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Books of Special Interest

Mental Testing

A MANUAL OF INDIVIDUAL MENTAL TESTS AND TESTING. By AUGUSTA F. BRONNER, WILLIAM HEALY, GLADYS M. LOWE, and MYRA E. SHIMBERG. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1927.

Reviewed by JOSEPH JASTROW

A NOTABLE as well as useful contribution to the important field of testing human intelligence is this book issued by Dr. Augusta Bronner and her associates of the Judge Baker Foundation. It presents a comprehensive and well organized collection of tests, covering the entire range of the mind's domain. The fact that there are one hundred twenty-five tests, with practical instructions, and others referred to, indicates how extensive this field has become. This directory of "What's What" in mental testing is indispensable.

While fundamentally a handbook for those engaged in practice, it supplies also a proper setting and guidance in the ideas and purposes, the *raison d'être*, of the mental test. The keynote of warning is that testing is not a mechanical operation. Intelligence cannot be scored by a numerical statement; for the human output is far too complex for that. The test as arranged is a practical compromise between what one would like to do and what must be done, if we demand a brief index of mentality and one readily compared with the average. The average, as is often said of language, conceals as much as it reveals. It merges various abilities in a common issue, which is called the intelligence or the I. Q. If all the ingredients or factors that go into it function at about the same level, we should have that ideal, but non-existent individual, the average man, or in this case, the average child. But as Professor Thorndike has well insisted from the days of his pioneer work in this field, we are always dealing with a number of special abilities which we must more or less accept as indices of what again we compromise in calling general intelligence. It is always desirable with regard to any individual to know what he is good at relatively, and at what poor, and in what of average ability. Again reduced to numbers or a curve, or what is called a profile, the test presents the problem of indicating with numerical convenience what actually is a portrait with many features. If we add that this total intelligence is displayed by an individual in whom the mentality is but one factor of a total personality, we appreciate the place and setting of an intelligence test.

All this is well recognized in its true importance by such workers as Dr. Healy and Dr. Bronner, whose main concern is in the utilization of mental tests as a part of the technique of the clinic. Anyone acquainted with the amazing human clinic that the Judge Baker Foundation has so ably conducted for many years, will realize the art that is necessary to give the intelligence test its proper rating in the total problem of management, whether as applied to finding a fit occupation or to the correction of defect and delinquency. It is a source of great satisfaction that a handbook of this kind has appeared under these auspices. It gives warrant that the art of mental testing will be developed as a human procedure, with full cognizance of its bearing and not as a mechanical footnote.

Viewed more closely, this survey of tests affords a detailed picture of the mental range. In our type of life, language and ideas play so prominent a part and education is so definitely concerned with the processes of learning, for which in turn memory is a chief prop, that this group of memory, language, idea, learning, and thinking tests plays the leading rôle. This in application has its dangers. Since the medium of expression is language, not all children are equally good in handling this medium of exchange, particularly in the country of the melting-pot, where a handicap in the use of English, to say nothing of the general foreign setting, would inevitably affect the mental rating. Performance comes next and the various devices to avoid the overstress of language facility. These have a further significance in that they correspond to the play tendencies of the child, and are again central in so much of the occupational work in factory and industry, which is to be the career of these children when grown. Following these clues, special educational and occupational tests have been devised to aid in the problem of fitting the worker to his job. Concluding the series is the most difficult and vital of all, the direct attack upon the measures of emotional response and character, where and how they come in their comminatory power.

inates, which in so many respects is the clue alike to social behavior and personal efficiency.

There can be no doubt that the art of testing has come to stay and will enter with increasing significance into the regulation of human conduct. It is important that its foundations should be based upon an intimate knowledge of human psychology and what may best be called the clinical insight. It is this that elevates mental testing from a laboratory facility to a profession. This work makes a contribution to the art and profession of mental testing.

On Profanity

LARS PORSENA: or, the Future of Swearing and Improper Language. By ROBERT GRAVES. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company. 1927. \$1.

THE Today and Tomorrow Series, which blazed so brightly on its first appearance, has begun to gutter and smoke and smudge, with only an occasional flare-up of its early brilliance. Whether this is due to the exhaustion of the good topics, or of the good authors, is a question into which it would not be seemly for a writer who has not been invited to contribute to the series to inquire. Mr. Graves's observations are often amusing, but he merely dances around the question of profanity, while his remarks on obscene language are so closely interwoven with some of the peculiar taboos of the English as to have a very tepid interest for American readers.

When Lars Porsena of Clusium swore by his nine gods he believed that they were real gods, and that when their names were invoked by such a devout and well-paying worshiper they might actually come and help him make sure that the proud house of Tarquin should suffer wrong no more. The decline of faith inevitably drains much of their value out of curses; but, despite Mr. Graves, there is a good deal left. "Bloody," that absurd English vestige of Mariolatry, has lost much of its force in the last decade, perhaps because it is so commonly heard (if the English novelists report correctly) in the mouths of school-girls; but it never could be taken seriously by an American anyway. Yet even in England a man can still, one surmises, be cursed into a fighting humor. It is possible to say "God damn you!" to a man in such a way as to annoy him, regardless of his views or yours on eschatology or the existence of God. And however England may have fallen away from its ancient grandeur, in this less effete nation even a dog fancier will probably fight if you apply to him an epithet implying kinship with the animals he so admires.

In England, Mr. Graves observed, "among the governed classes one of the unforgivable terms of abuse is 'bastard,'" a negligible epithet among the gentry since it may very likely be only an accusation of royal blood. But another English term of abuse, originally applied to the Bogomil heretics, but now curiously transferred, arouses little distaste in the lower classes who are not much addicted to the vice it imputes, whereas it is a serious insult to a gentleman who may very possibly indulge in such eccentricities. Well, in America this vice is perhaps commoner on Broadway than on Tenth Avenue, yet even on Tenth Avenue epithets which impute it are fighting words.

Mr. Graves recalls W. H. Davies's curious story of a man in a Welsh public house who cried out in a loud voice, "Aristotle was the pupil of Plato." Whereupon the men at the bar cried, "Keep silence, you there!" and their wives added, "we are respectable married women and did not come here to be insulted." Mr. Graves explains this on the theory that Aristotle, for God knows what reason, "is sold in every rubber shop in London and Cardiff, in company with other more obviously erotic publications." This is too deep for the cisatlantic reader. One thinks of the lawyer who silenced a longshoreman by calling him an "incorporeal hereditament," but has any of these legends ever been verified? The general rule still holds good that you can most insult a man by calling him what he is, or at least may plausibly be accused of being; but failing conveniently applicable epithets the old Anglo-Saxon monosyllables will still start a fight, if that is what you are looking for, regardless of the dying out of their comminatory power.



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Foreign Literature

Three New Writers

By ALEXANDER I. NAZAROFF

IN the course of the last years the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics has provided itself with almost everything a decent country should possess: it has banks, restaurants, Courts of Justice (if not Justice itself), Codes of Laws, a new bureaucracy, and even a new bourgeoisie comfortably prospering under the protection of the "proletarian dictatorship." The only thing which, in spite of all efforts, it so far has not been able to get, is a decent literature. In the years 1919-1920, when almost all the old writers fled out of Russia under various pretexts, the Soviet Government certainly had no idea how difficult it would be to replace them with new ones.

At first it was thought that this could be done by a decree. There appeared overnight a whole class of "proletarian writers," and a number of "futurists" to whom the pre-revolutionary Russia paid to attention were unearthed (the Soviet Government did not know to which of these two groups it should give preference). The former discussed at length the questions as to what was the difference between a "proletarian landscape" and a "non-proletarian one," between the "proletarian rhythm" and the "bourgeois rhythm," etc. Sometimes they tried to write verses or short stories, too (here again a question arose: should they write them "individually" or "collectively"? For a truly proletarian method of writing would be, no doubt, collective). The futurists acted in a simpler manner: they sang the seas of blood and the destruction of the old world, delighted over obscene invectives and falling skyscrapers, and insisted that the Soviet Government should make them "literary dictators of Russia" (this question was raised more than once by their official organ, *Lef*). Soon, however, even the Soviet Government realized that it would be foolish to take all these gentlemen in earnest.

In 1921-1922 a new attempt was made to fill the sad "cultural gap" which had appeared in Russian life after the exodus of the old writers. At the same time with the New Economic Policy, the New Literary Policy was promulgated. The Soviet Government decided to patronize, feed, and subsidize not only the enthusiastic extollers of the revolution, but also sincere, or even insincere, "fellow-travelers of the revolution." Soon there appeared quite a number of writers who, at the price of giving from time to time a solemn promise "to abide by the precepts of our dear Ilyich (Lenin)," were allowed to print their works in the Soviet periodicals and in the State publishing companies. The Soviet critics hastily proclaimed them "geniuses," "masters," and "stars." Men like B. Pilniak or the so-called Brothers Serapionov (a whole school of writers among whom V. Ivanov and K. Fedin became the most prominent) were unequivocally declared to be the legitimate literary successors of Tolstoy or Dostoevsky. This "baffling success" naturally knocked all sense out of the minds of the poor beginners. They immediately wrote their Autobiographies (for it is exactly with such a work that a writer usually makes his debut in Soviet Russia), and began to write short stories. In a year or two it became evident that some of these men were not without talent, perhaps even not without considerable talent, but that they were utterly spoiled by various "radical" mannerisms and by an unbearable literary pretentiousness coupled with a complete lack of literary culture, or even of any culture. These "authors of autobiographies" are still writing something, but no one buys their books; were it not for State subsidies or, to put it simply, salaries, their literary careers would be ended.

Thus, the Soviet Union still remained, to the shame of its enlightened rulers, without anything that would deserve the name of literature. Yet, in the course of the last two years, three new men have appeared on the literary horizon of Moscow. Their names are Leonid Leonov, B. Pasternak, and I. Babel. It goes without saying that, like their predecessors, they were immediately proclaimed to be "geniuses" (the Soviet press has acquired the habit of issuing false immortality licenses literally every year). It goes without saying, too, that they are not geniuses, but simply beginners. Yet it must be recognized that these beginners represent a considerable improvement upon their predecessors. Let it be stated right away that with their advent Soviet Russia has made a step forward

and has found itself nearer to real literature than before.

The most talented of these three is L. Leonov. He matured into a man during the years of Civil War. Unlike other Soviet writers of his age, he is entirely, or almost entirely, free of "grimaces of style," he does not seek originality by placing the subject of the sentence exactly where it should not be, or by seasoning his narrative with the heaviest proletarian invectives. He does not shed blood on every page, either. He has a remarkable gift of drawing expressive, caricaturistic, and comical, portraits of men, mostly ridiculous, crankish, foolish, and miserable men. His style—also caricaturistically expressive—is very sculptural, colorful, and full-blooded. Perhaps Leonov imitates a little Count Alexey N. Tolstoy, a writer of the older generation and of all-Russian fame. Yet outside of that imitative element which may be justifiable in a very young writer, he has something of his own. He has a real, genuine talent. In the "Barsuki," practically the only long thing he has written (for the rest of his works are short stories and novelettes), he has given an interesting picture of that essentially dirty and muddy transition epoch through which Russia is passing at the present time. Of course, it is difficult to say whether Leonov will mature into a real first-row writer or not; yet the fact is that he is the first man in Soviet Russia at whom one may look with certain hopes and expectations. He is "a quarter of an hour to real literature," which undoubtedly is a great achievement for Soviet Russia.

The second writer to be mentioned in this brief review is I. Babel. Stylistically speaking, he is also a great improvement upon his predecessors, for his is also human speech, and not hysterical, half animal outcries. Moreover, he tries to construct his stories in an architecturally expressive manner, and sometimes succeeds in it. But—oh, curse of all Soviet writings!—his "Cavalry Corps" ("Konarmia") in which his best stories are assembled, is so crammed with "bodies weltering in blood," with scenes of murder and rape, with all sorts of sadistic horrors, that one literally cannot read it. Indeed, this is a question for the psychiatrists—why do the ninety per cent of Soviet writers still produce the impression of mentally deranged men? The blood-soaked period of the revolution has long since come to an end. Why, then, are these men still choking with a strange—delight? horror? how should we call it? over pools of blood and piles of dead bodies?

The third writer, B. Pasternak, is, in the opinion of the present reviewer, far less promising than Leonov or even Babel. His "ornamental prose" with numberless artifices, gymnastic tricks, and pretentious effects is fatiguing and unconvincing. He can be called a "master of style" only in a country where people have entirely forgotten what style is. The less we say of him—the better it will be.

Such are Soviet Russia's three new writers. Will they, at last, enrich her with the long-coveted "real literature," "real new literature"? Who knows? It would be senseless to prophesy anything. Yet one may say that both these young writers and Russia need at the present time above all education and culture, primary education and primitive culture. Metaphorically speaking, they must learn how to use the pocket handkerchief, a thing which they have entirely forgotten during the revolution. After they learn it, it will be time to speak of literature.

The Oxford University Press, American Branch, announces the publication of "The Acts of the Early Christian Martyrs," translated by the Rev. E. C. Owen. This book contains translations of the oldest available accounts of the chief Christian Martyrdoms of the first two centuries of the Christian Era. For the most part the accounts used are either the official court records of the trials or narratives written by eyewitnesses. The value of these translations lies largely in the fact that Mr. Owen has passed by the medieval accounts of the martyrdoms with their full paraphernalia of miracles, and has gone to the starker, earlier records where the facts only are given.

The Dunster House Bookshop, Cambridge, Mass., announces a privately printed monograph on "Edwin Arlington Robinson and the Arthurian Legend," by Lucius Beebe of Harvard University.

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