

Social Science in Medicine

L. W. Simmons and H. G. Wolff

New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1954, 254 pp., \$3.50.

Both the medical profession and social science are indebted to the Russell Sage Foundation for making possible this collaboration between two scientists, each eminent in his own field. Dr. Leo Simmons, Professor of Sociology at Yale, and Dr. Harold Wolff, Professor of Neurology at Cornell, have been working and thinking together under the auspices of the Russell Sage Foundation since 1949, when it began its current program for "the improvement of the utilization of research in the social sciences in professional practice." The first fruits of this collaboration are embraced in the volume, *Social Science in Medicine*. This book is a general review of the major areas of interest shared by medicine and social science. It is "addressed primarily to students of medicine and the social sciences who are interested in training for research in these related areas." It provides a background and orientation which prepare us for further definitive studies being carried out by the author and others at the New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center.

The book assumes little or no knowledge on the part of the reader concerning the theoretical problems which arise when one tries to tie together the biophysical orientation of traditional medicine and the sociocultural orientation of the social scientist. The common meeting ground of the two disciplines is seen by the authors as man himself, who is at the same time (1) a biophysical organism responding to laws of nature which we understand in terms of physics and chemistry; (2) a member of a society, influenced systematically by the nature of interpersonal relations in social systems; and (3) a product of a culture with ideas, attitudes, and actions influenced by pressures of morals, customs, and laws.

The authors ask pertinent questions at the end of the book which they state are "necessarily vague and inconclusive," pointing the direction in which further research and conceptualization are needed. "What positive factors and behavior in the patient's life situation evoke the reaction patterns conducive to health?" "What techniques are necessary to elucidate these and how can they be supplied?" "Can these related aspects of the social environment be controlled or modi-

fied so as to influence favorably the course of therapy and perhaps also the patient's general outlook?" They raise further questions as follows: ". . . [It] may be that a particular individual is 'better off' with his illness, or that he and his associates are ill-prepared to pay the price of full recovery. Such are the complexities and problems of equilibrium in personal and social relationships." The concept which the authors advance to link together in the individual the mechanisms involved in understanding the dynamics of the whole man delicately balanced in a state of equilibrium with his environment—physical, social, and cultural—is the concept of *stress*. The authors develop this theme in an extraordinarily convincing fashion: stresses in the sociocultural sphere are no less a reality to be considered by the physician than stresses in the biophysical sphere.

Carefully collected evidence for this point of view is documented by a series of footnotes and a very complete and valuable bibliography. The orientation chapters are excellent. They should serve to convincingly awaken medical students and others representing the "hard core" of the biophysical approach to the importance and relevance of sociocultural factors in health and disease. It is hoped that this volume, and others to come from these authors and the Russell Sage Foundation, will be given a prominent place in the curricula of our medical schools.

WARREN T. VAUGHAN, JR.

The Meaning of Social Medicine

Iago Galdston, M.D.

Cambridge, Mass., published by Harvard University Press for The Commonwealth Fund, 1954, 137 pp., \$2.75.

This little book tackles a big task, the definition of social medicine and the interpretation of its implications for the future of the practice and teaching of medicine. Despite the valiant attempts of the author to define this field in positive terms, there seems to be no firm ground to do this. Thus the most trenchant chapter is on the "failure of modern medicine." The difficulty appears to be that modern medicine (by which is meant the phenomenal development of diagnostic and therapeutic skill in the last decades) is too successful in the rather narrow field in which it chooses to concentrate to notice its lack of success in the larger sphere of the promotion of health. The physician, caricatured as