

## Parliament in Britain

### Kidney Machines

IN January this year, 278 hospitals were equipped with kidney machines capable of treating a total of 509 patients and another 378 patients had installations in their homes. The exact number of people who require this type of treatment is not known. This information, which was given by Baroness Serota, Minister of State, Department of Health and Social Security, will, according to Lord Auckland, give only limited satisfaction because too few kidney machines are available in regional hospitals. Lord Auckland said that the large amount of regional development, and the growing numbers of people moving out of London, constitute a strong case for making more of these units available outside London. Baroness Serota replied that in 1965 there were only a handful of small renal dialysis research units, but in January this year there were thirty-one major units in England, six in Scotland, and one in Wales. Two more units have started work since then, five are being extended and three more are planned, she said.

Baroness Brooke of Ystradfellte also asked how many kidney machines are not being used because of a lack of trained manpower to look after them. Baroness Serota had, however, no figures either for the shortage of manpower or for the number of machines which are not being used. (Oral answers, Lords, March 17.)

### Science Research Council

THE alleged bias of the Science Research Council against Scotland has received the attention of Mr Ross, Secretary of State for Scotland, and Mr Short, Secretary of State for Education and Science. Mr Ross told Mrs Winifred Ewing that both ministers are concerned that Scottish interests are taken into account in questions of this kind, and that the number of Scottish academics on the Science Research Council boards has been increased from two to four. (Written answers, March 19.)

### Uranium Supplies

DR ERNEST A. DAVIES, Joint Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Technology, said that the Atomic Energy Authority is confident that the intense exploration for uranium now being undertaken in many countries will result in sufficient uranium being available at reasonable prices for the UK programme. He also said that uranium reconnaissance in selected areas of the UK has been sponsored by the AEA, through the agency of the Institute of Geological Sciences. The latest programme began in March 1968 and is continuing. Mr Alexander Eadie had asked whether the Minister of Technology is satisfied that sufficient supplies of uranium will be available, in view of the shortage of indigenous resources envisaged by the European Economic Community. (Written answers, March 16.)

### Nuclear Powered Ships

THE government has no proposals at present for the production of a nuclear powered merchant ship, but representations from interested parties are still being studied, Dr Ernest Davies said in reply to questions from Mr Edwin Brooks. Dr Davies pointed out that although the situation has altered in a technical sense over the last few years, the chief concern is whether there would be a market for such vessels. (Written answers, March 16.)

## Miscellaneous Intelligence

M. LE SECRETAIRE PERPETUEL of the Royal Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts of Belgium has announced that his functions as perpetual secretary came to a close at the end of last year.

THE cyclamate farce has romped its way through many curious interludes, but what must surely be the last scene of all is the announcement that saccharin, too, is under suspicion of causing bladder tumours. The rats that got cyclamate banned, it will be remembered, were, of course, fed not with cyclamate but a combination of cyclamate and saccharin. With the unerring certainty of a water diviner, the United States Department of Health Education and Welfare spotted that the cyclamates were the villain of the pair and banned them forthwith. The ban was withdrawn in part but too late to save health authorities in other countries, such as Britain, from stampeding down the Gadarene slope. The belief that saccharin, too, is carcinogenic, voiced by G. Bryan of the University of Wisconsin in evidence to the United States Government, is all that was needed to complete the logical somersault into a Wonderland that even Alice never dreamed of.

FOUND in a junk-shop in Greenwich, London: a copy of *A Classification of Living Animals* by Lord Rothschild, inscribed by the author, "This is an exceedingly boring book". These modest words belie its opening sentence, "During my studies of spermatozoa, I have often been frustrated by having to consult a number of books. . . ." which, for a catalogue, has a rare sparkle.

AN advertisement for American scientists to take up jobs in Britain would "attract about 10,000 replies", according to Mr Harry Hoff, the chairman of the selection board that tours North America on behalf of the Scientific Civil Service to recruit British scientists. If this is the epitaph of that ever-interesting topic, the brain drain, perhaps Mr Hoff's should be "Is his the face that lured ten thousand home, And spurned the topmost towers of IBM?"

A HAND-OUT from the United States Department of Commerce begins with the arresting words, "As civilization continues to contaminate the atmosphere. . . ." Were the ideals of the noble savage ever so succinctly, if unwittingly, expressed? If the Department of Commerce continues to use words without thought, it cannot but hasten the return of the good old days when barbarism kept the Earth pure.

ALSO in the best Doomsday spirit is a press notice from the US Department of Commerce that begins with the arresting declaration: "Lightning, the biggest killer in nature's arsenal. . . ."

A BLATANT invitation to spendthrifts is held out in a current issue of *Developmental Psychology* (2, 154; 1970). Dangled in a footnote to an article entitled "Birth Order and Avoidance of Dangerous Activities" is the insidious alternative, "An extended report of this study may be obtained without charge from (the author) or for a fee from the National Auxiliary Publication Service".