The Legibility of Type

The Special Report recently issued by the Medical Research Council, which is noticed in this number of our journal has already attracted considerable attention. It has been the subject of a leading article in The Times, an article which resembles many of the reviews of The Times Literary Supplement in being more concerned with the views of the writer than with those of the author of the report. If Mr. Pyke, to whom the research was entrusted has not succeeded in solving a problem which is largely psychological and therefore not capable of accurate physical measurement, he has, at any rate, for the first time laid down clear definitions and criteria for the use of future workers on the subject. He has devoted no less than two pages to the definition of legibility and has not said one word too much on a very abstruse subject. None of us reads quite in the same manner; moreover, every individual reads differently according to the purpose for which he is reading. The print of many private presses, specially designed to conform with ill-founded canons of artistic printing, are atrociously illegible, partly on account of bizarre types and partly on account of bad spacing. The primary function of print is utilitarian, and it is a crime to make legibility subservient to false aesthetics.

We published in the last number an account of a careful research into the use of letters as test-types. Here only upper-case letters are dealt with and the problem, although again largely psychological, is quite different. The educated reader is only concerned with the legibility of individual letters when engaged in the study of a foreign language, or, horresco referens, such occupations as proof-reading. Ordinary reading is done in spaces of varying length, depending on the reader's intelligence and knowledge of his subject. This does not mean that in any research on legibility the nature of the component letters can be neglected. On the contrary, it is essential that a preliminary investigation should be made on the accuracy with which lower-case letters of various founts can be recognized.

Our readers will be pleased to note that so far as the present research has gone the type in ordinary use comes well out of the test.

The Cataract Section

Speaking for ourselves, we never set out to perform an extraction of cataract without thinking of the tailor of Laputa who was commissioned to make Mr. Lemuel Gulliver a suit of clothes. "This operator did his office after a different manner