

tative Health Centre had shown mental ill-health, defined as some degree of emotional disturbance, among 21 per cent of the elderly men and 25 per cent of the elderly women.

Some of the factors responsible were as understandable as they were preventable—loneliness, poverty, a materially bad home environment, physical illness. These are all ills which it is within the powers of a society which cares to remedy to a greater or lesser degree. Professor Ferguson Anderson, like so many other speakers, had found that neglect by sons and daughters was not prominent among the causes—it is curious how this belief persists in the face of contrary evidence. He was far more worried about compulsory retirement which, for men, was 'a definite cause of mental ill-health in old age'.

Professor Martin Roth was equally emphatic that there did not appear to be much substance in the view that the care of the young for the old had deteriorated, and he was equally concerned to im-

prove the quality of life for the elderly—'old age should surely be something more than an interregnum between working life and death,' he said. A system of ascertainment and registration could ensure that old people received attention when they began to show deterioration, instead of, as too often at present, when their ills, mental or physical, were well established. Today, when it was found early, disturbed behaviour could be quickly controlled. Depression associated with old age was recognised as a reversible illness.

The main problem was the integration of the existing services into a single, comprehensive, geriatric service. An associated one was the fact that most medical students and nurses moulded their professional careers on the pattern of those who directed them. Since geriatrics and psychiatry were poorly represented in teaching hospitals, it was difficult to find enough skilled and gifted people to undertake research in those departments. Research and scientific inquiry were among the most powerful weapons in

Death of a son

(Who died in a mental hospital aged one)

By Jon Silkin

Something has ceased to come along with me.
Something like a person: something very like one.
And there was no nobility in it
Or anything like that.

Something was there like a one year
Old house, dumb as stone. While the near buildings
Sang like birds and laughed
Understanding the pact

They were to have with silence. But he
Neither sang nor laughed. He did not bless silence
Like bread, with words.
He did not forsake silence.

But rather, like a house in mourning
Kept the eye turned in to watch the silence while
The other houses like birds
Sang around him.

And the breathing silence neither
Moved nor was still.

I have seen stones: I have seen brick
But this house was made up of neither bricks nor
stone
But a house of flesh and blood
With flesh of stone

And bricks for blood. A house
Of stones and blood in breathing silence with the
other
Birds singing crazy on its chimneys.
But this was silence,

This was something else, this was
Hearing and speaking though he was a house drawn
Into silence, this was
Something religious in his silence,

Something shining in his quiet,
This was different, this was altogether something
else:
Though he never spoke, this
Was something to do with death.

And then slowly the eye stopped looking
Inward. The silence rose and became still.
The look turned to the outer place and stopped,
With the birds still shrilling around him.
'And as if he could speak

He turned over on his side with his one year
Red as a wound
He turned over as if he could be sorry for this
And out of his eyes two great tears rolled, like
stones, and he died.