

SIXTY YEARS OF PSYCHOLOGY*

By PROFESSOR L. S. HEARNshaw, Department of Psychology,
University of Liverpool

I

We are met together today for the special purpose of celebrating the founding of the British Psychological Society sixty years ago. Ten persons, under the chairmanship of Professor Sully, met together at University College London on 24 October 1901 and decided to form a society for discussion of psychological problems. Our archivist, Mr. Kenna, has so recently displayed in this city the photographs of our nine founding fathers and one founding mother and has outlined their biographies and achievements, that it is unnecessary for me to list their names and catalogue their claims to our remembrance. Some like Rivers, McDougall and Mott will be permanently remembered for their important contributions to psychology and psychiatry. In Liverpool we particularly recall W. G. Smith as our first lecturer in psychology appointed in 1905 to assist Professor Sherrington in his courses on "psycho-physiology". He was only here a year before he moved on to start the George Combe Laboratory at Edinburgh; and we cannot claim any direct link here today either with Smith, or through him with Wundt and the world's first laboratory for experimental psychology at Leipzig. But we can say that Liverpool was, through Smith, the first of the provincial Universities to be closely associated with the British Psychological Society.

A special word should perhaps be added about Sully, who chaired the initial meeting in 1901. Declining health prevented him from playing any large part in the development of the society he helped to found. He retired from the Grote Chair of Mind and Logic at University College in 1903, and went to live for a time in Italy. Though not very forceful, he was very charming and very learned. His textbooks were extremely thorough—in my view they are the most comprehensive and balanced textbooks of psychology ever produced in this country, and they were much used even in American Universities around the turn of the century. Sully was not only a very scholarly person, he was also a very sociable person and moved freely in cultural circles. He was, or had been, on intimate terms not only with leading scientific and philosophical figures, Darwin, Huxley, Tylor, Hughlings Jackson, Bain, G. H. Lewes, Ward, but also with many literary men, Meredith, R. L. Stevenson and others. He had many links with Continental scholars, having studied in Germany, and when the Second International Congress of Psychology met in London in 1892, Sully was joint secretary with F. W. H. Myers, the psychic researcher. Sully's interests were wide; he was a keen musician and devoted much time to the psychological and philosophical problems

* Based on a paper given to the Northern Branch of the British Psychological Society at a meeting in Liverpool on 14 October 1961, to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of the foundation of the Society.

of aesthetics. His first book incidentally was entitled just *Pessimism* and was a study of the German philosophy of pessimism. This book is said to have lost Sully the chair of philosophy at the University College of Liverpool, for which he was a short-listed candidate in 1883. The largely lay selection committee considered that the author of a tome on pessimism must to some extent be pessimistically inclined; which would hardly do for a then infant University College. Sully's most lasting claims to fame, however, are his pioneer work in child psychology and his role in establishing the British Association for Child Study in 1893; his setting up of the experimental laboratory at University College London in 1897; and then, of course, the part he played in the formation of our own society. Though he lacked the brilliance of Galton or the forceful personality of McDougall, Sully was a key figure in the development of psychology in this country, and it is proper that we should, on this occasion, pay our respects to his memory.

It is interesting, though perhaps not altogether profitable, to speculate as to what brought about the foundation of the Society in October 1901. Psychology as a separate scientific discipline had just begun to show signs of life: small laboratories had been started in 1897 in London and Cambridge. The return of Rivers, McDougall and C. S. Myers from the famous Torres Straits expedition in 1900 and the completion of the first considerable piece of co-operative psychological field research must have made quite an impact. I often wonder, too, whether the death of Queen Victoria on 22 January 1901, through its effect on the social climate, was in some obscure way partly responsible for our Society being born when it was. An epoch had closed; social inhibitions were relaxed; and anxieties about the future were beginning to trouble thoughtful minds. Could psychology and the human sciences help to resolve some of the doubts about man and society that began to seem more menacing now the great mother figure had gone? I would not press these speculations too far. The psychology the Society was founded to study was for the most part a cool academic subject with few immediate applications. Its later and more controversial manifestations were only just on the point of emerging. Intelligence tests were in a purely experimental stage, and had hardly left the laboratory. Psychoanalysis was known only to a handful of persons in Great Britain. F. W. H. Myers, the first to speak about Freud's work in this country, died five days before Queen Victoria, in January 1901; Havelock Ellis, who early became acquainted with psychoanalysis, was all his life essentially a recluse, and his books on the psychology of sex were not readily available in this country even to psychologists, much less as general bedside reading. Ernest Jones in 1901 was still a medical student and analytically a virgin. Psychology was still half philosophical with experimental and comparative appendices. The British Psychological Society was in its origins essentially a learned society not greatly concerned with applications and in no way a professional organization, for the obvious reason that there were as yet no professional psychologists to organize. And perhaps one of the main reasons for its birth in 1901 was, as Professor Cohen showed in his article on the "Natural History of

Learned and Scientific Societies" (Cohen, J., Hansel, C. E. M., and May, Edith (1954), *Nature*, 173, that the period round the turn of the century was fertile in the birth of such societies.

The learned society in its present form was largely a nineteenth-century creation. Older and more venerable institutions like the Royal Society (founded 1660) and the Linnaean Society (founded 1788) had originally a strongly amateur flavour, and the earliest of the more specialized societies were in those observational branches of science such as astronomy, geology and meteorology to which amateurs could make effective contributions. By the end of the century, however, the continents of knowledge had been pretty extensively colonized by learned societies, and these societies had become more specialized in character. The establishment of a psychological society in the opening year of the twentieth century was in a sense a natural development of the emancipation of psychology from philosophy, and the new breed of psychological specialists, working in laboratories, which however small, possessed an identity of their own. In doing so Great Britain, of course, was not first in the field. In the development of psychology we have for at least seventy years lagged behind the United States. The American Psychological Society was established in 1892, nine years before our own society; the *American Journal of Psychology* began publication in 1887, seventeen years before the *British Journal*. There is no doubt that the United States has provided far more fertile ground for the development of psychology than Great Britain. It is not merely that more money has been available, but that as Boring would have it the local *Zeitgeist* has been more propitious. In the circumstances it was a remarkable achievement to have brought the British Psychological Society into existence as early as 1901. It is perhaps worth recalling that the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Psychologie* was not established until 1903, in spite of the far greater scale of German psychological research.

It was indeed an act of faith on the part of our founding fathers to start the British Psychological Society in 1901. There was only one partly psychological chair in any British University, the Grote Chair of Mind and Logic at University College London. There were two very small laboratories, both established in 1897, in Cambridge and at University College, both then in single rooms. There was the Anderson Lectureship in comparative psychology at Aberdeen, established in 1896; and the Wilde Readership at Oxford, established in 1898. The first holder of each of these posts was G. F. Stout, whose interests were essentially theoretical. Though his first few books were about psychology, his last book was about God, and in fact his godward journey commenced quite early. So Stout did not greatly mind that the terms of his appointment at Oxford precluded experimentation. His successor McDougall did, and ingeniously got round the ban by experimenting in his ample spare time in the physiological laboratory. In 1901 these posts were all there were. It was a slender academic basis on which to start a learned society, and, of course, it would not have been possible but for the support of psychologically minded philosophers, educationists, physiologists, medical men and others. Until after World War I the Society remained small—its

membership in 1914 was seventy-nine, in 1918, ninety-eight—and it remained exclusive, membership being confined to those engaged in work of a broadly psychological nature.

II

The faith of the pioneers was justified: the Society still lives. Indeed it has vastly expanded: its membership stands at well over 2,500. There are seven regional branches, two oversea branches, four sections, and two professional divisions. The Society runs five journals, and is about to start another; publishes monographs and circulates to members and student subscribers a monthly appointments memorandum. It is the undisputed nuclear organization to which the majority of British psychologists belong, and which represents them and their interests within Great Britain and internationally. All this is a cause for congratulation and jubilation, and no doubt we are justified in this branch in holding a special meeting today, and the Society as a whole is justified in holding a Diamond Jubilee Dinner in London next week. A great deal of progress has been made by psychology in this country not only quantitatively but also qualitatively, and in this progress the Society through its meetings, journals, committees and representations has played a notable part.

To convince oneself that psychology has progressed in techniques, methodology and conceptualization it is only necessary to pick up some of the books current and highly valued in the early years of the Society. Glance, for example, at Shand's *Foundations of Character* (1914). Dr. A. F. Shand, the first secretary and treasurer of the Society, one of the founding fathers to whom the Society owes most, was a cultured Victorian gentleman whom Beatrice Edgell in her historical account of the Society describes as "one of the most beloved figures of the early days".* His book is scholarly and charming. He called on the works of great writers for observations and maxims on human character, organized them under a scheme of primary emotions and sentiments, and formulated a set of more than one hundred empirical "laws" such as, for example, the law that "Hope tends always to destroy anxiety and anxiety to destroy hope; but neither is able to succeed so long as each remains itself". Whatever the value of some of Shand's ideas, his methods are emphatically pre-scientific. In fact Shand had not really begun to grasp the requirements for a scientific psychology of personality. There is indeed far more to the point in Galton's brilliant article on "The Measurement of Character" (1884)† to which Shand makes no reference at all.

III

This is but one example of the progress psychology has made and I have selected it mainly because we must on this occasion remember Shand. We can recall with gratitude his services to the Society without uncritically accepting his psychology. Indeed I do not conceive a jubilee

* EDGELL, BEATRICE (1947). The British Psychological Society, *Brit. J. Psychol.*, 37.

† GALTON, F. (1884). *Fortnightly Review*.

as demanding an inhibition of criticism, nor do I think our founding fathers would have wished for uncritical adulation. In some ways in spite of the progress of psychology, quantitatively and qualitatively, in this country, our psychologists are relatively less eminent than they were. In 1870, a generation before the founding of the British Psychological Society, the French psychologist, Ribot in his book on *English Psychology* could write "Since the time of Hobbes and Locke, England has been the country which has done the most for Psychology".* With men like Darwin, Galton, Romanes, Bain, Spencer and Hughlings Jackson in mind, it was still possible to agree with Ribot's judgment up to perhaps 1880. It has not been possible at any time since to make such a claim.

The main responsibility for this relative backsliding must be placed not, of course, on the British Psychological Society, but on our very conservative universities. This conservatism has affected not only psychology, but the whole scientific and technological life of the country. Great Britain has produced so many illustrious individual scientists that it is not always realized that in the organization and public support of science until well into the present century she lagged far behind other Western countries. Our premier laboratories, the Cavendish Laboratory at Cambridge, and the Clarendon Laboratory at Oxford, were not established until the 1870's. Karl Pearson could proclaim with justification just before the turn of the century that there did not exist in London a physical laboratory worthy of the capital. The Royal Commission on scientific instruction and the advancement of science under the chairmanship of the Duke of Devonshire which reported in 1872 and 1875 revealed the parlous state of our scientific facilities. It is hardly surprising that universities which had only just become aware of the need to provide laboratories for teaching and research in the physical and biological sciences should not have regarded the establishment of psychological laboratories as a very urgent requirement, particularly as they would have had to provide the funds from their own researches. It took a good deal of persuasion on Lord Kelvin's part to extract even £100 for physical apparatus from the University of Glasgow, and the University set up a special committee to see that he did not misapply the money. Only contrast the state of affairs in Germany. There were many more universities; they were much better supported by the community; and from 1825 onwards when Liebig the chemist established the first University teaching laboratory at Giessen, there had been a rapid growth of university laboratories, particularly in chemistry and biology. Wundt's establishment of the first psychological laboratory at Leipzig in 1879 was, therefore, quite a natural development in the German scene.

In this country the academic development of psychology had to fight not only against the general conservatism of British Universities, but also for a critical period against a philosophical climate which was specially hostile to psychology. The "idealistic reaction against science", as it has been termed, was a general movement in Western culture in the last third of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth century. But the

* RIBOT, T. (1870). *English Psychology*, p. 33.

form which this reaction took differed from one country to another, and its effect on psychology differed correspondingly. The neo-Hegelian form of idealism was much stronger in Great Britain than elsewhere, and for more than a generation was the dominant school of British philosophy. It tuned in with and lent support to the evangelical conscience which was strong in Victorian England; it seemed to offer a refuge from the dangers of materialism; and its retarding effect on psychology was the greater simply because the earlier forms of British philosophy were so largely psychological. It is almost certainly no accident that the oldest and strongest schools of psychology in Great Britain are precisely in those centres—Cambridge, London, Manchester—where idealism was weakest; while in Oxford, where for two generations the idealists were all-powerful, psychology was not fully accepted into the academic fold until 1947, and in Glasgow, the home of the Cairds, there was no chair of psychology until 1955.

This prolonged philosophical antagonism to the scientific study of mind is, I am convinced, a very important factor in explaining our psychological retardation. In the majority of British universities before 1945 there was no provision, or only the slenderest provision, for teaching and research in psychology. Such departments as existed were desperately starved for resources. The Cambridge Laboratory was built in 1912, not by the University but largely from funds provided by the director, Dr. C. S. Myers himself. The Oxford Laboratory was set up in 1936 as the result of a gift to the University through Dr. William Brown, the then Wilde Reader, from one of his patients. The miserable accommodation of several of the main London departments before 1950 will be remembered by several of the present audience. In 1930, the year in which I took up psychology, the only chair of psychology in Great Britain, apart from those at the London Colleges, was the chair of psychology at the University of Manchester. There were, of course, small departments in the Scottish Universities and at Reading under non-professorial heads, and there was the Cambridge Laboratory directed by F. C. Bartlett, who was not, however, made a professor until 1931.

IV

The consequences of this academic starvation were far-reaching. McDougall in disgust left the country and accepted a chair at Harvard. C. S. Myers, perhaps the ablest and most balanced mind among the British psychologists of this century, threw up his post at Cambridge and helped to found the National Institute of Industrial Psychology. Insufficient psychologists were trained between the wars to sustain the potential expansion of psychology, academic and applied, after World War II. The British Psychological Society in order to survive and support the journal which it had taken over in 1914 had to open its doors to all and sundry. In 1919 membership was made available to anyone interested in psychology regardless of his training or sphere of work. All sorts of people joined, including eminent figures like Bernard Shaw, who was for

many years one of our members. But it was clearly difficult for the society both to cater for the educated élite, and to perform the more specialized functions required of a developing science and nascent profession. The new constitutions of 1941 and 1958 have reversed the trend and brought back the society nearer to the conception of its founders—a society of and for psychologists.

But perhaps the most serious consequence of the slow academic development of psychology in this country before World War II was an unbalance in British psychology. Speaking in general terms I would say that the applications of psychology in Great Britain tended to outrun the theoretical and academic foundations. After World War I, stimulated by the events of the war, two branches of applied psychology grew rather rapidly and caught the public interest, industrial psychology and psychotherapy. Some research, of course, was done in these fields. The National Institute of Industrial Psychology did as much as its slender resources allowed, mainly in the area of vocational guidance; the Industrial Health Research Board, a government body, produced a really notable series of reports; and there was a trickle of research from the universities. But as those who worked in this field will know application considerably outran research findings, and investigators often had to rely on their intuitions and guesses or on very imperfectly established data. It was the same in psychotherapy. The Tavistock Clinic did useful work; and the medical section of our own society provided a valuable forum for psychotherapists of all schools. But the academic starvation was even greater than in general psychology. In 1930 there was only one full-time chair of psychiatry in the whole of Great Britain, that held by D. K. Henderson in the University of Edinburgh, and the part-time chair at Leeds held by Dr. Shaw Bolton, Superintendent of Wakefield Asylum. Had it not been for pioneers working outside the university world in bodies like the National Institute of Industrial Psychology and the Tavistock Clinic, it is doubtful whether the expansion of psychology during and after World War II could have taken place at all. Those who kept these organizations afloat during most difficult years certainly deserve the thanks of British psychologists.

If we turn from these applied fields to the universities, the picture is one of theoretical sluggishness and extensive areas of neglect. There were not enough academic psychologists between the wars to make British psychology vigorously alive. Our big figures tended to have things too much their own way and their influence persisted too long. This applied both to our earlier theoretical psychologists, Ward and Stout, and to the two major British theoreticians of the present century, McDougall and Spearman. Ward's psychology was first formulated in his *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article of 1885. Nearly half a century later C. S. Myers in his presidential address on "The Nature of Mind" at the British Association in 1931 put forward an almost wholly Wardian point of view, and R. J. Bartlett presiding at the British Psychological Society in 1947 urged us to remain faithful to Ward. As to Stout, it still seemed worth while bringing out a new edition of his *Manual*, which first appeared in 1898, as late as

1938, and reprinting it in 1945. Allowing for the real merits of these works, this still seems an excessive degree of conservatism in a rapidly developing science in which revolutionary changes of viewpoint were taking place elsewhere. The extensive hold which the views of McDougall and Spearman have had over British psychologists right up into the post-World War II period hardly needs documentation. The pure milk of their theories, originally secreted in the first decade of the century, was still being retailed in influential British textbooks fifty years later. Not surprisingly it began to taste a bit stale, and our students more and more looked for fresher supplies from other lands.

Theoretical sluggishness and extensive areas of neglect in physiological, comparative, and social psychology, for instance. It was little short of a tragedy after the promising nineteenth century dawn. How came it that after the early work of Carpenter and Laycock, after the brilliant investigations of Hughlings Jackson, after MacDougall's early studies in physiological psychology, that so little further was done? How came it that no school of British physiological psychologists arose to join hands with the Sherringtons, the Adrians and the remarkable band of neuro-physiologists that we have produced in this country? Basically because British psychologists had ceased to believe in physiological psychology. Green and the idealist philosophers had taught that consciousness is not a part of nature, that "The man who knows so far from being an animal altogether, is not an animal at all or even in part".* Ward and his pupil Stout listened to these siren voices. They came to believe that psychology, the science of experience, was totally distinct from the biological sciences. As Stout put it, "When muscular contraction begins, the psychical series breaks off. The analytical psychologist is concerned with psychical activity, and not with physical changes".† In this framework physiological psychology withered away: even McDougall could not resist the tide: he succumbed to animism and abandoned his early work. British psychology may have been protected against the extremes of behaviourism; but the price was emasculation.

In comparative psychology the pioneer achievements of Spalding, Romanes, Lloyd Morgan and Hobhouse—in their day the finest in the world—were allowed to peter out and pass into oblivion. Spalding, the first ethologist, was rescued from total obscurity by J. B. S. Haldane in 1954. Romanes, a pioneer of exact and careful experimentation, on the strength of one incautious popular book, was casually dismissed as an anecdotalist. Lloyd Morgan failed to get established the research centre in comparative psychology which he wanted; he became instead a vice-chancellor, a philosopher and a canon. When finally Hobhouse turned to philosophical sociology British comparative psychology went into hibernation for a generation. In the late 1930's the study of animal behaviour began to revive but the main initiative came from zoologists rather than psychologists.

Finally, in the land of Mill, Spencer, Buckle, Bagehot, Tylor, Patrick

* GREEN, T. H. (1883). *Prolegomena to Ethics*, p. 79.

† STOUT, G. F. (1896). *Analytical Psychology*, p. 126.

Geddes and Graham Wallas, we have as yet produced no native school of social psychology. Perhaps not altogether a matter for surprise when we remember that in the 1930's there were only two chairs in the neighbouring field of sociology, at the London School of Economics and at Liverpool, and that to this day the older universities have refused proper recognition to the subject.

V

It is a depressing picture, though not, of course, unrelieved. Some stars were always shining—Burt, Bartlett, Valentine, Drever, Wolters, and in our northern clime, the still twinkling Pear; and between the wars a small band of enthusiasts braved the threat of joblessness to take up psychology as a career. But I can see no point, even on a diamond jubilee, in white-washing the past. It would be a mistake to do so. If we want to appreciate the achievements of the British Psychological Society we must appreciate the background against which it had to operate—a background of prolonged and massive academic neglect, not untinged with hostility.

The picture is brighter—much brighter—today: in part just because this Society was founded in 1901, and because it held on. During World War II British psychology became airborne. Its engines were clogged from disuse, and a tailplane or so was missing; but the machine went up. It made some odd noises, and bumped a bit, but it was definitely airborne. At the end of the war psychology was recognized—by the universities (which have increased the number of chairs from six to twenty, and the lecturing staff from thirty to nearly 200)—by the education authorities (who raised the number of child guidance clinics from about twenty to some 300)—by the hospital boards (who established a whole new profession of clinical psychologists)—by government departments and the armed services (who introduced a new class of psychological civil servants) and by the research organizations (who created for the first time a corps of full-time psychological research workers). If we have as yet made no spectacular flights, we have unquestionably set off *per ardua ad astra*.

That we shall remain airborne I am pretty confident. In a scientific and technological age it is really inconceivable that we can ever ignore the scientific study of man himself. Psychology has come to stay. The only question is whether our faith and vision will match our new opportunities, and equal that of the pioneers who started the British Psychological Society just sixty years ago.