

Harry Porter Weld

September 22, 1877 — October 2, 1970

Harry Porter Weld, professor of psychology, emeritus, was born in LaGrange, Arkansas, September 22, 1877, and died in Bradenton, Florida, October 2, 1970. He joined the Cornell faculty in 1912 and served the University continuously until his retirement in 1945.

After receiving the Ph.B. from Ohio State University in 1900, he devoted the next ten years to music, as professor of music at George Peabody College and as a professional singer taking part as soloist in many concerts and oratorios. He became interested in the psychological aspects of music and decided to study psychology at Clark University under G. Stanley Hall and J. W. Baird. There he was a fellow in psychology for the year 1909-10 and remained as assistant until taking the Ph.D. in 1911. His dissertation, "An Experimental Study of Musical Enjoyment" applied both physiological measurement and introspective analysis to the musical experience. In later years, while his personal interest in music remained active and was reflected in his participation in the University Committee on Concerts, his professional interests in psychology covered a wide range of topics.

After a year as instructor at Clark, Professor Weld was brought to Cornell by E. B. Titchener in 1912 to replace Madison Bentley, who had moved to Illinois. Dr. Weld served as assistant professor of psychology from 1912 to 1919, as professor from 1919 to 1945, and as chairman of the Department of Psychology from 1938 to 1945.

For many years Professor Weld was well known to undergraduates as lecturer in the second course in psychology, which surveyed the various branches and fields of the application of psychology. His polished and interesting lectures attracted many students into further studies in the department. Out of this course grew his book, *Psychology as Science* (1928), which investigated the relationships between science and technology in a way which is still relevant to the problems of present-day psychology. While he accepted the dominant emphasis at Cornell on psychology as a "pure" science, he also showed respect and appreciation for the application of psychology to practical problems.

During his career, Professor Weld taught many of the advanced courses in the Department, and many generations of graduate students owed a large portion of their training to him. He became the departmental specialist in the history of psychology, which was considered an essential part of graduate training. He also pioneered in teaching social psychology, developing the first course to be given at Cornell and probably one of the earliest to be given

anywhere. He also became interested in the psychology of law, developing a course and initiating research in this area, again at a time when the field was in its infancy.

In the mid-thirties, Professor Weld conceived of a new approach to the teaching of introductory psychology and a new type of textbook. Until that time, introductory texts supported a particular theory or “system” of psychology, so that students at different universities received quite different views of the field. It seemed to Dr. Weld that psychology had progressed to the point where the basic facts of the discipline could be presented in a neutral fashion without reference to a particular theory. Theories could be left to upper-level teaching, after the student had learned about psychology as an empirical science. He enlisted the collaboration of E. G. Boring of Harvard and H. S. Langfeld of Princeton in developing a book in which each chapter was written by an authority in the field, with the editors carefully fostering theoretical neutrality. The result was *Psychology: A Factual Textbook* (1935), familiarly known as “BLW” in a large number of colleges. In fact the main limitation on its usage was that it demanded better students than some institutions had. The book became the standard textbook in the field and set a trend in the teaching of introductory psychology which still continues. Two more editions, the last in 1948, involved such complete revision that they became new books and occupied much of the time of the editors for several years.

Graduate students knew Professor Weld not only as an enthusiastic and interesting classroom teacher, but as a friend who was readily available for informal discussion of specific problems or of general trends in the development of the field and its relations to the other sciences. His enjoyment of these discussions was so obvious that the student never felt that he was imposing or taking up too much time. This informal teaching went on continuously throughout the day, and the graduate students of the time could fully appreciate why the Cornell Graduate School emphasized the concept of residence rather than course credits. These conversations gave a vivid sense of the informal side of the history of psychology, emphasizing individual intellectual influences and development but not the personal scandals.

R. B. Macleod, T. A. Ryan