

FIRST WEEKS IN
LONDON.MENTAL TESTS AND THEIR
APPLICATION.

III.—By E. Allen.

There are many signs that the application of mental tests is a coming thing. The great success of the tests applied in America during the war has been one of the chief reasons of their being brought into general favour. Or rather, it has brought them into popular knowledge, and has made the more careful applying of their efficacy the duty of scientists. For the first time in London at University College, all undergraduates were asked to submit themselves to a mental test before entering upon their year's work. The tests were group tests, of course. Mental testing should be individually applied; at the same time group tests may be of interest. They may be as much for the enlightenment of the staff as of the students. But the results will be watched with some keenness, especially no doubt, by those who planned the type of test applied. By the courtesy of Professor Spearman I was present at the beginning of these tests. There was no little excitement among the young students, and no little restiveness at the idea of going to some kind of examination for which there was no preparation to be done. They could be heard in the hall indulging in all kinds of jeering remarks and defending themselves in advance from the judgments which should be based upon them. There is a very wide hall of entrance at University College, with big tables piled with forms of various kinds, and beadies to direct the nervous stream of newcomers. Of one of these beadies I enquired where the tests were to be held. I followed the directions next day when the hour arrived, only to find myself in an empty theatre, and had to find my way back and begin again. At last, however, I was in the right place. It was a large hall capable of holding a good many hundred students, and there were to be two sets of them. So that the first thing that they saw was a request not to speak of the nature of the tests until the following day.

—Black, White, and Yellow.—

There were present several professors and people interested in the experiment, the supervisors who had to distribute the papers, the secretary who had charge of the signals and the time indicator, and the students. Among the latter the large number of Chinese and Indian students was a very noticeable feature. And I noticed one African, jet black. One wondered what impression the arrangements made upon these foreigners, and whether tests devised for English students would be of much use for these impassive dark men. But at last all were in their place and the supervisors began to distribute the thick batches of papers, each with instructions and answer sheet attached.

The entire test was to last about two hours. For the earlier tests the time limit was rigidly kept and evidently part of the test was the ability to concentrate quickly upon a given subject and seize immediately the requirement of the moment. The following day proceedings were repeated with a few differences in management and distribution, that the experience of the day before had suggested.

—Nerves.—

I noticed one unfortunate student who was saying over every answer before he wrote it. One does not wonder that the expression of distress increased with the minutes, until, if he could have been filmed as an example of anxiety, he could have made his fortune. What a pity that so many of us choose callings in which our brightest genius has no chance of recognition! And alas! What a melancholy comment, when the very subject is that testing which aims at discovering our right sphere.

It was also a very good vantage ground for studying the feminine coiffure. Many of the sweet young things had their hair parted at back, plaited in two tails, and then coiled over either ear, and right on to the cheek. There are still a good many with their hair bobbed, but it is a fashion that seems to be on the wane.

By this time the tests are well on to the second part. Here the tests are a different kind. The bell rings less seldom, some faces look less agonized, others more befogged than ever. The professors whisper together, the supervisors yawn. Even mental tests have their comic side.