

In describing the subsequent career of P.S.W.'s, it is noticeable that many have taken up posts outside clinics. The increasing number who are employed by Local Authorities as community care workers or Children's Officers must in fact be carrying out their work on the social worker team basis. P.S.W.'s are running Child Care Training Courses and in fact carrying out this function of "Supervisory P.S.W.". Do the whole training and selection standards require re-orientation?

No persons were better fitted to look back and sum up than Miss Ashdown and Miss Clement Brown. Generations of students gratefully looked to them for guidance and help and they hold a unique position at the heart of psychiatric social workers in this country. We expected sympathy and understanding for our needs, and we know also that all would be illuminated by that sense of values which more than any skill, gives strength to the seeker. For every P.S.W. must throughout her career continue to seek for the way and the means. Ours is a profession which must be *lived* and in the turmoil of the present we should be looking to the future. A book of the quality of the one under review opens a new window.

R.S.A.

## Friendship and Mental Health

By E. T. ASHTON

(*Lecturer in Social Studies, Southampton University*)

It is easy to slip into sentimental platitudes when talking about friendship. Great writers such as Cicero and Montaigne avoided this pitfall, but mainly by describing not what friendship is, but what it ought to be. The close connection of intimate comradeship with mental health is being increasingly recognised.

A few aspects of this connection will here be outlined. In the first place, the type and degree of friendship vary with the special needs of an age and the stress that age put upon the value of the relationship. Secondly, friendship will mean different things to different people; it will vary with personality and temperament. Again, family situations in early childhood will greatly affect potentialities for forming full and mature friendships in later years. Lastly, an attempt will be made to sketch the functions of friendship in maintaining mental serenity.

Friendship has had a much higher prestige as a social relation in other periods of history. By the Greeks and Romans it was hallowed as a relationship of great spiritual and social value, as the works of Plato and Aristotle testify. Likewise in Elizabethan England, largely under the influence of the classical revival of the

Renaissance, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Spenser and others reflected in their writings the high place held by friendship in the social life of the day.

Usually friendship in its highest forms has flourished when times have been dangerous. The physical dangers of our age are only too evident. Sociologists and theologians have emphasised as strongly the spiritual dangers of the times. Writers have stressed the spiritual emptiness and aimlessness that can rot a state from within.

Certain aspects in particular of Industrial Society threaten mental health. In modern city life one meets too many people, one carries on different activities with different sets of people. One's neighbours are not the same people as one works with; and those with whom one spends one's leisure times are not necessarily either neighbours or workmates. This contrasts with the comparative social unity of the rural community. The wide variety of personalities met with in ordinary social life makes mutual understanding difficult. The drive for efficiency has often undermined the self-esteem of those indifferently treated as mere means to an economic end. Sociologists speak of "the sense of being unloved, uncared for and disregarded which results from the anonymity and impersonality of urban life".

Industrial psychologists are agreed that friendship within the work group is a necessary element in personal satisfaction. The work itself is often mass production which can easily seem meaningless to the individual worker. Elton Mayo, for example, insists that human relations at work must include opportunities for friendship.

People react differently to similar social backgrounds. Some persons need friendship as an aid to mental health much more urgently than others living in the same environment. It is possible that the need is related in some way to differences of personality measured in terms of intro-extraversion. Generally the assumption has been that the friendly sociable extrovert is better adjusted to life and more able to form close friendships than the introvert.

Ernest Jones points out "Friendliness is to be measured by the internal freedom of such feelings and attitudes rather than by their quantity". The more introverted person may take longer to choose a friend, to give or permit confidences, or to interest himself in the other man's affairs. Jung has said that one of the objects of friendship is to reintegrate secret thoughts and feelings with ordinary social intercourse. In this respect the inward-looking person needs friendship as much as the extrovert; his capacity for friendship may be as great, even greater.

The third respect in which friendship concerns mental health relates to the family, which stands at the centre of any discussion of mental health by its influence in paving the way for later

capacities for friendship. The same factors that promote healthy mental development in the child make it easier for him later to form intimate companionships.

"Changes brought about within the family group" says Bowlby (Human Relations—Summer 1949) "may lead to children growing up to be individually either more anxious and difficult and likely to increase tension and friction at their work or else friendly and co-operative and thus able to adopt friendly and give-and-take relations in their working and domestic life". Compare the latter type of attitude with that mentioned in "The Authoritarian Personality" (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson and Sanford. Studies in Prejudice Series, N.Y.1950). The authors saw in this type of person characteristics described as poverty of affection, an exploitive, manipulative approach to others and "preference of status to warmth and genuineness in human relations". Nor is the unstable neurotic personality able to find the security in friendship that he so urgently needs. To refer again to Bowlby, "many affectionless characters crave affection but yet have complete inability to accept or reciprocate it". To the emotionally unstable person friendship offers an opportunity of getting on to an even keel. As Reik has pointed out, in friendship as compared with love there is a more equal relationship, less over-estimation of the object, less idealisation, less intense possessiveness.

In the family circle the child learns how to accustom himself to normal human relations, to make his own compromise with ambivalent feelings, to test the strength of ties of affection. If his experience is unsatisfactory it will affect capacities for love and for friendship alike. Pain caused by maternal deprivation for instance will cause many children to withdraw from further emotional contacts of any depth. Ability to make firm and lasting friendships will be undermined. In later life, when friendly ties might have been able to compensate for unhappiness in love and marriage, this door too is closed to him by lack of confidence in himself and others. In juvenile delinquents this inability to make true friendships is often noted; many authorities have quoted cases where youngsters seem capable only of superficial relationships with others. Their chronic unfriendliness is at once difficult and pathetic. It greatly increases the task of the probation officer, as he finds no well-tryed habit of friendship that he can utilise. His own proffered friendship is psychologically implausible to the youngster.

What then are the positive functions of friendship in promoting mental health? The friendships of childhood help to develop the child's own distinctive personality. They give him in the course of play chances to exercise his capacities, physical, mental and social.

One function of friendship in mental health is summed up by Professor Brierley (*Trends in Psychoanalysis*, page 258) "The chief aids to the successful overcoming of frustration are to be found in compensatory relationships of affection, and new interests symbolising those that have to be relinquished". Aggression caused by frustration can be absorbed, to a large extent, inside the friendship circle. Thus, not only does it compensate for frustrations met elsewhere, but also allows expression and displacement without rupture of the relationship.

Much mental suffering is caused by lack of realism. Mature friendship can be very effective in enabling a person mentally disturbed to see an emotional situation objectively. The essence of friendship is not just frank criticism but understanding and constructive criticism. In this respect friendship often performs in ordinary relationships the function that is carried out by casework in the social work field. It enables a person to see how the situation looks to someone interested and sympathetic but not so emotionally involved. In the same way much casework can be regarded as friendship put on a professional basis and limited to a set period of time.

It is not helpful to mental health to found a friendship on an identification based upon a fantastic over-estimation of the other. That many such friendships do exist, particularly in adolescence, is unquestionable. They form a type of escapism characterised by infantile dependence.

Fortunately, in the ordinary run of life it is more likely that birds of a feather do in fact flock together: This is rightly so if for the ordinary man it affords emotional security without dependency. In other words, from the angle of mental health it is usually better, in most cases, for the relationship to be based on similarities of taste and interest. These will in general correspond to intelligence, education and position in society. Mutuality would not be possible if there were too big a gap in any vital respect, as big differences in experience make mutual understanding difficult.

Merely a few aspects of the connection between friendship and mental health have been considered. Romantic love on the one hand, love within the family circle on the other, have so monopolised the attention of modern observers that friendship as a relationship has not been adequately studied. We need to know a good deal more about the part played today by friendship in easing the strains of modern life, and its possibilities in actual therapeutic situations.