

Jonçich, Geraldine. *The Sane Positivist: A Biography of Edward L. Thorndike*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1968, pp. 634.

For many years Jones' life of Sigmund Freud was the only existing long biography of a psychologist, as Robert Watson pointed out in his *Great Psychologists*. Fortunately in the last two or three years half a dozen biographies have been published to fill this gap, and today we have relatively complete presentations of the lives and works of James, Thorndike, Brentano, Lewin, Ladd, and Porteus. Among them, the most remarkable and complete is Jonçich's *The Sane Positivist*, a 634-page biography of Edward L. Thorndike (1874-1949). The title comes from Woodworth's description of Thorndike and "his sane positivism."

This is a balanced, comprehensive, and well-rounded picture of a great psychologist and a great teacher, whose influence has been growing more and more every year. The book attempts to be a contribution to the intellectual history of the United States, besides being a masterpiece of historical work in psychology. The work is professionally-oriented, if by profession we mean the profession of historian of psychology. The author has been very careful in giving an analysis of her sources in a 20 page appendix which will be useful for future reference.

The intellectual environment of the book is the United States at the end of the 19th century and half of the 20th. The specific frame of reference is Teachers College of Columbia University in the fast growing New York City (that Bess, Thorndike's wife, never learend to like). The professional environment is composed of the Big Names of United States psychology: James who invited the young Thorndikes' chickens into his cellar. Watson, whose book *Behavior* Thorndike reviews in 1915 and says that "For students of objective behavior to regard themselves as martyrs, heroes or prophets is now unnecessary." Stanley Hall, devoted to his Child Study programs, admired by the public and attacked by many professionals as anti-scientific. Boring, whom Thorndike tried unsuccessfully to attract to Teachers College. Cattell, president of the IX International Congress of Psychology, who writes letters to Rockefeller describing the enormous potentialities of psychology and the importance of obtaining financial support for the young science. Maslow and Skinner, who appear later, have an important relation to Thorndike, and consider him as the most important psychologist of the epoch. As Boring said, if there were another International Congress of Psychology in the U. S. Thorndike would be elected president.

Actually he was president of several important associations, among them the American Psychological Association (in 1932), and

the American Association for the Advancement of Science (in 1934). He was recognized by Pavlov as the father of objective psychology, and by 1935 his books, among them *Educational Psychology*, were translated into the Russian and used as basic texts in many places of the USSR. The University of Athens granted him an honorary degree.

The goal of Thorndike was to establish an experimental science of human nature, and we see this aim from the first to the last book and article; he published 78 books and monographs, and hundreds of scientific and popular articles, among them a play, *The Miracle*. The two main directions of his research were equally influential: animal psychology and educational psychology. In the latter, Thorndike's contribution was the extension of the idea of measurement to all education and to social considerations generally. In psychology it was his learning theory, and particularly his law of effect, which has lasted for 60 years. According to the author, no school in the U. S. was left without the influence of Thorndike. On the other hand, Tolman wrote that all psychologists in the country had taken Thorndike, overtly or covertly, as their starting point.

That man, Edward L. Thorndike, is one of the pillars of psychology and education in the present day, and not only in the U. S. The present biography shows him as a human being, that every readers suspects existed behind the "puzzle boxes," the law of effect, and the dictionaries of most frequent words. It is expected that books of this quality be written about other important figures of psychology, like Wundt, Watson, Cattell, or Köhler. It would be a worthwhile enterprise, although not an easy one.

Rubén Ardila, Ph.D.

National University of Colombia, Bogotá