

# Robert Morris Ogden

*July 6, 1877 — March 2, 1959*

Robert Morris Ogden, born in Binghamton, New York, entered Cornell as a student of engineering. In his sophomore year, he transferred to the College of Arts and Sciences, from which he graduated in 1901 with the degree of B.S. Having as an undergraduate become deeply interested in psychology, he went for graduate study to the University of Wurzburg, one of the distinguished centers of research in that subject, and there earned the degree of Ph.D. in 1903.

Upon his return to the United States, Professor Ogden was, until 1905, an assistant in psychology at the University of Missouri. While at Missouri, he married Nellie Dorsey in 1905. Between 1905 and 1914, he advanced from the rank of Assistant Professor to that of Professor of Philosophy and Psychology at the University of Tennessee. The following two years he spent at the University of Kansas as Professor of Psychology. In 1916, he returned to Cornell, becoming Professor of Education and chairman of the department. He continued as chairman until 1931. In 1939, he was appointed Professor of Psychology. From 1919 to 1923, he was chairman of the administrative board of the Cornell Summer Session. During the spring semester of 1923, he was lecturer in psychology at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. On July 1, 1923, Robert Ogden began his term as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, an office he held until retirement on June 30, 1945, when he became Professor Emeritus. In recent years, he devoted much of his time to selecting and editing certain newly discovered papers of Andrew D. White, which have since been published by the Cornell University Library.

Professor Ogden was president of the Southern Society of Philosophy and Psychology in 1912; and from 1913 to 1916 he served as secretary-treasurer of the American Psychological Association. He held the following offices as well: cooperative editor of the *Psychological Bulletin*, 1909-1929, and of the *American Journal of Psychology*, 1926-1958; councillor of the American Psychological Association, 1918-1920; vice-president of the psychology section of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1936; president of the Association for the Advancement of Science, 1936; president of the Association of Colleges and Universities of the State of New York, 1938-1939; president of the Division on Aesthetics, American Psychological Association, 1954. In addition to these activities, Professor Ogden maintained an active interest in professional and academic societies: Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Xi, Phi Kappa Phi, and Phi Delta Kappa.

This mere recital of positions and offices held by Robert Ogden indicates his versatility and the range of his interests but does not provide an adequate description of the man. His distinction derives not only from the quality and duration of his services to Cornell and other institutions, but also from the banner in which he worked and from the kind of person he was.

Professor Ogden had tremendous capacity for work: teaching, administration, committee duties, research, writing. Yet he never appeared to be driven or impatient; he was always courteous, gracious, and free with his time, whether his visitor was a senior professor, a fledgling instructor, or a student.

As scholar and scientist, Robert Ogden was extraordinarily modest, his achievements notwithstanding. He was the author of *The Psychology of Art* (1938), *Hearing* (1924), *Psychology and Education* (1926 and 1932), and *An Introduction to General Psychology* (1914). With Max Meyer he translated from German, *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture* (by Adolf Hildebrand) (1907), and also from German, *The Growth of the Mind* (by Kurt Koffka) (1924). In addition, he contributed many papers to learned journals.

Professor Ogden's rendering of Koffka's book was the first volume published in the United States in the field of *Gestalt* psychology—a psychological theory which Ogden introduced, expounded, and developed in this country also through his *Psychology and Education*, the first book written on the subject by an American scholar. Furthermore, he was responsible for bringing to Cornell, from Germany, three of four leaders in Gestalt psychology, men who later settled in this country. Thus Ogden was the first American “gestalt psychologist”; he was principally responsible for introducing a theory which has since had wide influence upon psychological theory and research.

As Dean, he maintained that his colleagues, the faculty, were the College; that his duties were to provide leadership and initiative, to coordinate and reconcile, to execute the mandates of the faculty; for he followed the principle that he represented a company of peers in teaching, science, and scholarship. With noteworthy success he guided the College of Arts and Sciences through a long period of development and progress, including the critical years of World War II. He impressed his colleagues by the quiet, easy efficiency with which he handled problems; by his open-mindedness; by his friendly but perceptive interest in younger members of the faculty; and, by the soundness of his judgments when he was presented with unusual problems.

Robert Ogden was a man of broad culture, charm, and urbanity. He was gentle but not weak in his personal relations; he was of good humor but well aware of values; he was generous in his judgments but not uncritical; in short, he was an ideal colleague and friend. All who knew him and worked with him realize that, as Professor

and Dean, he contributed greatly, though in a characteristically unobtrusive way, to Cornell's development in an illustrious period of her history.

*F. S. Freeman, Harry Caplan, P. M. O'Leary*