



## IN THIS ISSUE

**T**HE great and growing interest in mental disorders, especially in their prevention, has stimulated much epidemiological research designed to obtain evidence on the causes of different kinds of mental disorders which can be the basis for developing preventive programs. Aware of this interest and of the many recent studies which have evaluated data on associations between a variety of factors and mental disorder, in 1959 the Milbank Memorial Fund sponsored a Round Table meeting at Arden House, at which present knowledge about causation of mental disorder was discussed. In preparation for this meeting, eight distinguished authorities were asked to prepare review articles summarizing the evidence relating to different kinds of causes which had been thought to lead to mental disorders. The papers were distributed to the participants in advance of the meeting. At the meeting, the discussion of each review paper was opened by a previously designated participant; a general discussion followed; and the reviewer then added his own comments on the discussion.

The Fund's formal publication of the Proceedings began in the January, 1961 issue of the *Quarterly* (Vol. xxxix, No. 1), and is scheduled to be completed in the July issue. Included in these Proceedings are the review papers, the opening discussions, summaries of the subsequent general discussion, and the closing remarks of the authors of the review papers. The first paper of the meeting—"Genetical Etiology in Mental Illness" by Professor Jan A. Böök—was printed separately from the Proceedings series in the July, 1960, issue of the *Quarterly* (xxxviii, No. 3), so that, unfortunately, the discussion of the paper was not published at that time. However, this material will be added to the Proceedings which will be collected in a

volume entitled: CAUSES OF MENTAL DISORDERS: A REVIEW OF EPIDEMIOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE, 1959, sometime in the latter part of 1961.

The reader is referred to the January, 1961, issue of the *Quarterly* for a brief introductory statement outlining the objectives of the meeting and for the abstracts of all of the review articles presented at the meeting.

Three of the review papers, together with their discussion, will be found in this issue:

The Family and Mental Disorder:  
An Incomplete Essay.

John Cumming, M.D.

This "incomplete essay" (so-called since it reviews only a portion of the very large number of studies which have tried to link the development of a mental disorder with a particular characteristic of the patient's family or family member) goes into less detail in criticizing the methodology of these investigations than in pointing out that the questions have often been too imprecisely stated to make research productive of answers. Dr. Cumming's discussion seeks to mark out a path through the present chaos in the field and to suggest ways of relating the studies to one another so that future investigations will be more productive.

Proximal or Precipitating Factors in Mental Disorders:  
Epidemiological Evidence.

D. D. Reid, M.D.

This review concludes that the field lacks any sustained and systematic approach to the problem of precipitating factors. Dr. Reid believes that while the most valuable studies have been made of stress in wartime, events which occur in civilian life have not been absolved: they have only been insufficiently examined.

Social Structures and Mental Disorders:

Competing Hypotheses of Explanation. H. Warren Dunham

The evidence which links an individual's position in the social structure in which he lives to the risk of manifesting men-

tal disorders is examined; and a number of critical studies are woven into a reasoned discussion of both methodological and theoretical issues. From this evidence it is clear that the relationship between social class position, occupation, and a number of other similar factors, and the frequency of certain mental disorders (in one or another form of treatment) is very marked and well established. The causal meaning of these associations is still uncertain. The problems connected with exploiting the clues suggested by these associations, and the problems involved in closing the gaps in our knowledge about them, are amply classified and clarified, both by Dr. Dunham and by the group in the ensuing discussion.



Higher death rates experienced by males than by females frequently have been attributed largely to biological factors. This excess mortality for males has been increasing at most adult ages in recent years in the United States when mortality for both sexes has been declining. In an article entitled "Causes of Death Responsible for Recent Increases in Sex Mortality Differentials in the United States," Philip E. Enterline describes trends in specific causes of death for different age groups and suggests that environmental factors may have an important role in the widening sex differential in mortality. The largest increases in the sex mortality ratios are found for age groups 15 to 24 years and 45 to 64 years. Increases in the sex mortality ratios are largely the result of recent trends in rates for a few important causes of death for which trends are of two types: "declines in causes of death importantly affecting females (tuberculosis, maternal mortality, cancer of the uterus and diseases associated with high blood pressure), and increases in male death rates for motor vehicle accidents, lung cancer, and coronary heart disease."



A paper, "Implications of Prospective United States Population Growth in the 1960s" is contributed by Dr. Joseph S.

Davis. Among the prospective developments considered are increases in school enrollments, number of women of reproductive age, size of the labor force, and number of aged persons. He discusses the resurgence in fertility, especially among nonwhites. The important trends in population redistribution during 1950–1960 include the marked gains in California, Florida, Texas, New York, and Ohio, and the losses in Arkansas, Mississippi, and West Virginia. A leading implication, as seen by Dr. Davis, will be a marked increase in demand for consumption goods and services. The relatively large increase in nonwhites enhances both the necessity and the difficulty of removing the economic and social handicaps confronted by these groups. Among the other problems are the utilization of the increased labor force, the provision of housing, the burgeoning of suburbs, and the increased need for investment capital. The author states that “Americans are accustomed to rise to challenges, and . . . our economic and social history has typically confounded both superoptimists and pessimists of all degrees.”



In an article in the July 1955 issue of the *Quarterly* Dr. M. A. El-Badry presented some demographic measurements for Egypt based on assumptions of stable age distributions. It was stated that the technique might be applicable to other underdeveloped areas lacking vital statistics but having a history of approximately stable fertility and mortality and an absence of migration across national boundaries. In view of the recent declines in mortality in the face of persistence of high fertility in underdeveloped areas, Dr. S. H. Abdel-Aty has found it more realistic to assume “quasi-stable” rather than stable populations in such places. His results are presented in this issue in an article “Life Table Functions for Egypt Based on Model Life-Tables and Quasi-Stable Population Theory.”