

Correspondence

THE *JOURNAL* AND ITS CONTENTS

DEAR SIR,

I am writing to suggest that now might be the time to see whether the ordinary membership of the R.M.P.A. could not have a greater say in the type of *Journal* which they are, as it were, obliged to receive. I had in mind, for instance, that the Editor might circulate some sort of questionnaire from time to time to ascertain what type of articles members would be interested in.

I should like to make clear that I am not questioning either the frequency of appearance of the *Journal* or its quality; in both these respects, as in others, the *Journal* seems to me to be greatly improved since I first came into psychiatry in the late '50's. My complaint centres rather on the *type* of articles, which seem to me to cater to a somewhat narrower interest than might be the case. As a sort of caricature, I can express what I mean by saying that I think it would do very well as a high quality and somewhat specialized "Journal of Experimental Psychiatry"; as such I would respect it but probably not read it much.

To look at it another way, what is left out? I think I could summarize my views by saying that a very large percentage of the articles could as well be written about white rats. One misses the feeling of human emotions and relationships being talked about. I note that in your Editorial of May 1964 you conclude by saying "First and foremost this *Journal* is an organ for the communication of information which can be subject to test, confirmation and refutation". I take it that this is an expression basically of a philosophy of science associated with the name of Karl Popper, which after a good deal of reflection I have found myself unable to accept. It seems to me that much of our work is not capable of validation, quantification, falsification, etc., and that if one restricts oneself to what is capable of such treatment, one has to leave aside much of what is most alive, important, and specifically human. Perhaps it is significant that I can recall only one article on existential psychiatry (an unsympathetic one, I felt); and certainly anyone whose reading in psychiatry was restricted to the *British Journal of Psychiatry* might well be excused for not knowing that such a person as Dr. Laing exists. The same could be said about such distinguished figures as Drs. Balint and Winnicott.

The above two paragraphs represent of course my own opinion and predilections; it may well be however that many members of the Association share my views; others might wish to see more on the subjects of child psychiatry, forensic psychiatry, family therapy or other topics. It is for this reason that I suggest that it might be a good idea to canvass the opinions of members of the Association.

R. E. MACKIE.

*The Ross Clinic,
Cornhill Road,
Aberdeen.*

[*Editorial Note:* The above has been condensed, by the elimination of extraneous matter, from two letters received from Dr. Mackie.]

DEAR DR. MACKIE,

Thank you for your letter, which I have discussed with Dr. Walk.

I think you have the wrong idea that we are turning down papers when they come from a field of work which we regard with disfavour. This is not so. We have published nothing from Balint, Winnicott, Laing, etc., because we have not been offered anything. I am sure they have their own preferred media of communication which put them in touch with the audiences they want to reach. Dr. Walk thinks that what you are really suggesting is that we should not be merely passive recipients (as we largely are), but should go out to get articles. If we did this on a large scale, it would certainly get us into trouble on the score of not being impartial.

However, we could certainly do a little in that way, just as we do ask for occasional critical reviews. Would you care to offer a paper, e.g. a discussion on a field which you think the *Journal* is grossly neglecting? I can't guarantee to accept it unseen, but it would be very sympathetically received.

ELIOT SLATER.

*R.M.P.A.,
London, W.1.*

ATTEMPTED SUICIDE AND THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

DEAR SIR,

The National Health Service seems to have been under critical scrutiny of late. I have read the paper