James Rowland Angell, 1869-1949, Psychologist-Educator

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JAMES ROWLAND ANGELL made substantial and brilliant contributions to the science, education, and culture of his time. What he did and the influence he exerted, not only in the United States but internationally, are part and parcel of our most cherished achievements of the last half-century. He went all out for man. With clear vision, he saw that human progress and development lay along the road of research and cooperation. A master in the scientific study of the mind and of human behavior, he sought by lucid, analytical writing; by entertaining, summarizing addresses; and by wise administrations to realize on the implications of scientific research for the improvement of human living and achievement. He was an opener of the mind's eye. His salty Yankee comment both stimulated and challenged all who heard his dry voice, and left enduring traces in their memories. He never overreached himself; his points and objectives were not hazy or chimerical; his readers and auditors were not left with a flat or helpless feeling, but rather with hope and determination. In several different capacities, he exercised what must be accounted great administrative authority, but he did not push people around, or wave a big stick. He was companion, friend, teacher, and leader, and understood not only human foibles and frailties, but how to energize human capacities, power, and strength.

Jim Angell was born in Burlington, Vermont May 8, 1869, the youngest of three children. His mother, Sarah Swope Caswell, was a descendant of Peregrin White, of Mayflower fame. His brother, Alexis Caswell, twelve years older, became a judge on the federal bench. His sister, Lois Thompson, six years older, became the wife of an historian, Andrew C. McLaughlin. When Jim was born, his father, James Burrill Angell, was president of the University of Vermont. He had formerly been professor of modern languages at Brown University, and editor of the *Providence Journal* for six years. Subsequently he was the distinguished president of the University of Michigan for 38 years. In the latter academic household and community Angell grew up. It is not without interest to note that John Dewey, who greatly influenced Angell's early scientific outlook and professional life, was also born in Burlington, Vermont and was ten years his senior. Choice hereditary and environmental factors were not lacking and there was a virile religious family background. Jim's health was impaired by recurrent attacks of malaria, and by scarlet fever, which produced deafness in one ear. In his home he had a large amount of adult association: with his parents, the academic community, and many distinguished visitors. Among the latter he has recalled Cannon Farrar, Matthew Arnold, Andrew White, and Grover Cleveland. In his biography he says, "I was practically on my own, for my brother and sister were too much my elders to be companions in any intimate sense" (*2*).

After graduating from public school and starting high school in Ann Arbor, he spent a year and one-half in China, where his father had been sent as United States Minister. Jim, having completed high school, entered the University of Michigan and received his B.A. in 1890, and his M.A. in '91. As an undergraduate at Michigan, Angell's intellectual interests seem to have been aroused first by the study of Greek and then more especially by philosophy and psychology. The latter was under John Dewey, who had recently published a psychology text. Williston Hough taught him British philosophy, and with James H. Tufts he studied the general history of philosophy. The climax of his Michigan experience was a seminar with Dewey on William James' recently published *Principles of psychology*. Angell has said that this book, more than any other, profoundly influenced his thinking for the next twenty years of his life.

Fresh from this stimulating graduate year at Michigan, and on the recommendation of Dewey, he went, in the fall of 1891, to the Graduate School at Harvard, and studied under James, Royce, and Palmer. Taught and stimulated by this remarkable faculty, he was yet undecided whether to follow philosophy or psychology. After taking his M.A. at Harvard in '92, he went to Europe, as so many of the brilliant graduate students of his period did. Finding Wundt's laboratory at Leipzig full, he spent his first semester at the University of Berlin, where Ebbinghaus was lecturing on psychology and Paulsen on ethics. Also he occasionally audited the lectures of Helmholtz and other eminent scholars there. The second semester was spent at Halle under Erdmann in psychology and with Vaihinger on the philosophy of Kant. Angell became a candidate for the doctor's degree and wrote

a thesis on "The Treatment of Freedom in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* Compared with the *Critique of Practical Reason.*" His thesis had been accepted and returned for revisions when he received an offer to become instructor in philosophy and psychology at the University of Minnesota. Accepting this offer meant immediate departure for America. Revision of his thesis was consequently put off, and he did not receive his degree from Berlin then or later.

In beginning his work as a teacher, as a laboratory organizer and director, and as a research worker, Angell was singularly fortunate in his choice of positions. Moreover, he entered the field of psychology at its most formative period and when only eight American institutions had ventured to open laboratories. In the period 1890–1892, that is, between his senior year at Michigan and his M.A. at Harvard, twelve new psychological laboratories were started. These included Michigan and Yale, but not Minnesota or Chicago, both of which awaited Angell's advent. His record as a student at Michigan and at Harvard was highly recommendatory to him. He knew, had studied with, and was favorably known by men who were already leaders or later became leaders. The American Psychological Association, organized in 1892, elected him to membership the following year, at the age of 24. His name was starred in the first edition of *American men of science,* 1906, the same year he was president of the American Psychological Association. His reputation as a teacher, as a researcher, and as a research director grew rapidly, on a solid foundation of keen scientific insight and steady, devoted application to work. Frank Angell, the noted older psychologist of Stanford University, was his cousin. And although it may be said that Jim's academic background and connections may have tugged at his bootstraps, he was certainly not lacking in energy, drive, or headwork. He produced abundantly and in good quality, and graduate students were attracted from all over the country.

Only one year was spent in a vigorous workout at Minnesota—arranging and teaching courses, building up a psychological laboratory, and introducing a course in laboratory methods. Students and faculty associates alike were pleased and stimulated by these developments, which were aided materially by the chairman of the Department of Philosophy and Psychology there, Williston Hough, Angell's former Michigan teacher. John Dewey was now head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Chicago. Angell was offered an assistant professorship there, with the opportunity of taking charge of the laboratory and the courses in psychology. Thus, in 1895 he began his career as psychologist at Chicago, which terminated in the academic year 1918–1919, when he was acting president of that university.

Angell's scientific writings, aside from his unpublished doctoral dissertation, first took the form of critical reviews of scientific literature on memory, thought and imagery, habit and attention. Shortly after his Chicago laboratory was going, however, there began a series of joint publications with his students on experimental studies. These included contributions to such topics as the influence of attention and habit on reaction time, the organic effects of agreeable and disagreeable stimuli, the relations of dermal and optical space, monaural localization of sound, and the relation of organic processes to consciousness (for a bibliography to 1931 see reference *5*). Rooted in laboratory research results and nurtured by discussions with Dewey and others, there gradually grew up in Angell's mind a newly organized scientific outlook for psychology, which came to be known as "functional psychology," in contrast to the "structural" point of view. Angell championed the position that psychology is the science of mental operations rather than the science of mental elements. This position, sometimes designated as the "functional school" (*4*), was clearly foreshadowed in his psychology textbook of 1904, which had the supplementary title, "An Introductory Study of the Structure and Functions of Human Consciousness." His text was very successful and reached a fourth edition in 1908. In his presidential address before the American Psychological Association in 1906 on "The Province of Functional Psychology" he gave this point of view its clearest statement and strongest impetus. The functional formulation was strengthened through interest at the time in the development of educational psychology, experimentation on animals, and the study of intelligence through mental tests.

Angell's efforts to mold psychology into something more respectable and presentable among the sciences, as well as more representative of the range of man's psychological life, were no doubt in part stimulated by his very close association with leading scientists in other fields. Albert Michelson was his warm friend and tennis companion, Jacques Loeb and Henry Donaldson were next-door neighbors. Robert Millikan, Henry Gale, Eliakim Moore, Julius Stieglitz, and George Hale, to mention some who represented the exact sciences, were among his close friends and constant associates. Even Angell's ready and brilliant wit could not wholly satisfy such associations; his science had to be good. It had to be founded on something solid, its experimental and quantitative data demanded integration around an acceptable and practical philosophic viewpoint. Angell was not lack-

ing under this stimulation. He played everything he had and hit the psychological jack pot; many excellent students were attracted to his laboratory, and through them and their successful careers his influence was multiplied.[1]

Throughout the period of his deanships at the University of Chicago, 1908–1919, Angell continued to direct the psychological laboratory and to be productive in psychological writing and editing. He brought out his second volume, *Chapters from modern psychology,* in 1912, remodeled his introductory text in 1913, and again in 1918. He published a considerable number of articles, and contributed chapters. In connection with the American Psychological Association Angell was a leader in standardizing experimental procedures and mental tests and in organizing laboratory courses and apparatus for psychology. He thus played a prominent role both in systematizing the objectives and content of the young science of psychology, and also in organizing its teaching as a laboratory science and promoting its applications in the broad field of American education.

In World War I, Dean Angell participated on a full-time basis with other psychologists in devising and adapting psychological methods to the large task of classification of personnel in the Army. Later he was an advisory member on the Committee on Education and Special Training. At the end of the war he became full-time chairman of the newly organized National Research Council, which he served during the year 1919–1920. The Council, created as an operating agency under the National Academy of Sciences by President Woodrow Wilson, largely took form under the direction of Angell's associate and friend, George E. Hale. For a few months prior to Angell's chairmanship, John C. Merriam, later to become president of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, had served in this capacity.

The quality of Jim Angell's mind, his ability to immerse himself in a large amorphous subject, to sort out its logical relations, to see practical implications, and to present the subject in challenging description and orientation for his fellows is illustrated in his leadership of the National Research Council. Shortly after becoming chairman, he addressed the Twenty-First Annual Conference of the Association of American Universities on the subject, "The Organization of Research" (*1*). In this address, which is one of the most comprehensive and lucid statements of the platform of science, and as applicable now as then, he analyzed the concept of research, and the distribution of research functions. He discussed personnel, training of research men, organization, and cooperation in research, and presented the possibilities opened up through the creation of the National Research Council. Concerning the fundamental nature of research, Angell said: "I would accordingly urge that in our conception of research we look beyond the peculiar combination of intellectual traits, which may characterize any one individual, and think of it as the organized technique of science itself for its own propagation. It is, so to speak, the reproductive process of science. When thus conceived it takes on a far larger and more momentous aspect than when thought of, as too often at present, as being a mere appendix to the processes of science, a sort of luxury of the scientific idle rich."

While Angell was chairman of the National Research Council (1920) he was elected to the National Academy of Sciences. He was the sixth psychologist to be elected to the Academy.[2] His maternal grandfather, Alexis Caswell, mathematician and astronomer and sometime president of Brown University, was one of the fifty charter members. Also during 1920 the Carnegie Corporation made a large gift for the support of the National Academy and the Council and for the erection of a stately building on Constitution Avenue in Washington. In association with Robert Millikan and George Hale, Angell was successful in securing from private sources the considerable fund required to purchase the site where the building now stands. These activities brought him into close touch with Elihu Root and the Board of Trustees of the Carnegie Corporation. Mr. Carnegie had died in 1919, and before and following his death the affairs of the corporation had been under the guidance of a small board of trustees with Mr. Root as chairman. The board now invited Mr. Angell to become president of the corporation. This unprecedented offer, if yielded to, meant severing his connection with university work, and dismissing the attractive and strong probability of his succeeding President Judson at the University of Chicago. It was a difficult decision, but he accepted this newly created and broad executive position—to which, needless to say, he brought large competence and vision.

[1] In his autobiography (page 38) Angell mentions the following among his women students: Helen Thompson Woolley, June Downey, Florence Richardson Robinson, Kate Gordon, Jessie Allen Charters, Ada Hart Arlitt, Grace and Mabel Fernald, Mary Hayes, Stella B. Vincent, Helen Koch, Jean Weidensall, Dagny Sunne, and Edwina Abbott Cowan. Among his men students he lists: John B. Watson, Joseph, Harvey, and John Peterson, Walter Hunter, Harvey Carr, Beardsley Ruml, Clarence Yoakum, Curt Rosenow, L. L. Thurstone, Joseph Hayes, Myron L. Ashley, Walter V. Bingham, Henry F. Adams, Edward S. Robinson, Harry D. Kitson, Carl Rahn, Conrad L. Kjerstad, Jacob R. Kantor, Louie W. Webb, F. A. C. Perrin, Joseph U. Yarborough, Elmer K. Culler, and Rutledge T. Wiltbank.

[2] Those whose election preceded that of Angell were: James McKeen Cattell (1901), William James (1903), Josiah Royce (1906), John Dewey (1910), and G. Stanley Hall (1915).

These two years in Angell's life—the first as chairman of the National Research Council and the second as president of the Carnegie Corporation—proved to be important for the future of Yale University. They were supertraining and broadening years, which against Mr. Angell's solid scientific and educational background, at the age of 52, prepared him obviously and exceptionally to succeed Arthur Hadley as president of Yale in 1921. Not for a century and a half had Yale chosen a leader outside the frame of its own traditions. In prospect, the "bulwark of tradition" must have looked somewhat ominous, but Mr. Angell won hands down. As an adopted son, or perhaps it was naturalized stepfather, he was readily accepted by students, faculty, and alumni. His sixteen years as president of Yale were effective and brilliant, and constitute a great period in the history of that institution. In his administrative office he had the loyal, devoted, and skillful support of George Day, Thomas Farnam, Robert Hutchins, Carl Lohmann, Wilbur Cross, and Charles Seymour, as top team. The combination was good. Developments too numerous to mention took place; the educational climate of the country was ready for them and was improved by them. Mr. Angell was successful in convincing the Yale alumni that the university's acceptance of the munificent gift of Edward S. Harkness for the establishment of the residential college system constituted a great step forward. The adoption of "the College Plan" will always be remembered as one of the notable achievements of his administration. It was on February 22, 1930 that Mr. Angell announced the adoption of the residential college system at Yale and the appointment of the first master in the person of Robert D. French. Another accomplishment which should also never be forgotten was the success of the movement, initiated at Angell's urging, for the enlargement of the university's endowment. Carried forward under his enthusiastic leadership, the campaign resulted in obtaining the then incredibly large sum of twenty million dollars for the making "of a finer, not a bigger Yale." To this project over 22,000 of Yale's friends pledged support in one year.

In 1937 no one was concerned that Mr. Angell at retirement would be lacking employment. What overtures or offers he received are not publicly known. But that he became educational counselor for the National Broadcasting Company is no secret. What he did in this new educational position as a kind of presiding judge over the content broadcast by radio waves around the globe, and what influence this may have had on man and his destiny only The Almighty knows. That his counsel was sought and valued and acted upon in an ultramodern institution staffed by brilliant, imaginative young men, who chose and accepted him as a colleague in their great exploratory enterprise, must have given him deep satisfaction.

The term "emeritus" never fitted well in Angell's case, except perhaps on the page of a college catalog. From the age of 45 or 50 to the very end of his gallant life, in New Haven on March 4, 1949, he was in constant demand to serve on committees, commissions, and boards of directors, and as a speaker on all sorts of select occasions. He could shift the mood of an audience as easily and as nonchalantly as he changed his spectacles but he never let them leave without some new and important mental imprint. Numerous published addresses reveal President Angell's qualities of mind and something of his charming personality, but unfortunately they seldom include many of the humorous asides that so characteristically accompanied his associations and appearances. Scores of these are treasured memories, as for example, when after walking in the rain in the procession at the Harvard Tercentenary, he said: "This is one of the ways in which Harvard soaks the rich." His type and his order of achievement appear rarely in any generation. Science and education in its forward progress will look back to him with admiration and affection.

References

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