Book Reviews.

Mental and Scholastic Tests. Report by the Education Officer, submitting three Memoranda by Mr. Cyril Burt, M.A., Psychologist, on Mental and Scholastic Tests, published by the London County Council. pp. xv x 482. 21/- net.

To the teacher of the defective child, the use of mental and intelligence tests as an aid both in the diagnosis of mental deficiency, and in the practical classification of children for teaching purposes, has become a commonplace. So widely indeed is the value of certain well-known scales for measuring intelligence accepted, that we are in considerable danger of forgetting their limitations and of attributing to them powers which they do not possess. Particularly is it too often forgotten that until the recent publication of Mr. Burt's Mental and Scholastic Tests we have had no translation or emendation of the Binet-Simon Scale,—still the foundation of practically all scales for use with individuals—properly standardised for English children. While admitting the essential importance of a standardised procedure in order to get comparable results we yet have used tests in which the very translation of the instructions given has made of the test itself a quite different thing. In standardising the Binet-Simon Scale, therefore, for English children, Mr. Burt has achieved a result of great service to all who have used this scale in the past or may use it or any of its revisions in the future.

Mr. Burt's book is in the form of three Memoranda. The first of these deals with the actual revision of the Binet-Simon Scale, including a discussion of the practical use of the method. Memorandum II. gives results of work done with the amended scale and discusses their theoretical validity. Memorandum III. gives certain standardised tests for educational attainment, including many tests specially designed for use with defective children together with a discussion on the need for such tests and their uses.

In his consideration of the practical use of Scales for measuring intelligence, in Memorandum I. Mr. Burt emphasizes the need for early recognition of ability or of disability, especially in cases where the variation of the individual from the norm is comparatively slight. The danger of classification on an age basis only or mainly has never been more clearly demonstrated. We recognise indeed more and more that we should "promote by attainment rather than by age and by ability rather than by attainment," yet in practice age is still the main basis of classification except with the very bright or very dull. The practical issue of such a situation is that teachers must themselves learn to test their children and to make use of the results so gained.

The actual scale of tests given in this Memorandum includes all those from Binet's 1908 and 1911 scales, with some few additions; 65 tests in all. The individual tests are modified as little as possible, only such changes as are essential for translation being made. Thus comparison with earlier results obtained by using the unrevised Binet-Simon scale is made possible.

The tests are arranged in order of increasing difficulty, on the basis of results given by some 3,000 London children, normals, defectives, and delinquents. The standardised methods of procedure for giving and for marking the tests are exactly given, together with suggested methods of entering and keeping the records, and the computation of the mental age from the results. All the materials needed are also included, or exactly described.

Memorandum II. as has been indicated, consists of a consideration of the theoretical validity of the results of the work carried out. A study of it is essential for a true grasp of the contents of the preceding memorandum, while everyone interested in the problem of mental deficiency will find here a wealth of material both in its facts and in its suggestions very worthy of consideration, especially when such problems as the education and the after-care of defective children is a point at issue.

The aim of the revision, to provide an improved scale for English children, the results of which can be compared with earlier results obtained from the Binet-Simon scale, together
with the method pursued to attain this aim, are exactly described. Especially interesting here is the number of assignments of the original Binet tests to ages different from those originally indicated. No less than 34 out of the 65 tests of the original scale have been found to need re-setting, a fact which must involve making large alterations in mental ages already found if they are to be as exact as possible; and which is also of the utmost importance in using Binet-Simon scales for the diagnosis of defect.

The findings with regard to the constancy of the intelligence quotient confirm the trend of opinion that it varies little in spite of favourable environment and therefore is especially significant in prognosis. While further light is thrown on the mentally defective condition when we are told that in general intelligence more than half the mentally defectives are equal to children in the ordinary schools—a fact from which Mr. Burt assumes that mental defect is a pathological and not a normal deviation from the average.

The suggestions made as to a line of demarcation for defect on the intelligence side, a matter badly in need of definition, are useful, although many may not agree with the idea of estimating the number of defectives as a percentage based on existing accommodation. It is probably, however, sufficiently satisfactory in London, where special school accommodation is provided for some 1.5% of the school population; that is, for all children with an intelligence quotient below 70.

Further points of interest are, the relations shown between the results of the tests and educational attainments, and the influence of educational attainments and opportunity on the tests themselves. The correlation between the results of the tests and educational attainment is high, but it shows nevertheless that the general tendency in school life is for the brighter children to be kept back to the level of the average. On the other hand, the tests themselves are shown to be considerably influenced by school knowledge. Readers interested in young delinquents will find suggestive hints for the prevention of delinquency in the section dealing with the relation between backwardness and misbehaviour.

Finally, the consideration of the diagnostic value of the scale is of great importance to all. Even with the emendations, the Binet-Simon scale is only moderately successful with normals as a test of general intelligence. In fulfilling its original purpose, however,—that is in helping in the diagnosis of defect, and also in helping in the selection of the dullest normals,—it is far more successful. As Mr. Burt admits, a new scale is needed, but until we have this there is no doubt that a revision of the old scale, standardised for English children can be of immense service,

An appendix to Memorandum II gives certain supplementary tests of intelligence, more suitable for the selection of super-normal children.

In Memorandum III Mr. Burt records the result of certain attempts made to standardise tests for the measurements of educational attainments as distinct from that of intelligence. That the two are not the same thing is clearly shown in his earlier discussion, and the importance of the distinction to the teacher of the mentally defective is obvious when we realise how often defect is shown in school work mainly, or even in it alone. The need for keeping a permanent record of the educational progress of each child is justly emphasised, and there can be no question that such a record would be of greater value if kept in terms of standardised tests than if it merely expressed the opinion of different individual teachers. A knowledge, in particular, of the special educational difficulties of each child such as these tests could give, would prevent much loss of time in school.

Tests are supplied for reading, arithmetic and spelling, while case-histories are given, showing clearly the possibilities of danger to the child of an unrecognised specific disability, which may well influence adversely and often unnecessarily its whole school career. Tables of norms for these tests are supplied, together with medium specimens by which such subjects as drawing, composition and writing may be judged.

Mr. Burt’s book would form a valuable addition to the Staff library of any school. In
the school for the mentally defective it is practically essential, for in its carefully established and recorded facts, and in its many valuable suggestions, it throws much light on some of the most vital problems faced by the teacher.

L.G.F.

"EDUCATION OF DEFECTIVES IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS." By Meta L. Anderson. Harrap & Co., Ltd. Price 5s.

"SCHOOL TRAINING OF DEFECTIVE CHILDREN." By Henry H. Goddard. Harrap & Co., Ltd. Price 7s. 6d.

One of the difficulties met by teachers taking up Special School work is the dearth of textbooks by means of which the experience of others would be placed at their disposal. As yet we have produced in this country only one or two such manuals, so we welcome especially this edition of Miss Anderson’s concise yet comprehensive monograph issued some three years ago in America and now made more easily obtainable in England. While not attempting to give such details of method as should be already in the possession of the efficient teacher of normal children—and none others should take up Special School work—the book will be of great value in helping such teachers to take up the right attitude in dealing with feeble-minded children and in showing where to leave the beaten paths of elementary school methods.

It may be noted that Miss Anderson advocates that, beyond the kindergarten stage, the Special School should, where possible, be organised on the departmental plan, having ‘subject’ rooms, each in charge of a specially qualified teacher, every child spending one period in each room per day. The ‘subjects’ are (1) housework of all kinds (2) wood-work; (3) manual work including basketry, brush-making, weaving and sewing; (4) physical training and music and (5) academic work along with nature study and speech-training.

There is much to be said in favour of this arrangement though it might lead to the ‘subject’ becoming more important than the all-round development of the individual pupil, a condition of things sometimes to be met with in our Secondary Schools.

A simplified form of the educational record chart given on page 7 (similar to those in Burt’s Memorandum on Educational Abilities) might well be incorporated in the records of progress kept in our Special Schools, the graphs for successive years being entered in different colours. We need everything that will help us, as this does, to have a clear understanding of the individual pupil, his attainments and possibilities.

It is encouraging to find that while speech training is emphasised, academic work is relegated to its right place. The survey of occupations suitable for defectives (Chapter 6) and the selections from after-school records (Chapter 7) should be of interest to social workers as well as to teachers. Again and again throughout the volume we meet the injunction ‘Begin where the child is,’—simple but so often forgotten. When the parent, the teacher and the State each do this then will the outlook be more hopeful than at present, for only then can we tackle successfully the problems of home, school and after-care.

School Training of Defective Children is a re-issue by Harrap and Co., of the Report on the Ungraded Classes for Defective Children in New York, drawn up by Dr. Goddard about ten years ago. Many of the criticisms put forward could be directed at our present-day half-hearted methods of dealing with the feeble-minded in our midst. We would recommend this volume to any educational administrators, social workers and teachers to whom it may not be already known, dealing as it does with all aspects of the problem.

E.L.S.R.