

ON REPORTS

The reports of studies on medical and sociological subjects are often presented so badly and written in such uninspired English that their content makes hard reading. All but the dedicated experts are driven away to lighter reading after the first few pages. This is unfortunate because these tomes frequently contain valuable material; the subject matter is usually good and the conclusions of undoubted importance. The worst offenders are committees who in their endeavour to speak with one voice effectively iron out all originality and life from their reports. In this respect the reports of government departments are not far behind, nor are individual workers entirely blameless.

Some reports of a hundred or even fifty years ago still make excellent reading and those of such masters as Sir John Simon and Sir George Newman still remain as object lessons in the art of compiling official reports. There are few such now and it was therefore with surprised delight that we picked up *The Ageing Countryman: a sociomedical report on old age in a country practice* which was originally presented as a thesis for the doctorate of Edinburgh University and awarded a gold medal and is now published by the National Corporation for the Care of Old People. The author, DR H. C. MILLER, moves familiarly in and out of the homes of his people; he has a happy knack of description and is able to bring them living onto his pages. But even more to the point, he moves as agilely amongst his statistical material and never allows even it to get dull. This is a sample of his style taken from his chapter on "Companionship":

"Old people in the country tend to live longer than those in the towns. Examination of the records of one parish in the area, over the decade 1948-1957, showed the average age at death (including one pair of premature twins) of the 53 recorded burials, male and female alike, to be 81 years. Hence a very common feature of life in the country is that of old married couples still sharing their lives together. It is a happy sight and, so long as they are able to 'gang along' together without hurt, quite the most satisfactory, because the most natural, arrangement of all. I do not mean to imply by this that the countryside is sprinkled with starry-eyed Darbies and Joans stumbling into the sunset, hand in arthritic hand. Very often the reverse is true; many old couples, unable to get about and away from each other as freely as formerly, get on each other's nerves to an alarming extent and, to those who know them well, are not slow to say so; but they know and usually esteem each other so deeply, they have shared so many experiences, that the deeper union usually transcends the irritations and annoyances of prolonged propinquity and, as they say, they would not leave each other for all the tea in China."
