

The Psychologist Goes to School

SUCCESS in school is almost as much dependent on emotional attitudes as on ability. That is, how a child feels about his school, his teacher, his different subjects, partly determines his success in school, how he thinks, and how effectively he learns. Have you ever noticed how difficult it is to concentrate if you have been upset or if you are anxious, how difficult it is to remember what you want to say when you speak before a group for the first time, how hard it is to think clearly or keep your mind on your job if people are critical of you or your work, and how well you apply yourself if people encourage you. How often does a child, who has been absent for three or four weeks, come back to school fearful of what he has missed—mainly of the arithmetic he has missed or forgotten. Sometimes the situation is made worse for a returning child by a seemingly heartless little egotist who says, "Yes, while you were away we had three new kinds of sums." The child's worst fears are realised and his confidence falls still further. The wise teacher reassures the child that, although work has been

Extracts from "Psychology in the Service of Education," a talk recently broadcast for the NZBS by Professor F. J. Schonell, Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Queensland.

missed, she will help him. Such understanding puts new heart into the child.

We are not all the same and cannot all achieve the same scholastic levels. It is far from true that "all men are born equal"; at least, in learning power—that is, in intelligence. We now know that in every representative school population there are almost 12 per cent who cannot keep pace with the average pupil, no matter how hard they try, because of their lack of intelligence. Yet there are still some misguided teachers who cane or criticise these pupils for not reaching certain levels, though the same children may have done their best within the limits of their capacities. Thus a boy of 10 with a mental age of only 8 is doing quite well if his reading, spelling, writing and so on are equivalent to those of an eight-year-old—

to blame him or chastise him for not reaching a ten-year-old level is unjust, and may cause him to lose confidence in what he can do, or to become antagonistic, surly or rebellious. That he cannot master certain arithmetic or spell some difficult words doesn't matter tuppence as a preparation for life. But to antagonise him, to give him a sense of failure, to undermine his confidence in his powers and to neglect to develop his practical interests or his social adjustment does matter immensely.

In addition to this 12 per cent of handicapped pupils there are three to four per cent of bright children who experience special difficulties in school work. For example, some months ago I examined a boy of 11 who could do intelligent tasks equivalent to those

(continued on next page)



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