

struction companies in Germany, France or Italy? Will the corresponding utilities on the mainland ever think of using for the same purpose the Nuclear Power Group Limited or the British Nuclear Development Company Limited, its rival in Britain? The answer is that in the last resort, chauvinism will probably prevail. The chances are that if there is a field in which last week's new consortium will win business for itself, it will most probably be outside Europe.

Yet is this not a great misfortune? Is it not high time that a part of the understanding between the countries of the European Economic Community, with the would-be members included, should be that capital equipment installed by governments, public utilities and national airlines should be bought wherever in Europe it can be had most cheaply? This provision would among other things

Making Policy Explicit

THE latest annual report of the Medical Research Council (see page 213) is a refreshing break with tradition. In many significant ways, the council has broken out of the convention which in the past has allowed it to dwell somewhat smugly on its past successes. To be sure, everybody agrees that the Medical Research Council is one of the most efficient organizations of its kind. It is also a simple truth that to say too much about intentions is to give hostages to fortune. Yet it will help enormously in the better understanding of what the council is like that it should now have given some of its reasons for believing that research should be developed in certain chosen fields. By doing so, of course, it gives up the convention that a research council should back good ideas and bright people, whatever their inclinations in research. Instead, it seeks now to encourage work in fields such as mental health, drug dependence, population control and arterial disease. Nobody doubts that the genteel persuasion which the research councils exercise will be able to bring about shifts in the directions in good people's interests without stifling initiative or the spirit of research.

The device which the Medical Research Council has adopted for charting its course for the future is the setting up of specialist working parties to survey the problems and opportunities in different fields of research. On balance, the working parties appear to have put forward entirely sensible proposals. There are, for example, obvious reasons why the council should make special efforts to support research in arterial disease, for this is bound to be the largest group of intractable causes of death in advanced societies for many years to come. Population control is another field in which medical research can do much to alleviate social problems, but in both cases it is to be hoped that an essential part of the council's planning consists of a close coordination with similar programmes of research elsewhere, especially in the United States. The programme for research in mental health is potentially more difficult to grapple with. Obviously there is room for more and better clinical psychiatry. Obviously the time is coming when the biochemical attributes of nervous function may be relevant to the understanding if not the treatment of mental disease of some kinds, so that much of the research that is sponsored in these fields may be quite fundamental in character. But there remains the

ensure that the larger market which theoretically exists was actually accessible to industrial companies in Europe. To be sure, such an understanding would have to be negotiated quite separately from the treaties which exist at present, and which do not prevent public authorities from buying local goods, whatever their cost. It is also plain that such an agreement would be hard to reach, for a fondness for national products is deeply ingrained in most governments. Yet it is clear in nuclear power as in many other fields—aircraft and telecommunications are two obvious cases—that if companies cannot enjoy to the full the freedom to sell their skills throughout western Europe, many important economic advantages will be lost. Is this not an issue that should be taken up immediately and quite independently of the discussions under way on the enlargement of the EEC?

question of what distinctive flavour a research council operating in Britain might be able to provide for its programme of research in mental health. May this not be an opportunity for looking for a closer integration of psychological and psychoanalytical skills with more orthodox medical practice? These are fields in which the council has wisely recognized that the interest of the British scientific community can be harnessed to social need.

It is significant that in the report the council makes a case for continuing its programme of research in tropical medicine, and of course this can easily be justified by the recognition that infectious diseases can leap across national frontiers. But there is a more telling if less parochial reason for hoping that research in tropical medicine will continue to flourish. In the past few years, and with the decline of western European influence in Africa, the old proving ground for tropical medicine, there has been a loss of momentum in an important area of research. It would be entirely proper if the Medical Research Council were to bend whatever rules may at present inhibit so as to make sure that this work continues.

100 Years Ago



Western Chronicle of Science

I WOULD beg to be allowed one or two remarks with reference to the very favourable review of the "Western Chronicle of Science" which appeared in last week's NATURE.

It is not a "common Cornish habit to hang heavy jackets, great-coats, &c., on the lever of the safety-valve," and the farmers do not, *as a rule*, "mix guano with lime a few days before applying the manure." The editor has seen both these absurdities performed, and has used them as beacons to warn young men what to avoid. I may also remark that Mr. Williams's Paper is on Scientific *Minning* and not Scientific Nursing.

Falmouth, July 22

J. H. COLLINS

From Nature, 4, 243, July 27, 1871.