EXPERIMENTS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

By PROFESSOR HAROLD F. CLARK
TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Can you experiment in the social sciences? With the help of the Sloan Foundation and several universities, I have had the chance to try and get a partial answer to the question. What have we learned from these efforts regarding the limits of experimentation in the social sciences? Does experimentation offer any promise of throwing light on complicated social problems? Before we turn to our efforts at experimenting let us briefly review something of the history of science and see if we can obtain any light on the problem.

Animals hibernate in the mud at the bottom of streams in the winter. That is obvious; the animal is here in the fall, he is here in the spring. He must have gone in the mud. At least some of the greatest minds in the world said so only a little over two thousand years ago.

Every one knows that the way to cure a person of witches curse is to rub his head with ground-up bodies of dried wasps. So, at least, said some of the great medical authorities of the middle ages.

Rosen, in his recent book on "Hollywood," says many of the famous actors and actresses believe in the magic of numbers. One particular actor would never go on the stage unless the number of steps was exactly nine. He knew he would hurt himself if it was any other number. One day the studio built a set with ten steps on it. The actor insisted the steps be changed to nine. They were. That day he fell down...