

THE MARTIANS WOULD LAUGH

IF there is life on other worlds, our neighbours in space may be so advanced that they would laugh at our technical backwardness.

They may have been exchanging radio messages — if not actual visits—for centuries, scientists told the British Association at Southampton today.

Our only hope of joining their Galactic club would be through some kind of kindergarten department on the look-

out for communities on the threshold of inter-stella communication, said Dr. D. M. A. Mercer, head of Southampton University physics department.

A really advanced community, he added, would probably feel they couldn't care less about us; and if they were busy they might not bother to signal us more than once in every 100 years.

The best way for an advanced community to explore space, Dr. Mercer suggested,

would be to spray thousands of unmanned "probes" into the galaxy.

These would be equipped with listening apparatus designed to "home" on any planet transmitting radio or TV signals.

Such a probe would probe the planet and relay back to base for interpretation and reply, any message it picked up. In view of the vast distances separating habitable worlds, the quickest reply might take 40 years to reach its destination.

100 STARS

"A listening station in the U.S. has searched—without result so far—for intelligible waves from some nearby stars.

Dr Mercer said that within 15 light-years of us there were seven stars which could have habitable planets; within 50 light-years there were at least 100.

If we woke up one morning and found a probe or space ship in our orbit the problem of communication would be a very urgent matter—especially as the visitor might have the means of completely destroying our planet, he said.

Prof. W. T. Williams, professor of botany at Southampton University, told the conference that the bug-eyed monsters of science fiction are possible but time-travel is not.

It was conceivable that there were man-like creatures swimming in the oceans of liquid ammonia on Jupiter or rock-like men living on sun-scorched