Louis Leon Thurstone

With the death of L. L. Thurstone on September 29, 1955, psychology lost one of its greatest, a unique figure on the psychological scene and one to whom psychologists will always be indebted. If any psychologist of the past quarter century deserved to be called Mr. Psychological Measurement, it was he. His major professional objective coincided with that of the Psychometric Society and of *Psychometrika*, both of which were founded under his leadership: The development of psychology as a quantitative, rational science. By virtue of his own contributions and his influence on others, psychology has taken long steps in the direction of fulfillment of this objective. No major aspect of the field of measurement was untouched by him.

Louis Leon Thurstone was born May 29, 1887, in Chicago, where in later years he spent the greater portion of his professional life and achieved his greatest distinction, at the University of Chicago. His parents were of native, Swedish stock, his father's occupations being, in turn, military instructor, Lutheran pastor, editor, and publisher. Owing to a mobile family life, Thurstone went to school in Illinois; Mississippi; Stockholm, Sweden; and Jamestown, New York. He attended Cornell University, where he specialized in engineering. Considering the few instances of which the writer has known in which psychologists have started from a base of engineering training, he has often thought that we should be better off if more psychologists had taken that educational route.

It was during his engineering-school days that the problem of the learning curve, and hence psychology, caught Thurstone's attention. On graduation, however, he was offered a position in the laboratory of Thomas A. Edison, where he spent the year of 1912. During the next two academic years, he taught engineering courses at the University of Minnesota, and there began his study of experimental psychology. Graduate work followed at the University of Chicago. In 1915 he accepted an assistantship in the new and active laboratory established by Walter V. Bingham at the Carnegie Institute of Technology. He received his doctorate from Chicago, with a dissertation on the learning curve. His academic rise at Carnegie was something of a record. Beginning with the rank of instructor in 1917, with a promotion each year he became professor and head of the department by 1920.

The year of 1923–24 was spent in Washington, D. C., with the Institute for Government Research, an agency devoted to the improvement of civil-service practices. From that time on, Thurstone had considerable influence, directly or indirectly, upon civil-service procedures.

After his marriage in the summer of 1924 to Thelma Gwinn, Thurstone assumed his professorship at the University of Chicago. In the course of time,