

# WHY SOME CHILDREN ARE ALWAYS LAZY

## Experts Have Made a Study of This Familiar Weakness in Childhood and Suggest a Cure.

A FRENCHMAN, M. Laumoier, has been interesting Paris with his study of the causes of "laziness" among school children. This gentleman claims that the greater part of what passes among children for lack of ambition to learn is nothing less than the result of poor physique. Bad nourishment, whether it takes the form of too little or too much to eat, ailments of the throat and nose that interfere with proper breathing, inherited troubles, are, he says, at the bottom of most school failures.

The most interesting part of Dr. Laumoier's investigations have been those into the heredity of the children. He took twenty-seven children, not a large number, but the task was one of peculiar difficulty.

He found that twenty-two, or 80 per cent. of this number, came of parents who suffered in a marked degree from some of the so-called minor troubles, such as rheumatism, excessive fat, and so on. He did not take any child whose parentage was obviously bad, physically—that is, none whose father or mother had a pronounced "serious" ailment.

His conclusion was that before any child was condemned by his teachers as lazy his physical condition must be thoroughly tested, and he indorsed emphatically the movement toward fresh air classes and the new school hygiene generally.

A somewhat similar study was made in New York a short time ago by the Russell Sage Foundation. It was found that children with physical defects were slower at their studies than the normal child.

The one exception was in the case of children with defective vision. This seemed no drawback, but everything else, including defective teeth, retarded the child.

The exception in favor of defective eyesight may be readily enough explained. Poor vision is a handicap, and many a child is retarded by it, but on the other hand, many bright children have injured their eyes by overstudy, and the high average of these makes up for the poor showing of the others.

Classifying the results of the Sage investigation it is found that if one takes eight years as the length of time a normal child will require to complete the eight school grades children with physical defects will take the course in the following number of years: Defective vision, eight years, like the child without defects; defective teeth, 8.5 years; defect-

ive breathing, 8.6 years; hypertrophied tonsils, 8.7 years; adenoids, 9.1 years; enlarged glands, 9.2 years.

The unfortunate child who has enlarged glands or adenoids has not a fair chance in competition with his absolutely normal schoolmates.

The best of the many studies that have been made on this and related questions comes from Germany—as might be expected. Dr. Gaspar of Stuttgart endeavored to find the relation between physical defects and malnutrition and obtained some very valuable statistics which have been translated into figures which the lay mind can grasp.

This matter of malnutrition is now exercising the minds of educators in this country and for a considerable period has had careful consideration in Europe. Over here the methods employed to determine whether or not a child is ill-nourished are less good than those Dr. Gaspar was able to use.

It may be said that no such thorough study of the question has ever been made. The doctor took thirteen of the commonest diseases of the ear, eye, scalp, heart, and so on, and his investigations may be thus summarized: Of well-nourished children 19 per cent had physical defects; of fairly nourished, 39 per cent.; of fairly

nourished who suffered from anaemia, 45 per cent.; of poorly nourished, 62 per cent.; of poorly nourished suffering with anaemia, 79 per cent.

This table, based on evidence collected in the most scientific manner, shows clearly the relation between physical defects and malnutrition. Here is another one, from Liverpool, showing the difference in height and weight between the children of well-to-do parents and those of the poor:

	Age of 7 Years.		Age of 14 Years.	
	H'g't.	Wt.	H'g't.	Wt.
	Ft.	Lbs.	Ft.	Lbs.
Wealthy .....	3.12	49	5.75	94.33
Poor .....	3.80	43	4.70	71.00

This table is eloquent of the harm done by poor feeding and early work to the children of the poor.

Now we come to the great question, How large a proportion of the children in the public schools are underfed? There have been many differing estimates. In Europe, where the matter has been thrashed out for a longer period and in a more thorough way than has been the case in America, it has been found necessary to supply a very large number of school children with food.

The London County Council took the matter up very seriously after the recruiting returns at the time of the Boer war had shown the amazing physical degeneration of the British people. It will be remembered that only two out of five of the applicants at the recruiting stations were able to pass requirements that had not in the past been considered too high, and the standard had to be materially lowered in order to get soldiers for the war.

The County Council spent \$311,000 on food for school children during the year 1909-10, supplying more than 7,700,000 free meals. The condition of the parents is carefully ascertained before free lunches are given, and the cost of the food is charged against them, to be paid if possible and collected by law if the parents were found to have been able to pay while they were taking free lunches for their children.

But in spite of careful watching only six such prosecutions have been found to be necessary; only six cases, that is, out of the 47,000 attended to were impositions. The other 46,994 simply could not feed their children properly.

At Bradford, England, these experiments have been very carefully carried on. Forty children of the very poor were fed with two meals a day for three months and weighed carefully.

Forty children of the same class were weighed and not fed. The children dependent on home meals gained on the average one ounce a week—a yearly gain of three pounds and four ounces.

The children who were fed at school gained six ounces a week—a yearly gain of nineteen and a half pounds. During a holiday of ten days the children who were fed lost a pound each in weight.

In this country there have been many estimates of the number of underfed children in the schools. They range from 300,000 to 1,500,000.