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PSYCHOLOGY AS A QUANTITATIVE RATIONAL SCIENCE¹

By Professor L. L. THURSTONE

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE purposes of this society are not new, but they represent an emphasis and direction which have not hitherto received major consideration in psychological science. It seems proper that we should devote some share of our first program meeting to a consideration of our main objectives.

Our main purpose is briefly stated in the subtitle of the new journal, *Psychometrika*, namely, to encourage the development of psychology as a quantitative rational science. More briefly, this may be called mathematical psychology. We should justify our emphasis upon quantification and upon rationalization in science, as well as our conception of the fundamental nature of science.

I assume that we are in complete agreement that we can not suddenly quantify our comprehension of psy-

chological phenomena over their entire range. As psychologists, we are as interested as ever in making exploratory studies of new psychological effects and in discovering hitherto unknown effects. At present, the range of psychological phenomena that can be profitably reduced to mathematical formulation is limited, and it is likely that every man who works on a problem of mathematical psychology will also concern himself with exploratory studies of other problems that are as yet too new for detailed rationalization.

After the discovery of a psychological effect, we naturally turn to the second phase of scientific inquiry, namely, to relate the new effect in a simple descriptive manner to what is already known. In this stage, theories are devised to explain the experimentally known effects, and we try, of course, to make psychological theories less complicated than the effects that are to be explained. In this phase the descriptions of psycho-

¹ Abstract of address by the retiring president of the Psychometric Society at Hanover, N. H., September 4, 1936.

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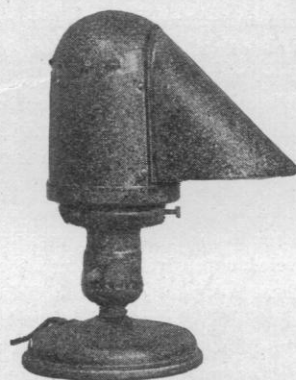
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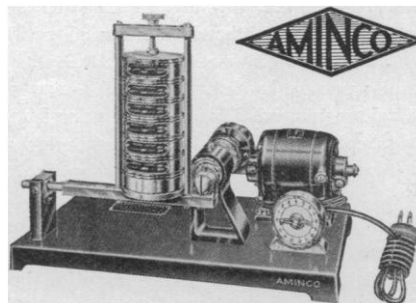
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