WATER POLLUTION

Cleaning Up the Trent

ABOUT 16 per cent of the total effort of the Water Pollution Laboratory in 1968 was spent on studies of the effects of pollution on streams, especially the River Trent (*Water Pollution Research 1968*, HMSO, 17s 6d). The laboratory and the other authorities concerned are trying to find ways of using the river more effectively to meet the growing demand for water in the Midlands and in the eastern part of England. The demand for water in this area by the end of the century is likely to be about 500 million gallons a day—about the same as the present daily supply to the Greater London area—and the total expenditure is expected to be more than £500 million.

The trouble is that the Trent's catchment area is in a very heavily populated industrial area, and the river is therefore so badly polluted at its source that its water cannot be treated by normal methods. The Water Pollution Laboratory is, however, seeking methods for predicting the effects of pollution discharges on the quality of water elsewhere in the river