SCIENTIFIC APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF THE HUMAN MIND

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We are met to inaugurate a museum of psychology. May I begin by quoting a letter which I recently received from a spirited adolescent girl, age 14? “I have many hobbies,” she wrote, “in fact they are almost countless. The one I like best is keeping a museum. As you probably remember, our house is quite large. My museum (the name of it is ‘A Country Museum’) is one of the smaller rooms upstairs. . . . Some of the things are Indian arrow heads, a tip of an Indian ax, a hornet’s nest, and some butterflies. The thing that I thought would be interesting is to try to get a stone or two from every state of the union. . . .” So I sent her a rock from Connecticut.

1 Address delivered at inauguration ceremony of Psychological Museum and First Psychological Exposition, Garfield Park, Chicago, May 4, 1938.

There is a good deal of psychology in that letter; not so much in the rock itself. A psychological museum must deal with phenomena less substantial and less accessible than rocks and hornet nests. Can it succeed in giving tangibleness to the human mind?

The Lewis Institute, your trustees and director have undertaken a project of great difficulty, but one which has important pioneering possibilities. Museums have in general been devoted to the products and often to the curiosities of human culture. A psychological museum will have to concern itself in a new way with a delineation of the nature, mechanisms and the needs of human behavior. It will have to design a new kind of transparent man. Its problem is to objectify, to make visible, the operations and the laws of the human