

Book Reviews

Sociology in Medicine. M. W. SUSSER and W. WATSON, London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1962. p. vii + 337. Price 42s.

In this book a lecturer in social medicine and a sociologist look at health and disease. Its basis is that "man's economic and social environment is part of his natural environment and helps to determine the incidence and prognosis of disease". There are two parts. In the first, the importance of social factors is shown by comparing health and disease in industrial and peasant societies (both authors have worked in Africa). In the second part, the family in contemporary Great Britain is the central theme; it is viewed in health and disease throughout the life cycle, with particular interest in children and old people. An intermediate chapter looks at doctors and the social influences which affect their behaviour.

Most readers of this *Journal*, including the reviewer, practise their art and science wearing the blinkers which their partly inappropriate training has provided for them. Better understanding of sociology could help to lift one blinker (and of psychology the other). This is why this book is important. In its own words (p. 183): To meet the needs of the whole patient "the general practitioner is driven back to a traditional sphere of medicine, the art which all doctors practised before the period of rapid scientific advance. He will have to apply the sciences of psychology and sociology to the art of medicine, or yield to other specialists, such as medical psychologists or sociologists".

It is partly because it looks at our own subject from an angle which is unfamiliar to us that this book is difficult to read. We meet familiar topics here and there but the authors move between them by unusual routes. It is unfortunate too that they have their jargon just as we have ours, and that the two are not the same. Had we more appropriate education we might feel more at home among these abstract concepts; but might the authors have come a little further to meet us by using plainer English? The difficulty also stems from the fact that "social medicine is a complex and difficult branch of medical science in that it attempts to grapple both with the nature of social processes and with their complicated relation to health and disease".

There are copious references which are set out in an encouraging way, so that this is a first-class source book. It is excellently produced and not expensive.

The Last Refuge. A survey of Residential Institutions and Homes for the aged in England and Wales. PETER TOWNSEND. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962. Pp. xv + 552. Price 60s.

The title of this book is to some extent a misnomer as, from the statistics given which relate to the various types of establishments surveyed, it is