

Obituary

C. A. MACE, M.A., D.Lit., F.B.Ps.S. (1894-1971)

Emeritus Professor, University of London; first Professor of Psychology, Birkbeck College

Professor Alec Mace died on 7 June 1971, at the age of 76. It would appear from things that have been said and written since his death that a large number of psychologists in this country have become more fully aware of the great influence he had had on their own lives and thoughts. One would expect the study of psychology to enlarge the humanity of the student but so often the pursuit of false goals — scientism, publish-or-perish values, gadgetry for its own sake, pseudo high-poweredness—makes for narrowness and intolerance. Alec Mace enabled people to keep their faith and interest in a psychology that might some day add to human happiness: and by his own great humanity and good humour made them proud to be associated with the body of scholars who regarded the study of psychology as a worthwhile enterprise. As Rex Knight said, in his introduction to the symposium edited by Vida Carver at the time of Professor Mace's retirement (C. A. Mace: *a Symposium*. Methuen and Pelican, 1962): 'A prominent feature of Mace's work in psychology is that he has always enjoyed it. He is not one of those dons who have long been bored with their subject; and he is not one of those psychologists whose concern with psychology is tense and defensive.'

Alec Mace's influence as a psychologist is not to be discerned in a major advance in a particular problem area, but in the illumination of many problems in an astonishingly wide range of concern. Perhaps among academic psychologists he was most often thought of as a philosophical psychologist, such are the strange classifications we engender. That meant that he was able to take the large view about such questions as the naturalistic origins of values, and the characteristics of the various aspects of behaviourism. He contributed more directly to the history of psychology by his collaboration with G. F. Stout in writing the article on psychology in the 14th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1929) and by his revision of Stout's *Manual of Psychology* (1938). Previous to that he had

written *The Principles of Logic* (1933). But Mace's 'philosophical' psychology had as a major objective the clarification of the status of psychology as an empirical science dealing with objective reality; and some of his own philosophical inquiries became invested in a series of experiments on incentives sponsored by the Industrial Health Research Board (*Incentives: Some Experimental Studies*, 1935). His first book, *Sybill: or the Revival of Prophecy* (1927), was to some extent presaging this facility to move from the larger themes of human endeavour to their realization in work settings. His Honorary Directorship of the MRC's Building Research Unit; his membership of the Anglo-American Productivity Team which crossed the Atlantic to study management practices; his various activities in Civil Service selection and the like, which stimulated the book on interviewing that he was writing at the time of his death (which characteristically was examining the interview situation from the victim's point of view) all demonstrated not only concern for human affairs, but also the tendency to apply to them the same tools of inquiry, the same care in conceptual analysis, as to more generalized themes. Professor Mace was one of the only two people to have been president of both the Aristotelian Society and the British Psychological Society: he was also at various times chairman of no fewer than three of the Sections of the latter society, marking his contribution to educational, industrial and social psychology.

Alec Mace's influence as a teacher is, by now, world wide. The revision of his *Psychology of Study* has become a best-seller, delighting and profiting students of many kinds. His elegant prose style graces many editorial prefaces from when he was General Editor of the Pelican Psychology series and of Methuen's Manuals of Modern Psychology. Two university departments of psychology, Nottingham and St Andrews, were introduced by him to laboratory experimental psychology. He was Reader at Bedford College before accepting the Chair of Psychology at Birkbeck,

a department which, under his benevolent leadership, grew very large and fruitful of psychologists to disseminate his influence. All who were able to profit from his seminars will remember well his shrewd appraisals of matters psychological, his ability to think aloud and to illustrate his thought with arresting and unlikely examples. Occasionally he would be sardonic, but never at anyone's expense. His readiness to savour every idea, follow through every line of thought, accept any colleague, any student, as someone certain to be well-meaning, however apparently charlatanical, made his seventeen years as head of the Birkbeck department a joyous time for all who came under his urbane spell. It was an atmo-

sphere that facilitated thought and inquiry; although it is disconcerting the way one finds, when reading Alec Mace's writings, how much of one's cherished new thoughts must have been picked up from him.

Alec Mace shared with his department, as with everyone he encountered, his great gifts, his enormous sense of fun, his happiness and to some degree the wife and sons who contributed so greatly to that happiness. Those of us who were privileged to be part of his larger family will long mourn a generous spirit and a man of very great charm.

THELMA VENESS

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