

REVIEWS

The Question of Establishing United Nations Research Laboratories. U.N. Dept. of Social Affairs, Lake Success, 1949. (Available from H.M.S.O.) Pp. 290. (10s.)

In October, 1946, the French delegation to the Economic and Social Council of the U.N. submitted a draft resolution which pointed out that a number of research activities can only be carried out in an efficient manner on an international scale, and suggested that an inquiry should be made into the problem of establishing U.N. research laboratories. Accordingly the Secretary-General sent out several hundred letters to various organizations and prominent scientists seeking their opinions on the general principle of U.N. research laboratories.

This report contains a summary of the opinions given (28 pages) and annexes containing individual memoranda and reports (257 pages). In brief, there was a widespread opinion that it would be proper for the U.N. to establish research laboratories and that astronomy, meteorology, geophysics, infectious diseases, nutrition (especially in relation to agriculture), and the social sciences (especially social psychology), among others, would be proper activities for such international laboratories. Although the principle has been widely accepted as sound, many practical difficulties confront those who would attempt to set up such international laboratories and some of these are set out in the annexes. The problem of finding suitable staffs would be very difficult, especially in view of the fact that in all countries of the world national and university laboratories suffer from a scarcity of trained and experienced research workers. If U.N. laboratories are set up, it is clear that they must be on a small scale if they are not to reduce seriously the efficiency of other organizations. At the start it might be proper for a large proportion of their time and resources to be devoted to the training of research workers and thereby to the creation of their own special staffs. A large research programme without a corresponding teaching and

training programme could only further disturb the balance between the demand and the supply of trained scientists.
R. Passmore

Mongolism (Peristatic Amentia). By M. ENGLER, M.D. 1949. John Wright, Bristol. Pp. 208+viii, 28 plates, 12 figs., 24 tables. (21s.)

Perhaps the most interesting and useful part of this monograph is that containing the author's own observations on the physical and mental peculiarities of his mongolian patients. This is supplemented by a comprehensive review of the pathology of the condition, collected from the literature, and lavishly illustrated by photographs, figures and tables. In addition, the author has tried to produce a summary of all that has been published on the subject, and an attempt to show that there can be only *one* explanation. The italics are his. His aetiological chapter is the least satisfying. He passes in review all the hitherto suggested theories of causation, and shows that they rest on very flimsy foundations. He accepts the high correlation between incidence and advanced age in the mother, and produces additional evidence from his own cases. His conclusion is that mongolian idiocy is produced by the implantation of a normal ovum in a diseased uterine mucosa. This seems to be little more than another way of saying that the older the mother, the more likely is the child to be mongol. It would be better to say frankly that the aetiology is unknown.

Dr. Engler regards the traditional appellation, mongolian idiot, as incorrect and misleading, and unworthy of our race, and suggests "peristatic amentia". By peristasis, he understands the total of all harmful factors acting on the ovary and the uterus. A new name would have a much greater chance of acceptance if it were more colourful and less suggestive of an unproven aetiological theory.

B. Woolf

Owing to the steadily increasing cost of production, it has been found necessary to raise the price of the BRITISH JOURNAL OF SOCIAL MEDICINE, beginning with the first issue of 1950. The yearly subscription will then be 30s. (U.S.A. 5 dollars). Single copies remaining at 7s. 6d. each.