

INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY FOR FOREMEN

The New Techniques for Supervisors and Foremen

By Prof. Albert Walton. Pp. vi+233. (New York and London: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1940.) 17s. 6d.

THIS is a remarkable book written by an author of remarkable experience. "The new techniques" which it describes, in elementary fashion, are those of industrial psychology. "Management," he says, "faced with the absolute necessity of adopting the new techniques" crudely employed by the early efficiency engineers in the United States, "yet finding that their introduction was always the signal for labor troubles, finally recognized that the problem was, in its essence, a psychological one. They turned to the university psychologists and asked them what could be done about it. Bred in the cloistered peace and quiet of their campus laboratories, these psychologists were not of much assistance. They had no experience in the workaday world, and most of them were not inclined to venture into it to attack the monumental problem which they had been asked to solve. Here and there a bolder spirit was found who could see not only the tremendous interest which might be aroused by work in the field but the vital necessity for finding a solution. . . . A few pioneers took up the work and soon found they had entered a rich field in resources and awaiting only careful research to yield a wealth of practical values not only to the industry but to general psychology itself" (pp. 104-5).

Prof. Walton was not one of these academic psychologists. He was more than forty-five years old when he entered the University of Washington in Seattle as an undergraduate student in psychology. He had, when a youth, graduated at Cornell as a mechanical engineer, after which he was engaged for twenty-five years, he tells us, "in the field of industrial engineering, part of the time with such organisations as Westinghouse and General Electric, . . . and part of the time as a consulting industrial engineer with my own office and private practice" (p. 1). He regarded his new career of a psychologist as one "in which age would be no barrier but rather an advantage". From Seattle, after taking his master's degree, Prof. Walton proceeded to Stanford University where he taught classes in psychology, took his doctor's degree, and then served as instructor in psychology, until he accepted his present post of assistant

professor at the Pennsylvania State College. Here he has been teaching industrial psychology in "foreman training classes in the various industrial plants around Philadelphia and the territory within a hundred miles of the city" (p. 3). Thus he "came into the field of psychology after a quarter of a century in the active world of industry, looking", as he says, "for something usable, something that I could apply to my own situation" (p. 3). The present volume virtually contains what was covered by this course in industrial psychology for foremen, and concludes with an appendix giving notes of supplementary discussions attended by those who had already been through the earlier course.

There are many details in this book with which the 'pure' psychologist may not agree. He will object to the definition of psychology as "the study of the mind, which is what we think with" (p. 8); but the author fully realizes the important part played by the feelings, drives, motives and by what he calls "intents". He will object to the statement—"The only way we know anything about the mind is by what the body does" (p. 11); but the author is clearly far from being an extreme 'behaviourist', for although he urges that "interviewing is not a satisfactory way of securing an estimate of a man's abilities" (p. 19), possessing, as it does, the weakness of allover 'subjective' methods of investigation, he concedes later that "in no test program with which we are familiar has it been proposed to do away with the interview entirely and to place sole responsibility on tests. The test is to serve as an aid to the personnel department and to the supervisor" (p. 66). The psychologist may also cavil at the statement that instinctive reactions "and a few reflexes are all the child has at the outset. All else is learned" (p. 26), and at the exaggerated distinction drawn between what is innate and what is acquired. But it becomes clear that this and many other criticisms arise mainly from the need for extreme simplicity of initial statement, having regard to the previous education of those whom the author is addressing.

It is from this point of view that the book should be judged; and no fair critic can read it without admiration and appreciation of its almost perfect fitness for its purpose. It should be read by every progressive departmental manager and intelligent foreman in English-speaking countries.

C. S. MYERS.