

# DR. KONIG ON MENTAL CARE

## 'Train retarded child early'

DR. KARL KÖNIG, world-renowned child psychologist, said in Port Elizabeth this afternoon that if all mentally defective children were given proper care early in life, mental hospitals might be empty in about 60 years.

He advocated the introduction of schemes all over the world to create a social setting where such children could learn to live and work "as proper human beings".

Dr. König, who is the Medical Superintendent of the Rudolf Steiner School for Retarded Children at Aberdeen, Scotland, was the guest speaker at a Rotary lunch.

He said the percentage of retarded children had grown "immensely" all over the world in the last 30 or 40 years.

The basic causes of the problem had not been investigated properly so far. More should be done in investigating what was wrong with these children and why their numbers were increasing.

### Years wasted

The usual reaction of parents was to hide a retarded child away from friends and relatives. As a result the first few years in the life of such a child was usually wasted, while valuable work could have been done to train and help him.

"There is hardly anything worse than calling such a child a 'mental defective'," said Dr. König. This caused a stigma which might remain with the child for the rest of his life.

"If you help them you will see how, under your hands, they open up. Underneath what is termed imbeciles and idiots, you will find a wonderful human being."

Mental hospitals all over the world were overcrowded. The reason for this was that the hospitals were filled with adult mental cases who became so because they were termed defective when they were two or three years old.

"If we take these children, train them, give them a proper social surrounding, the mental hospitals might be empty in the next 40 or 60 years," said Dr. König.

The majority of mentally defective children develop if given proper care in their earliest years. But they should be correctly diagnosed. At present not enough care is given in diagnosis, Dr. König said.