

This accords well with the measurements of the concentration of radioactive materials in the atmosphere and in rain which have now been published by the Health Physics and Medical Division of the AERE, Harwell. The report (HMSO, 7s.), which runs up to the middle of 1967, shows that the average concentration of strontium-90 in rainwater had decreased by roughly 40 per cent between the first half of 1966 and the first half of 1967. Because rainfall in 1967 was considerably less than in the previous year, the actual deposition of strontium-90 in the first half of 1967 was only 40 per cent of that deposited in the same period during the preceding year. By the end of 1966, it seems as if the rate of deposition of fresh strontium-90 had become comparable with and smaller than the rate of disappearance of deposited strontium-90 by means of radioactive decay, so that "for the first time", the "cumulative deposition began to decrease with time". The balance was reversed with the spring rains in 1967, but it is clear that an end is in sight to the accumulation of radioactivity in the soil.

## All Quiet on the Quiet Sun

LIKE a great actress in later life, the organization of the International Years of the Quiet Sun is now well settled in the habit of making its final appearance. Formally, it is true, the great symposium at Imperial College last July marked the end of the period of co-ordinated or at least simultaneous observation. Now there has appeared the latest issue of *IQSY Notes*, the twenty-first, which is full of valedictory statements and which also contains the announcement that this issue will be the last. The next step is the publication of the *Annals of the IQSY*, which is being managed by the Royal Society. There will be admiration and even gratitude for the firm promise that the first of the eight or nine volumes in this series will appear early this year, and that publication of the whole series—which will include a record of the symposium last July—should be complete by the end of 1969. With luck, it should be possible to avoid overlap between the productions of the IQSY and of Dr Herbert Freeman's Commission on Solar and Terrestrial Physics, now in the process of gestation.

Although the latest *IQSY Notes* has no great surprises, it does provide some information about the financing of international operations like these. It is notable that the total cost of administering the IQSY for a period of 5½ years amounted to merely \$173,000—a sum which had to cover the maintenance of the secretariat in London, the publication of manuals and the organization of meetings. The publication of the *Annals* is reckoned to cost a further \$60,000. Most of the funds have been raised by voluntary contributions from the national committees of participating countries. The statement of the council goes out of its way to emphasize that "the payment of a contribution has never been a condition of adherence to the IQSY programme. Contributing and non-contributing committees have been treated exactly alike. . . . This was essential, since the prime objective of the scientific programme was to encourage the widest possible geographical participation in the programme. . . ." This decision was no doubt wise, for the list of contributors suggests that some participants have been rather slow in paying up. It is perhaps understandable

that Taiwan and the Congo should not have paid after the first year or two. It is more surprising that Belgium, Finland, Israel, Rumania and Switzerland should not have contributed after a similar period. The Soviet Union had only paid two contributions out of six by October last year—a total of \$10,000. Difficulties about the convertibility of the rouble (and of the rupee) are known to have been a complication in this connexion. But the IQSY seems to have managed well enough and, even if its scientific programme was inescapably a somewhat undramatic business, the organization may well have been able to establish standards of good management among international organizations.

## More Medical Science

A SMALL reform in the organization of the British Medical Association seems likely to come about as a result of suggestions made by Dr Ronald Gibson, chairman of the council of the association. Dr Gibson has proposed that all the scientific and educational work done by the BMA should be brought under the umbrella of a central board. As well as the work of the present Committee on Medical Science, the board would provide for scientific and sociological work. But the hope expressed by Dr Gibson that the BMA could in this way "prove its right to be considered a forceful entity in the field of medical science" is hardly realistic. The proposal does not recommend any increase in the money which the BMA spends on research—last year it was £60,000—but simply concentrates on the reform of the committee structure. Nor is the suggestion particularly new—a similar idea was put forward some years ago. Dr Gibson has suggested that if the board is set up—a decision which the council of the BMA will have to take within the next few weeks—it might also sponsor some general sociological surveys. Topics put forward include drug addiction, the population explosion, nutrition, the stress diseases and the like.

There seems to be no reason why the council should not approve the suggestion, modest as it is. It may, however, put the BMA into a position where it could begin to influence medical research in Britain, given a greater financial outlay. A counterweight to the massive influence of the Medical Research Council would not be entirely unwelcome. The field where the BMA might be most influential, clinical research, has not so far had the same attention in the MRC as more basic studies, although this may change when the MRC Clinical Research Centre opens at Brent Hospital in 1970. In the BMA, the move reflects a feeling that the politics of medicine has in the past few years been allowed to obscure the more cerebral activities of the BMA. Having exhibited its taste and talent for political controversy, the argument runs, the BMA should now try to divorce itself somewhat from the image of a militant, if successful, trade union.

The American Medical Association itself turned to research for many of the same reasons several years ago. There was a feeling that the AMA had become too closely identified with the fight against the Medicare proposals, and too far detached from scientific research. But the move to support basic research, in the Institute for Biomedical Research at the AMA headquarters in Chicago, seems not to have been wholly successful. After only two years of existence, the institute is now