

policy such as whether screening of anti-cancer drugs or experimental chemotherapy should be concentrated at a single institute or dispersed among several centres.

Although the three sponsoring bodies have stated that the committee's function will be purely advisory, it would be tragic if their representatives on the committee should fail to ensure that its advice is listened to. Between them the MRC, the CRC and the ICRF dispose of some £4 million a year on cancer research, which accounts for a sizable fraction of Britain's research expenditure and which, because of the breadth of cancer research, has a significant effect on medical and biological research in general. With the appointment of the committee there is at last an opportunity for devising a coherent strategy as to how these funds should be deployed.

The committee is to hold its first meeting early next month and if all goes well it will probably continue to meet at frequent intervals. One of its first decisions will be how far to make public its judgments and it will be a good augury for an innovative future if it elects to depart, even a little, from the standards of secrecy practised by government bodies such as the MRC.

100 Years Ago



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[The Editor does not hold himself responsible for opinions expressed by his Correspondents. No notice is taken of anonymous communications.]

The Corona

HAVING been informed that my remarks at the meeting of the Royal Astronomical Society, on Friday last, have been interpreted otherwise than I meant, doubtless in consequence of my having spoken without preparation, I beg to repeat what I intended should have been the purport of my statement.

It seems to me beyond reasonable doubt that we have upon all the photographs, whether of long or of short exposure, a representative of *something which is at the sun*, since the contour of the radiance depicted upon all the photographs exhibits minima, in directions closely approximate to the extremities of the sun's axis of rotation. Furthermore, exterior to all this, and apparently masking it in a very great degree to the ordinary observer, is a much wider and more conspicuous radiance of very irregular outline, to which the name *Corona* has been ordinarily applied. The streamers and irregular projections of this latter corona appeared to me to vary in position during the period of totality in August last. They seem, moreover, to have no connection with the positions of the prominences, nor yet with that of the solar axis, and hence I infer that this phenomenon arises from something *which is not at the sun*.

London, June 15

B. A. GOULD

Gould, who was born in Boston, is best known for his catalogue of southern hemisphere stars. *From Nature*, 2, 141, June 23, 1870.

OLD WORLD

ELDO

Successful Failure for Europa 1

ONCE again the Europa 1 rocket of the European Launcher Development Organization has failed to put a 260 kg Italian test satellite into orbit. This was the sad news from Woomera on June 12 after the last test of the rocket before the programme moves to the new launching site in French Guiana. ELDO has now marked up an immaculately complete history of failures stretching back to August 1966, an inauspicious record to lay before the forthcoming European Space Conference at Brussels.

What seems to have happened this time is that the nose fairings which protect the satellite during the flight through the lower atmosphere were not jettisoned, so that the weight of the payload was increased to an unacceptable value. According to the flight plan the fairings should have been released 223 seconds after launch during the firing of the second stage engines, at a height of about 150 km. That this did not occur was apparently due to the premature disconnection of a connector plug 78 seconds into the flight. The fairings added something like 300 kg to the weight of the payload.

ELDO is used to putting a brave face on things, and this week a spokesman described the flight as "on the whole very satisfactory". It is true that by ELDO standards the firing could have been called a roaring success. For the first time all three stages of the multinational rocket functioned correctly so that the problems which caused the German third stage to explode on the previous two flights seem to have been solved. According to an article in *Le Monde*, it could have been that the autodestruction mechanism in the German stage was being triggered spontaneously by stray potentials. This would have given rise to the sort of rapid increases in pressure in the fuel tanks that were recorded during the previous two flights. Therefore the most important objective of the flight was achieved, and on the face of it the non-release of the nose fairings ought to be easily solved.

Whether this will cut any ice at the European Space Conference remains to be seen. Postponed to July 22-24 because of the British elections, the conference is at ministerial level and is expected to make at least a start on setting the future pattern of European work in space. In the first place it is hoped that the conference will take a further step towards rationalization of the European space effort by combining ELDO with its sister agency, the European Space Research Organization. But behind all discussions about the part that Europe ought to be taking in space is the debate over whether Europe needs the luxury of a launcher of its own, and the past history of ELDO is inevitably colouring the argument.

Had everything worked perfectly, Europa 1 would have orbited an Italian test satellite of 214 kg and an adaptor carrying radio guidance equipment. Other aims of the flight were to carry out communications experiments using equipment supplied by Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Norway and Sweden and installed in the satellite, and to test the operation of the ground stations associated with the ELDO programme. But this was also the last flight of Europa 1. In the ELDO