

to believe that scientists can long remain undisturbed, or that the Chinese economy can continue to bear the huge burden of the nuclear programme.

## No Diagnosis, No Cure

DURING its twenty year life, the British National Health Service has often been criticized. Usually criticism has been directed at the service, rather than the doctors and nurses who make it up. Recently this unwritten rule has been broken by a book, *Sans Everything*, compiled by an organization called AEGIS (Aid for the Elderly in Government Institutions) and written by Mrs Barbara Robb, chairman of the organization. The book alleges bad nursing practices, mismanagement and even physical ill-treatment of elderly patients in some geriatric and psychiatric hospitals. The book does not name the hospitals, nor its sources of information, explaining that this is done to protect the informers from becoming scapegoats.

After some weeks of negotiation, Mr Kenneth Robinson, the Minister of Health, has persuaded Mrs Robb to tell him confidentially the names of the hospitals involved. This, he said, would enable the truth to be established. But he has now set in motion enquiries which seem calculated to reassure only those who never believed the allegations in the first place.

First, the enquiries are to be held by the hospital boards. In effect the boards are being asked to set up enquiries into their own management of their own hospitals. True, the ill-effects of this will be mitigated by the fact that the committees of enquiry (each with a Queen's Counsel as chairman) will be selected from people from outside the region, but the hospital boards will be responsible for selecting them. (The Lord Chancellor has put forward a list of names of QCs to the minister, who has forwarded them to the boards for selection. Other members of the committees will be a doctor, a nurse, and a member of the public, man or woman.)

Second, proceedings will be held in private, which is never the best way of convincing critics outside. Staff and patients, the ministry says, will be able to give evidence about hospitals in complete confidence. But if they want to make allegations against named individuals, the ministry adds, they must be prepared to do so in the presence of the individuals accused. It is hard to think that nurses, who are best placed to know what is going on, will come forward to give evidence against matrons.

## Merger for Engineers?

THE Institution of Mechanical Engineers and the Institution of Heating and Ventilating Engineers are considering the possibility of a merger. The stimulus for the talks seems to have been the desire of the IHVE to join the Council of Engineering Institutions—for this a Royal Charter is necessary. The IHVE has twice applied for a Royal Charter, a form of official recognition which entitles the institution to represent its members, award qualifications and give evidence or comment on legislation to government departments or working parties.

When the IHVE first applied for a charter, in 1948, its request was turned down. In 1962 it applied again, but the decision was held in abeyance. The institution

also applied to join the CEI, and during discussions it was suggested that the position might be easier if the IHVE were to consider the possibility of a merger with the mechanical engineers, already members of the CEI. This is the possibility which is now being considered, although both institutions point out that the discussions are still at an early stage.

## Astronomy by Computer

THE Institute of Theoretical Astronomy at Cambridge is now in business. Armed with the tools of their trade—paper, sharp pencils, and an IBM 360/44—the astronomers will have been at work for several months by the time the institute is officially opened at the end of the year.

The institute, of which Professor Fred Hoyle is the director, has been made possible by a grant of £250,000 from the Nuffield Foundation to cover staff costs, and a matching grant from the SRC to buy the computer. The Wolfson Foundation gave a grant to pay for the special building, and the University of Cambridge is also contributing towards running costs. The common factor behind these generous gestures of support seems to have been the fear that Professor Hoyle would turn his thinly veiled hints of emigration into reality. That, at least, seems to have been averted, but Professor Hoyle will continue to be something of a trans-Atlantic commuter. One of the features of the institute will be the provision of facilities for visiting workers, many of them no doubt from America, and joint studies in collaboration with the California Institute of Technology are proposed.

When complete, the institute will have a staff of about 20, all of them post-doctoral. No teaching in the conventional sense will be expected of them, and the institute is not part of any of the Cambridge faculties. There will, however, be some lectures suitable for graduate students. The research work will cover subjects such as stellar structure, relativity, cosmology and celestial mechanics. The joint studies with Caltech, which will give the Cambridge workers access to the outstanding facilities for observational work in California, will include work on the synthesis of elements in stars.

## Immunochemistry Moves to Oxford

A new Medical Research Council Unit for research into immunochemistry is to be set up at the University of Oxford, under the directorship of Professor R. R. Porter, FRS, who succeeds Sir Hans Krebs, FRS, as Whitley Professor of Biochemistry in the university in the coming academic year. The unit will be concerned with investigating the structure of antibodies, and its relation with their function. The problem is to discover how antibodies can combine specifically with an unlimited number of different antigens. It is hoped that research into this will throw light on the formation of antibodies, and allow a greater control of immune reactions. Some reactions, such as tissue graft rejection, are, however, caused by cells, not antibodies, and the unit will begin studies of the relationship of the two types of reaction.

Professor Porter, who has been Professor of Immunology at St Mary's Hospital Medical School since 1960, established the MRC Research Unit in Immuno-