

Psychology in the University
G. S. Brett (1922)

Classics in the History of Psychology

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During the last fifty years a process of development has brought about the complete transformation of what used to be called mental philosophy. The sciences of the nineteenth century grew rapidly and consequently tended to continual re-organization; one after another new fields were marked off and given fresh boundaries; such terms as physiology, biology, psychophysics, physiological psychology, and psychobiology are landmarks in the process of this expansion and organization of knowledge. As the words suggest, there has been throughout a degree of overlapping, or more correctly persistent vital connection between or department, and another. The founders of modern psychology were descendants some more ancient and honourable line, and the science they constructed was based on other sciences already more highly developed.

These historical facts are recognizable in the problems of organization which have to be faced by a department of Psychology. If the department looks forward to producing really competent psychologists it must receive students who have an adequate [p. 299] knowledge of Physics, Physiology, Neurology, and Biology. A complete equipment in all these branches can rarely be expected, but with a good elementary training the student can adapt himself to his subject by specializing in that aspect of Psychology for which he finds himself best trained and best fitted by nature.

The specialist in Psychology must, of course, be a graduate student. Specialization in a field of this kind is not to be expected or desired before the student has had time to lay a broad and firm foundation in the sciences with which he must always retain some connection. But from the point of view of instruction there are many grades to be considered, and as an element in the whole machinery of the University a course in Psychology serves many purposes. So far as the resources permit all these purposes have been kept in mind when the curriculum of the department has been framed. The result is sufficiently complex and need not be described in detail, but a summary of the main points will show the extent and importance of the work now undertaken.

In this, as in other departments, the lowest stratum is the instruction offered as part of the General Course. In view of the present popularity of the subject, the innumerable interests which have or pretend to have a psychological aspect, and the fact that even the most casual reader of current literature must know something of the use or abuse of psychological terms, it is necessary to provide a broad general survey of the field of Psychology and an opportunity to learn the grammar of the subject. A course of this kind may be taken by those who have no intention of continuing the subject, and serves also for others who may require to continue it in certain limited fields. This type of instruction is specially adapted, in fact, to students of the General Course, to teachers, and to miscellaneous groups such as may from time to time be formed for special purposes. During the current year courses of this description, with special adaptation as required, have been given to the extra-mural University Classes at the Central Y.M.C.A. and in the Short Course for Farmers conducted at the University.

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Until recently Psychology was a sub-division of Philosophy. This was the traditional connection, and so long as the subject remained "mental philosophy" it was a natural relationship. At the present time there is no advantage in the connection beyond the fact that it keeps alive the tradition; the philosopher of course needs Psychology and psychologists frequently stand in need of some Philosophy, but to that extent every subject needs to be supplemented. The decisive factor is the direction in which growth is to be expected and in the case of Psychology that direction is toward experimental laboratory work, study of individual character, analysis of social and industrial problems, and specific work in the sphere of abnormal Psychology.

Through the development of these phases psychology has gradually become a distinct factor in many forms of training, in addition to the training of the psychologist himself in the "pure sciences" of his subject. This is particularly true of all courses for training social workers; similarly it is true for medical training, and those who look forward to the organization and control of workers in almost every sphere of labour are becoming more certain that help can be derived from a knowledge of the mental aspects of behaviour.

At present the work in Psychology is growing steadily under the pressure of demands from all these different sources. In addition to the general training mentioned above, there is a special course in Psychology; there is also a large enrolment of medical students who elect Psychology as an option in their course; there is a compulsory course for all medical students of the third year; there is daily clinical work through which the department assists the work of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene and the work of the Juvenile Courts; there is also the research work which has to be carried on when possible, though obviously this programme leaves little opportunity for anything outside the routine. Here as everywhere in the University there is continual demand for expansion, but neither staff nor premises can be taxed beyond their limits. The premises include a block of rooms in the north-west portion of the Main Building, with the old Dining Hall as a specially equipped lecture room for demonstrations before the larger classes. The laboratory equipment and special experimental [p. 300] rooms have been distributed over the third floor above the clinic and lecture rooms and are under Professor Bott's direction. The courses in abnormal Psychology and the clinical work are managed by Professor J. W. Bridges who came to the University last year from the State University of Columbus, Ohio. Professor Bridges is a graduate of McGill and of Harvard; he has had experience in teaching and in the methods of psychological work as applied in the United States to the army and to the general problems of personnel. In coming to Canada, Professor Bridges was returning to his native land. The work in the Social Service Department has been carried on by Miss K. M. Banham who was also appointed last year; her training at Cambridge and at Manchester under the best English teachers, together with her experience in teaching, has made Miss Banham's work exceptionally valuable to the department. While the regular staff is limited to three and there is a recognized sphere of work for each member of the staff, the success of the work has been due very largely to the co-operation of the individuals and to the willingness with which they have submitted to conditions which require self-sacrifice. People who never teach probably never understand that the most irksome part of that occupation is the necessity of abandoning the work with advanced students, where obvious results are obtainable, in order to assist in routine work for which a subordinate staff should be provided. The present resources are drawn upon to their full capacity. A request for additional courses of any kind can be met only by finding additional helpers. A crisis of this kind arose when the Farmers' Course required lectures in Psychology, and the department can take this opportunity to thank Dr C. M. Hincks for his willingness to help and the excellent way in which he conducted that course.

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