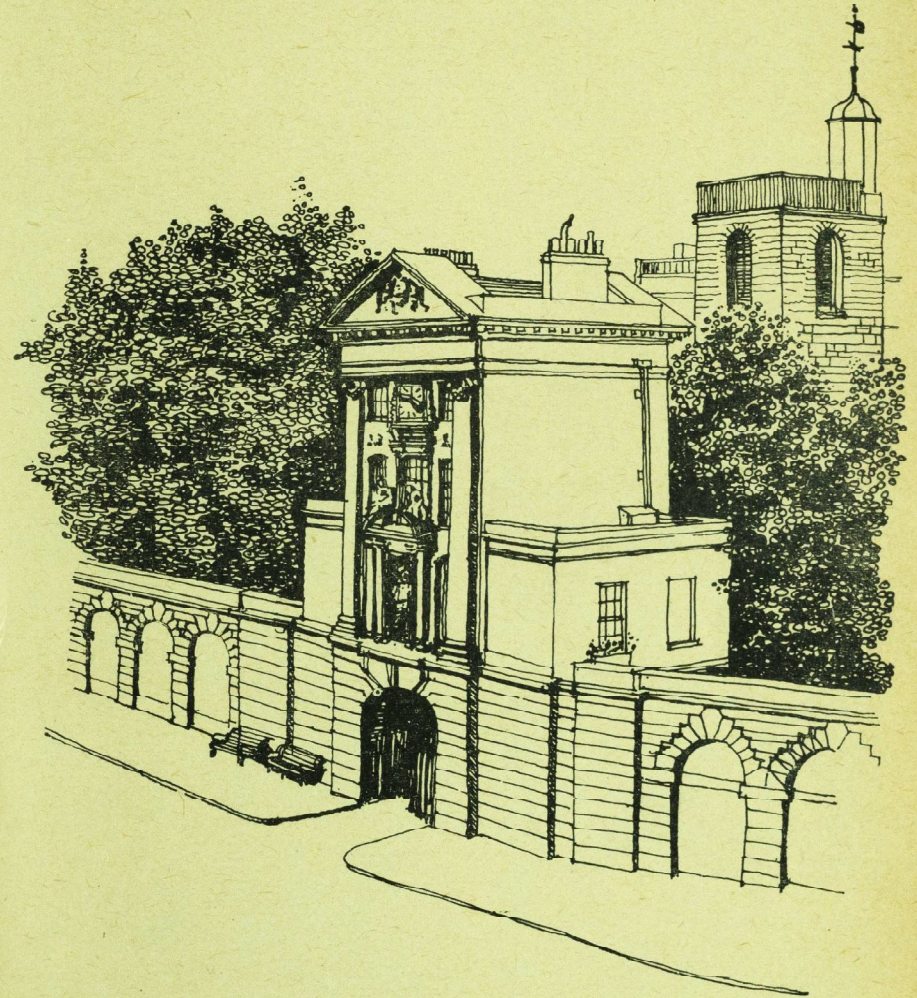


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JANUARY 1959

No. 1

EDITORIAL

At the end of each year people have always wondered what the next year holds in store. This custom should be abandoned now that future events are more and more unpredictable, in fact more and more unlikely and, indeed, impossible. In 1958 the Nautilus sailed under the North Pole, and a rocket was sent 79,000 miles into space. What are the most likely happenings of this nature in 1959? A likely event could be the projection of a man into "space" and, even more probable, is the successful observation of the backside of the moon by TV cameras and other scientific instruments. The only sure thing in the coming year is that these exploits will cost as much money as they have done in the recent past.

Some people think this expense is worth while. That it is an absolute good to extend man's knowledge of nature. Others more cagily say that money spent on pure science has always brought tangible rewards. One can agree that the Americans could use their wealth to worse ends, and that the Russians nearly always do. What is so surprising to the British taxpayer is that he is contributing money to these excursions. It is time some new Hampden protested about this new space-"ship money." We are not told how much money is spent by our Government on space projects, but it is certain that many millions of pounds are being poured into the rocket range in Australia, that at the research departments at Farnborough, huge machines are constructed to prove that men can safely be sent into space, and that there is even a factory in the Midlands which manufactures space suits.

It is not really a question of how important it is for this country to keep abreast, or just behind, the Russians, Americans, or anyone else in these new fields. It is not important at all. We cannot afford to develop a space empire, so we should forget about it and concentrate on solving nearer and more realistic problems. The most pressing of these is not the control of thermonuclear power, it has nothing to do with rocketry, it is the problem of feeding a world population which is going to outgrow its food supplies quite soon. This hovey has been held before us for many years now, but it seems that it really is now something to fear. It is a problem that can be solved, not by sitting down and waiting for the Chinese to indulge in birth control, but by diverting money from the rocket researchers to the biological researchers. Although even we, for instance, can send a rocket into outer space, we are doing virtually nothing about organising the seas which surround us into a food producing area, although 50,000,000 of us live on an island which can only feed 25,000,000 from its own resources.

As members of a State-owned and State-supported service, we have a special interest that the State should invest its money wisely. Perhaps we should feel that the economies which, from time to time, are demanded of our hospitals—no free tea for Surgeons, for example—would be more justified were the money saved on tea spent on making sure that we'll always have a biscuit with it, and not on discharging rockets into a space where others better able to afford it already have theirs.