

# 'Casework in Probation'

reviewed by  
R. COOPER

"IDEALISM WITH REALISM"—  
"Love and care in a legal framework," the dilemma of all concerned in social work: this, I feel is the problem the author has attempted to deal with. This book is an honest, realistic attempt to examine and describe casework as it exists, or may exist in probation.

The \*book, we are told, was ostensibly written for Probation Officers, particularly those in their first years of service and for those responsible for their training. It seems to me that it can offer at least two things to members of the Prison Service. Firstly, it can provide us with a better understanding of the work of those in a service closely allied to our own; work that is concerned with those we find in our charge, both before and after sentence. Secondly, in his first chapter the author declares the keynote of his work to be the definition of casework taken from *The report of the Departmental Committee on the Probation Service* (H.M.S.O. 1962).

"By casework, we understand the creation and utilization, for the benefit of an individual with personal problems, of a relationship

between that person and a trained social worker."

If we are to implement Rule I, it would seem that at least one approach would be to recognize, develop and use personal relationships in a skilled way. I must, however, add that I personally am never quite sure what is meant by a "trained social worker."

To define casework as a principle is not too difficult, but to explain it in practice, particularly to the uninitiated, is. Monger's approach is to give the legal framework, to discuss possible resultant attitudes, and then to use examples, expressed in simple terms. This seems to me to be most effective.

I found it difficult to review this book objectively, for it is a subject on which I have strong personal feelings. This, I think, has also been a problem for the author. He has attempted to write an objective book from a personal standpoint which he frankly states "A blend of non-conformist protestantism—with orthodox if diluted Freudian thought." In one chapter he writes of three underlying assumptions:— (1) That every individual has value and that this is no less and no greater than that of any other person," (2)

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"It is necessary to regard an individual against his background, as a person living in an environment."

(3) "That it is necessary to take into account that the way in which people feel and behave is governed in part by forces which are conscious and in part by unconscious forces." The latter is followed by some discourse on conscious and unconscious motivations. My own view is that it is enough to say that the problems with which casework is concerned are in part personal and in part environmental, that internal and external features both need reconsideration. Feelings are as important as facts; facts are as important as feelings; feelings are facts.

It is often argued that the client in the "free" social work field is vastly different from the inmate in an institution, yet I find in this book expressions such as "Relationships by order of the Court," "The unwilling client," "Relationship within a fixed period." It may be that the difference is but one of degree and is not so vast as might appear at first sight. In fact it could be that these problems are not really so far removed from the ones with which we have to contend.

In a chapter on casework in after-care, it is once again made abundantly clear, that there is little hope of implementing the recommendations of the A.C.T.O. report until there are radical changes in the lines of communication, and increased understand-

ing of the various roles among all the agencies involved. I feel that Monger's conclusion to this chapter is well worth quoting; "Eventually, as casework or its equivalent becomes firmly grounded within institutions, he (the after-care agent) may find it possible, and indeed necessary, to adjust to a situation which is far more akin to that experienced in the transfer of a probationer from one officer to another than anything which has yet emerged. This indeed is much to be desired, for it will mean that at last, every part of the effort made by society towards the reclaiming of its delinquent members will be based upon the same fundamental principle."

Casework is not, of course, a panacea. The part of social work, which is known as social casework, uses a body of knowledge, derived from studies of anthropology, medicine, sociology, criminology, psychology, psychiatry, religion and from experience of social work itself. It is a tool we can use, in the prison service, alongside other approaches.

In his preface, Monger recognizes the limitations of his work and declares it to be of modest dimensions. To the experienced practising caseworker it will have little to offer. To the tutor it has value. I would feel that its real value will be to the student or to the uninitiated who wants to know what casework is about. The book is objective, is easy to read and is easily understood. Recommended.