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EDWARD BRADFORD TITCHENER

1867-1927

BY CHARLES S. MYERS.

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By the death of Prof. Titchener Experimental Psychology has lost one of its first British founders. Although he spent the last thirty-five years of his strenuous life in the United States, he remained an Englishman throughout its sixty years. He had but one teaching post—at Cornell University, Ithaca; and there he died on August 3rd last, from a cerebral tumour, after a brief illness.

Edward Bradford Titchener came of an old Chichester family. He was born at Chichester on January 11th, 1867. We hear of a certain John Tychenor being headmaster of the local Prebendal School in 1532. To this school went young Edward, and from it he gained a scholarship at Malvern College at the age of fourteen. In his nineteenth year he proceeded to Brasenose, Oxford, where he held a senior classical scholarship for four years. He obtained a first-class both in Moderations in 1887 and in *Literae Humaniores* in 1889. He took his B.A. at Oxford in 1890, and his M.A. in 1895; in 1906 he received the degree of D.Sc. at that University.

During the academic year 1889-90 he worked as a research student under the celebrated Oxford physiologist, Burdon Sanderson. To him he dedicated his first book. Doubtless owing to his previous studies in philosophy, Titchener became now attracted to the work of Wundt in Leipsic who, having passed from a training in physiology to the study of philosophy, had by a converse route been drawn to experimental psychology. Wundt's psychological laboratory was then eleven years old. Here Titchener worked for the next two years, with Scripture, Frank Angell, Witmer and Warren from America as fellow-students, and under Külpe as *Privatdozent*. In the eighth volume of Wundt's *Philosophische Studien* Titchener published a short paper on "Recognition." In 1892 he obtained his doctorate in philosophy at Leipsic by a dissertation, entitled *Ueber binoculare Wirkungen monocularer Reize*, which appeared in the same volume of the *Studien*.

Returning to England in that year, Titchener gave for a short time some University extension lectures in biology at Oxford. He endeavoured

to find an opening for teaching experimental psychology at Oxford, but received even less academic encouragement than is accorded there to the subject to-day. Meanwhile Frank Angell, his former fellow-student at Leipsic, had opened a psychological laboratory at Cornell, but in the year following accepted an invitation to Stanford University. This set free the post at Cornell to which, on his recommendation, young Titchener was appointed.

Thus in 1892 Titchener became Assistant Professor of Psychology in Cornell. In 1895 he was made Sage Professor of Psychology there, and in 1910 his professorship was attached to the Graduate School of that University.

Throughout the thirty-five years' tenure of his professorship at Cornell, Titchener never wavered either in his enthusiastic worship of Wundt, whom, however, he had never known intimately at Leipsic, or in his loyal patriotism to Great Britain, which, however, he seldom visited because of its fancied neglect of him. He never became a Fellow of the Royal Society. As an Englishman, he was ineligible for admission to the National Academy of Sciences. He contributed, by special lectures in America, to the Prince of Wales's fund for the widows and orphans of those who had fought in the Great War. His faithfulness towards Cornell led him to decline both the offer of Münsterberg's chair at Harvard in 1917, and the Presidency of Clark University which fell vacant on the retirement of the late Stanley Hall.

Titchener's devotion to Wundt is illustrated by his heroic attempts at publishing an English translation of the *Physiologische Psychologie*. While still at Oxford, he had already translated the third edition; but on taking it to Leipsic, he found that Wundt was about to issue the fourth edition of this work. Forthwith Titchener applied himself to translating the fourth edition, only again to find that Wundt had overtaken him by preparing the fifth edition. Still undaunted, he began immediately to translate the fifth edition, part of which he published without delay in 1902. Pre-occupation with his own text-books put a stop to further labour in this direction. He had already translated Külpe's *Grundriss* in 1895 and, with Pillsbury, one of his first pupils at Cornell, Külpe's *Introduction to Philosophy* in 1897.

In 1896 Titchener published his *Outline of Psychology*; this was replaced in 1910 by his *Text-Book of Psychology*. In 1898 he brought out his *Primer of Psychology*; this was replaced in 1915 by his *Beginner's Psychology*. In 1908 he published his *Columbia Lectures on the Elementary Psychology of Feeling and Attention*; and in the following year his *Illinois*

Lectures on the Experimental Psychology of the Thought Processes. In 1911 he gave the Lowell Lectures at Cambridge, U.S.A., which were never published. He received the honorary degrees of D.Sc. at Harvard, Litt.D. at Clark, and LL.D. at Wisconsin.

During the years 1901-5 he issued his *magnum opus*, the four volumes of his *Laboratory Manual of Experimental Psychology*. It had demanded thirteen years' hard work, and its financial cost, he used to say, nearly ruined him. Its preparation involved the invention and standardization of many useful and now familiar psychological apparatus for laboratory teaching. The *Manual* has since been translated into most European languages and into Chinese and Japanese. It has formed the basis of many later laboratory text-books, and it led to requests for his assistance in planning psychological laboratories in a large number of countries both in the Old and in the New Worlds.

Between 1894 and 1920 Titchener acted as American Editor of *Mind*. From 1894 until 1925 he was Associate Editor and ultimately Editor of the *American Journal of Psychology*. His aim finally was to found a journal as representative of Cornell psychology as Wundt's *Psychologische Studien* had been of the Leipsic School. True to his German training, Titchener's ideal was to establish his own School. He had to some extent imbibed those earlier German methods of laboratory research, whereby the Professor or his *Privatdozent* allocated experimental tasks to their students in order to confirm the Professor's views; and woe betide the candidate for the doctorate or his *Dozent*, if those pontifical views were not corroborated by research! Free and open discussion, of course, whether by pupils or staff, was not tolerated. Such, if in caricatured outline, were the conditions in which Psychology had grown up at Leipsic and which tended to be imported into Cornell. It led inevitably to certain occasional 'differences' between Titchener and his assistants and colleagues.

Titchener was essentially a 'separatist.' He broke from the American Psychological Association and founded at Cornell a body known as the 'Experimentalists.' He broke from the *American Journal of Psychology* and was on the point of founding a new journal before he died.

Although he found it difficult to forgive an enemy, no one could rival Titchener in his kindness and generosity to his friends. The *Festschrift*, presented to him in 1917 after twenty-five years' teaching work at Cornell, is sufficient indication of his far-reaching influence. By 1923 the number of papers for which he was personally responsible written by his students amounted to 158, while his own published articles numbered 190

by the same date. He had finally an annual entry of 1000 undergraduates, and a staff of two professors, two instructors, and three assistants. At the time of his death he was engaged on a *Systematic Psychology* which was to appear in three or four volumes; of these he had practically completed the first before his fatal illness.

Titchener's attitude towards psychology showed relatively little change throughout his life, despite the rapid progress and development of the subject. He took little interest in individual mental differences, in Behaviourism, the *Gestaltpsychologie*, mental testing, or in applied psychology. His single aim was to study the human mind *in general*, and to express all mental processes in terms of a fixed number of hypothetical elements and attributes. Although such atomistic procedure has been largely superseded now as a psychological ideal, Titchener's views were useful in their day in provoking much experimental research. Whether or not they ever regain their former influence, their value during a by-gone stage in the development of psychology is unquestionable.