

These are phrases that commit the government to nothing and even in spirit stay well within the platitudes that are on everybody's lips. Now that Dr Martin Holdgate's central scientific unit for pollution research is responsible only to the Minister of Housing and Local Government rather than to an environmental overlord, and given the likelihood of reforms among the ministries in the autumn, it is hard to see that the policy of the government to encourage industrialists to clean up in their own interests will be backed up by any measures strong enough to inspire credibility.

The restraining of the Industrial Reorganization Corporation is likely to be the first manifestation of the intent expressed in the Queen's speech to liberate industry from unnecessary government intervention, and indeed one of the first actions of Mr Geoffrey Rippon in his job as Minister of Technology has been to clip the corporation's wings. From now on the IRC, originally set up by the Labour government in 1966 to catalyse the rationalization of industry—"to drag Britain kicking and screaming into the twentieth century" were Mr Wilson's words—will have to consult Mr Rippon before taking part in any new schemes. For doctrinaire reasons of Conservative policy, this restriction was to be expected. Indeed, it will be surprising if the corporation that has been an *éminence grise* behind such battles as that between George Kent Ltd and the Rank Organization for Cambridge Instrument Ltd keeps anything like its old power for much longer.

Politics apart, however, it would be a pity if the spirit behind the IRC were to be lost entirely. The debate will continue as to whether anything worthwhile was achieved by the corporation's intervention—it is probably too early to say—but now the government ought to be thinking about rationalization on a European scale. Mergers such as that between Dunlop and Pirelli are difficult enough to achieve, but their potential is so great that they deserve all the help they can get.

At the same time Mr Rippon ought to be getting down to the problem of the laboratories at Harwell, now rather sadly referred to as the rump of the Atomic Energy Authority. The proposal of his predecessor, Mr Wedgwood Benn, for a self-supporting British Research and Development Corporation composed of a hotch-potch of government laboratories, was always a non-starter. It is more likely that Mr Rippon will find a solution in terms of a generous retirement plan for the government scientists who have found themselves surplus to requirements, and of course it will be crucial for him to win the confidence of the Institution of Professional Civil Servants which has been vigorously looking after the scientists' case.

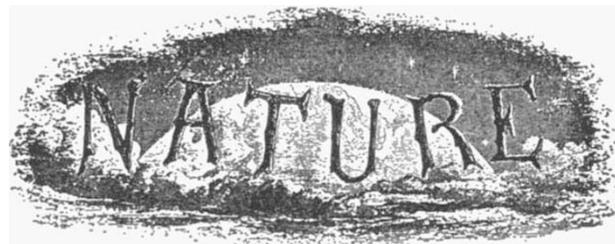
It is a pity that Mr Rippon will not be able to reap the benefit of the work put into the investigation of the computer industry by the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology, but the committee's report has been one of the casualties of the snap election. Even so, with Mr Rippon likely to preside with pleasure over the pruning of his own department, it is probable that the Select Committee's

feelings about the role of the Ministry of Technology in the computer industry would soon cease to have any relevance.

The future of the Select Committee is one of the several questions of interest to scientists which are still in abeyance. Indeed, Mr Airey Neave has already put in a plea for the reinstatement of the committee during the debate on the Queen's speech, and everyone must be hoping that this will soon be done.

There is also no hint so far as to which way the new government will jump in the European science organizations. But, unshackled by the mistakes of the past, there is the opportunity to think again about participation in the 300 GeV project, and about drawing up a European space policy in cooperation with the other members of ESRO and ELDO. At home, radio astronomers have been patient for too long over the Mark V telescope for Jodrell Bank. What scientists should be doing at this stage is to look at their requirements in a European context. But whatever policies Mr Heath's government will adopt, one thing that the new parliament will miss is the disproportionate number of members interested in science and technology who failed to be re-elected.

100 Years Ago



Gymnastics for Ladies. Madame Brenner.

ALTHOUGH many of our large towns are now provided with gymnasiums at which ladies' classes have been established, the subject is but little appreciated, especially, in some more important cases, among the ladies themselves. There can be no doubt that for growing girls a large airy room, provided with suitable apparatus, and where a loose easy dress is a necessary condition, must be advantageous, if the exercises performed are such as to induce emulation without over-exertion. When we consider at how much earlier an age "romping" is prohibited to girls than to boys, and how little there is in the routine of a girl's life to correspond to the cricket and rowing which form the best part of her brother's recreations, we think the fact offers a very probable explanation of the increasing languor and delicacy of the ladies of the period. Breadmaking and other manual duties are being superseded by reading and preparing for examinations, and we must, therefore, look to artificial means to preserve a just balance between mental and physical development.

Madame Brenner's book is little more than an advertisement of her class in Bruton Street, being a description of those exercises which she teaches, enlivened by rather severe criticisms of those which others teach. Still we hope her book will find many readers, as the graceful illustrations, the strains of lively music which we are told accompany every movement, and, above all, the repeated assurance that the ladies need do no more than they like, will all tend to persuade parents and daughters that gymnastics are very pleasant and desirable.

From *Nature*, 2, 208, July 14, 1870.