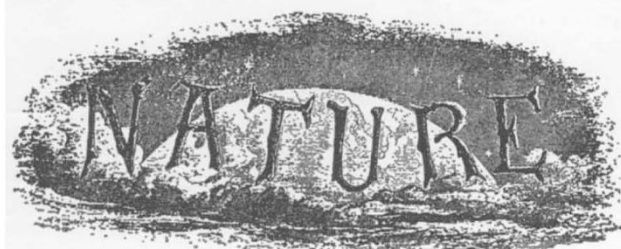


siderable difficulty and they may often not be as productive as their creators must have expected. To be sure, research units can be directed more confidently than the more loosely organized research teams usually responsible for spending research grants, and it is also true that the labour policies of a research unit can assure a new research programme of a degree of continuity otherwise difficult to achieve. Yet is it certain that the present balance between permanence and impermanence is exactly right? This is a point on which the council's explanations will be awaited with some attention. The spending on the research units accounts, after all, for a half of what the council receives each year from the Department of Education and Science. For a public body which is quite rightly elastic enough to have agreed that in future its employees may undertake consultancy work for industry and share in the proceeds of this work, defining this line more accurately should not be too difficult a task.

## 100 Years Ago



### NATURAL HISTORY IN SCHOOLS

AMONG the many indications of the taste for natural science which is spreading throughout the country, there is none more striking than the rapid increase, during the last ten years, of local Field Clubs and Natural History Societies. Those who reside in our larger towns and can avail themselves of every facility for prosecuting their favourite branch of study, are apt to under-estimate the value of these bodies, and to look upon them as merely accessories to the bringing together, under the name of science, of men of congenial tastes, rather than as performing any definite or actual work; but this is an error which can only arise in the minds of those who have had no opportunity of seeing the working of such societies, and who have not therefore felt the advantages by which membership is attended in a remote country district. No doubt there are, here and there, Field Clubs which fall short of the perfection they ought to attain; but that these are the exception, and not the rule, no one who has investigated the matter can reasonably doubt.

It is not, however, to such societies that we would now direct attention, so much as to the rise and progress in our public and private schools, of bodies whose aim and object is the same; a progress which is the more gratifying when we remember that it mainly originates with the boys themselves. As to the value of such societies there cannot be two opinions. We would not for a moment depreciate cricket and other manly sports; but we would supply for the mind a rational substitute for such manias as that of postage-stamp collecting, which a short time ago reigned in our schools.

From *Nature*, 2, 249, July 28, 1870.

## OLD WORLD

### TRANSPLANTATION

## Kidneys against the Law

IN spite of the backlog of patients waiting for new kidneys, and the good chances of successful transplantation, British surgeons are not able to carry out as many operations as they would like. This is particularly distressing for them because machines for renal dialysis treatment are scarce. Some of the reasons for the shortage of suitable donors were discussed by doctors and lawyers when the British Academy of Forensic Sciences met in London on July 17 and 18 to discuss some of the implications of organ and tissue transplantation.

Dr J. A. Sachs (London Hospital) said that although there are likely to be between 500 and 600 deaths in London each month of people between 18 and 60 whose kidneys could be used, only two or three actually become available to transplant surgeons. One of the reasons for this is the state of the law, which the surgeons feel is too restricting.

The law governing transplantation is the Human Tissue Act 1961, which says that if a person dies leaving evidence that he wished to donate his organs then the lawful owner of the body can authorize the removal of parts. But if he expressed no such wish, organs can only be removed if "such reasonable enquiry as may be acceptable" has been made to obtain the consent of his relatives. If death occurs in hospital the lawful owner of the body is assumed to be the hospital authority, although some participants were not convinced of this. But the question of consent is more troublesome, because kidneys rapidly become unusable after death. Mr J. R. Salaman (London Hospital) said that surgeons do not really know how far they are required to go in seeking consent, thereby losing time and probably potential donors. How many relatives, for example, should they ask? South African law is more precise on this point, and defines relatives as spouse, brothers and sisters.

Salaman said that no clear solution to this problem had been suggested by the advisory committee set up by the British Government last year to consider the amendment of the Human Tissue Act. Although it concluded that the law should not stand in the way of transplantation by restricting the supply of donors, it could not choose between three possibilities. These were to do nothing, and leave the present loopholes; to assume that a person is a willing donor unless he contracts out, or to let people say whether or not they wish to give their organs after death. Although some of the lawyers at the meeting were keen that their clients should be able to donate organs in their wills, most participants seemed to feel that some more reliable scheme was required. Salaman suggested that information about willingness to donate organs could be requested on census forms and then kept in a central registry.

Mr W. M. F. Hudson, QC, giving the lawyer's point of view, discussed another of Salaman's worries, the determination of death. The advisory committee recommended that organs should not be removed from a body in which the heart is still beating. But this does not solve the neurosurgeon's problem of how long to keep a patient with severe brain damage