OBITUARY

GEORGE HUMPHREY (1889–1966)

While not a member of the Experimental Psychology Society, George Humphrey was a well-wisher who often attended our meetings and occasionally reviewed in this Journal. He addressed the Experimental Psychology Group at a meeting held at Cambridge in April, 1951.

An Oxford man, Humphrey went to Leipzig to study experimental psychology just before the first War and later gained his Ph.D. at Harvard. In 1924, he was appointed to the Charlton Professorship of Philosophy at Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario, where he built up an active psychological laboratory in which much of his own best work was done. He returned to Oxford in 1947 as the first Professor of Psychology in the University and succeeded Dr. William Stephenson as Director of the Institute of Experimental Psychology in the following year. After his retirement, Humphrey lived for some years in Cambridge, where he was a frequent and welcome visitor to the Psychological Laboratory.

Although Humphrey’s output of experimental work was not large, some of it is very well known indeed. In particular, his papers on habituation have been described as classical. Humphrey also worked on conditioning and reinforcement, on audiogenic seizures in the rat, and on apparent visual motion.

Of Humphrey’s books, by far the best is The Nature of Learning, published in 1933. This remarkable book did much to set the study of learning in its biological context and had wide influence in its day. His later book on Thinking: Its Experimental Psychology (1951) never quite got to grips with the problems in the same way but has none the less proved useful as a source book and historical survey. After his retirement, Humphrey edited Psychology through Experiment and, with Michael Argyle, its companion volume Social Psychology through Experiment, both of which have been widely used as introductory texts.

Although he achieved distinction, George Humphrey never perhaps had quite the success he deserved. He was an unassuming man who hated intellectual assertiveness and perhaps for this reason did not always make the best of his opportunities. None the less, he will be widely remembered as an upright, shrewd and lovable man.

O. L. ZANGWILL.

BOOK REVIEWS


Contributors to the Annual Review must have great difficulties in deciding what to leave out of their chapters: very few of the titles could be comprehensively treated in the available space. Showing their awareness of this, most of the authors announce an intention to restrict the scope of their review. In some instances, however, the proposed limitations seem less than severe, as in Kagan and Henker’s review of developmental psychology where “Primary emphasis was given to work with human or animal subjects that had a developmental implication” (p. 1). Other writers have a more radical solution, and both Ward (Audition) and Poulton (Engineering Psychology) simply describe work they believe to be important and interesting. This measure is entirely successful in both cases, as it is in Hernández-Peó and Sterman’s “Brain Functions.” Faced with an impossible title these authors have elected to concentrate on their own research interests (Attention and Sleep) and the chapter thus contains useful detail and genuinely critical comment. Another almost meaningless title is “Cognitive Functions”; Van de Geer and Jaspars are forced to write nearly four pages defining their intended subject, only to end with the decision “to leave out anything that is traditionally covered in other chapters of the Annual Review of Psychology” (p. 149).