

PREFACE

*THE history of psychology in America has never been written. In an address delivered in 1898, J. M. Cattell asserted that "the history of psychology here prior to 1880 could be set forth as briefly as the alleged chapter on snakes in a certain natural history of Iceland—"There are no snakes in Iceland."*¹ *The neatness of the witticism and the authority of the speaker, combined with the general reticence of the historians of psychology,*² *has contrived to invest some two hundred and fifty years of American thought with the obscurity of the dark ages. J. Mark Baldwin, quoted literally by the German historian Klemm, remarks that "early American psychology was written by theologians or educators or both in the same person,"*³ *and dismisses it with this laconic note. In a half dozen pages of his valuable and scholarly three-volume work, G. S. Brett manages to single out the least important things in early American psychology for supercilious comment, pokes fun at authors whose works were never referred to by any of their compatriots, and misses all the significant events of the rich and varied American past. W. B. Pillsbury allows three pages to the period, while E. G. Boring intentionally limits his profound study to the history of experimental psychology, and J. C. Flugel restricts his treatment to the last hundred years. In 1929, Gardner Murphy re-echoes the general impression in his statement that "prior to 1880, the only important Ameri-*

can contributions were a few articles by James during the decade of the 'seventies.'"⁴

The neglect of the period by historians of psychology is further aggravated by the absorbing current interest in what is called "scientific psychology," and by a corresponding antipathy to anything that smacks of philosophy. This prejudice against speculative philosophy has not operated to prevent genuine historical scholarship in European psychology, and should not be allowed to stifle research into the development of psychology on American soil, where the early attempts at a science of the human mind were no more metaphysical than the contemporary essays in Great Britain and on the continent of Europe.

*Interesting and significant studies have been made in early American philosophy, but such authorities as M. M. Curtis, A. L. Jones, L. van Becelaere, I. Woodbridge Riley, and H. S. Townsend have failed to lay any particular stress on the evolution of psychological ideas.*⁵

Psychology in the strict etymological sense of the "science of the soul" is defunct. It was moribund in 1886, when John Dewey defined psychology as "the science of the facts or phenomena of self,"⁶ although in the same year James McCosh, and two years later, David Jayne Hill, made the last desperate effort to maintain the original definition. It was dead and buried in 1890, when William James consecrated a chapter in his epoch-making work to the passing of the soul. The "psyche" lingers on in a single anachronistic work, "Maher's Psychology," the standard text in the Catholic schools, in which Father Maher claims to represent a psychology "that has already survived four and twenty centuries, and has had more influence on human thought and human language than all

other psychologies together.”⁷ The discipline which has replaced the old psychology is still in its birth throes. It is clearly a biological science with strong leanings towards physiology and neurology. It repudiates its philosophical antecedents, but, like metaphysics and unlike other sciences, it is marked by a division into warring sects. The present situation is so chaotic that recent surveys of the schools, such as those of R. S. Woodworth, C. E. Ragsdale and Edna Heidbreder, attempt to untangle the maze with obvious strain and with indifferent success.⁸

The new science is not coterminous with the old. It has put objective and experimental methods to work in a limited portion of the field occupied by the obsolete philosophical psychology. For the rest, it has evaded problems of vital importance that cannot be met by its technique, or has frankly taken over terms, data, and conclusions without realizing it, or at least without acknowledging its obligations. This becomes increasingly clear as one studies the contributions of the early American psychology.

The title of the present study indicates its limits. It definitely terminates with the publication of James' "Principles of Psychology" in 1890. Up to this point the essential facts in the development of American psychology are presented and evaluated in the light of contemporary European psychology, and not according to criteria set up by the science of today with essentially different aims, techniques and objectives.

It should be noted that the term "American Psychology" is chosen for its convenience to indicate psychology in America, and especially psychology as developed by American writers. It does not imply that psychology has any national peculiarities. In the same way, "American"

will be understood to refer to the British colonies in North America, and later to the United States.

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