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BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR

OF

FREDERIC WARD PUTNAM

1839-1915

BY

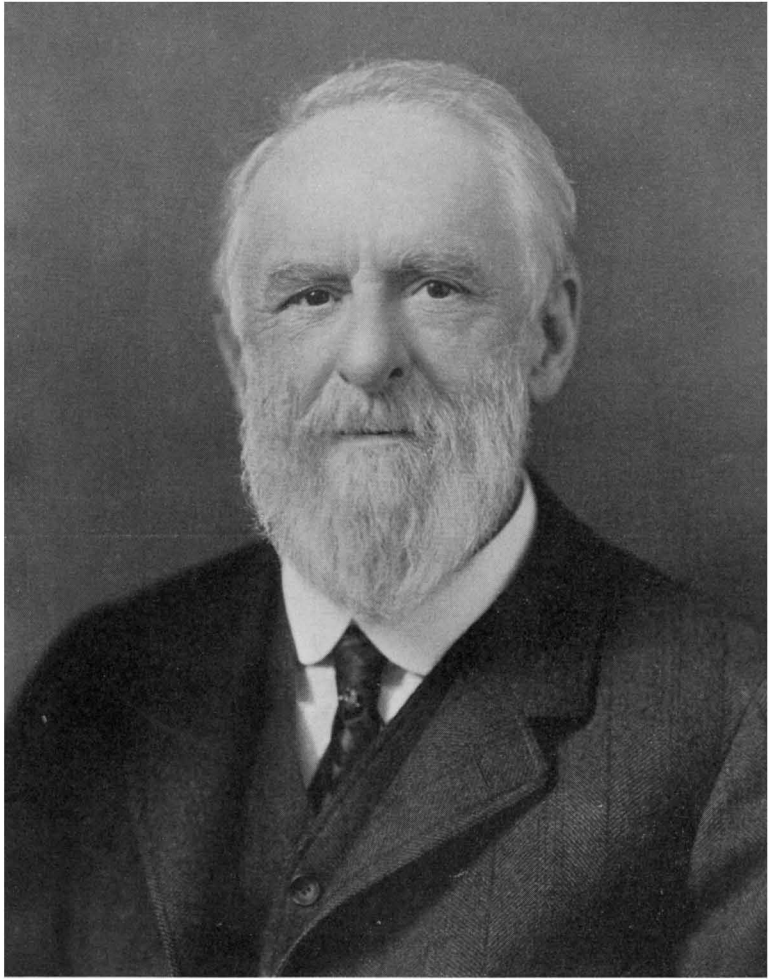
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*J. W. Putnam*

# FREDERIC WARD PUTNAM

1839-1915

BY ALFRED M. TOZZER

To have been, almost literally, the founder of a new branch of knowledge in America is, in itself, no small honor, and when to this is added the prime force behind anthropology for almost fifty years, the record is indeed unusual.

From an ancestry dating back to John Putnam who migrated from Aston Abbotts, Bucks, England in 1640, including Appletons, Fiskes, Wards, and Higginsons, Frederic Ward Putnam was born in Salem, April 16, 1839, and died in Cambridge, August 14, 1915. He was the son of Eben and Elizabeth (Appleton) Putnam, grandson of Eben and Elizabeth (daughter of General John Fiske) Putnam and of Nathaniel and Elizabeth (daughter of Joshua Ward) Appleton. In 1864 he married Adelaide Martha Edmands, who died in 1879. Three children were born, Eben, Alice Edmands, and Ethel Appleton Fiske, later married to John Hart Lewis; she died in 1922. In 1882 he married Esther Orne Clarke who survived him until 1922.

During his whole career Putnam was a natural historian in the old-fashioned, but best sense of the word. With almost no school or college background, but with home tuition, he developed at a very early age a great interest in nature. He was an assistant to his father in the cultivation of plants, but it was the study of birds which especially interested him. His first two scientific papers, on the fish of Salem Harbor, were published at the age of sixteen. With little help, and mainly on his own initiative, the next year he published a list of the fish and a catalogue of the birds of Essex County. These unusual achievements brought him almost immediate recognition, as he soon became Curator of Ornithology in the Essex Institute of Salem. This was his first official connection with a scientific institution, but this relationship, which later came to include institutions from California eastward, continued for sixty years until his death.

Within a year, Professor Louis Agassiz discovered him at Salem and induced him to become one of the assistants in the Museum at Cambridge. While still retaining his position in Salem, he worked with Agassiz for seven years. With him at

Cambridge were Edward S. Morse, Alpheus Hyatt, Samuel H. Scudder and A. S. Packard.

During this time he turned from ornithology to ichthyology. While his contemporaries were going through the usual college courses, he was studying living forms and making valuable contributions to science. The discipline of routine education he never had; his discipline came from nature and his associations with his one teacher and his fellow students, all of whom became noted scholars. For his work with Agassiz, Harvard conferred upon him the degree of B. S. in 1862. The influence of Agassiz remained with him during his entire life. His love for his teacher and the respect and admiration for Agassiz's method of teaching were always favorite themes in his conversations with his own pupils. His never-ending lament was that his students found their knowledge in books rather than in specimens. His work in ornithology and ichthyology is shown in the following list of positions he held from 1856 to 1889:

- 1856-1861—Curator of Ornithology, Essex Institute, Salem.
- 1862 —Curator of Ornithology and Mammalogy, Essex Institute.
- 1863 —Curator of Mammalogy and Ichthyology, Essex Institute.
- 1864-1867—Curator of Vertebrates, Essex Institute, Salem.
- 1864-1870—Superintendent and Director, Essex Institute.
- 1859-1868—Curator of Ichthyology, Boston Society of Natural History.
- 1867-1869—Superintendent, Museum East Indian Marine Society, Salem.
- 1869-1873—Director, Museum of Peabody Academy of Sciences.
- 1876-1878—Assistant, Ichthyology, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge.
- 1882-1889—Massachusetts State Commissioner of Fish and Game.
- 1874 —Assistant, Kentucky Geological Survey.

1876-1879—Assistant to United States Engineers in the Surveys West of the One Hundredth Meridian.

His interest in anthropology may be said to have begun as early as 1857 while attending a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Toronto. On one of his frequent excursions into the country in search of information he found on the site of Mount Royal a quantity of clam shells, fish bones, burned earth and pottery. This was one of the first reported discoveries of the work of ancient man in America. "The study of man and his work," a definition he has often given for anthropology, became even at this early time an interest second only to that of ichthyology. From 1875 onward his work was mainly along anthropological lines. The previous year he had been an assistant in the Kentucky Geological Survey and from 1876 to 1879 he was assistant to the United States Engineers in surveys west of the One Hundredth Meridian. It was at this time that he made his first contribution to the knowledge of the prehistoric ruins in southern California, Arizona and New Mexico. Later the Pueblo cultures were to be the subject of elaborate researches undertaken under his direction.

From an original suggestion of Professor Othniel C. Marsh of Yale University to his uncle, George Peabody, in London, the three Peabody Museums at Yale, Harvard, and in Salem came into existence. In 1866, Peabody gave the sum of \$150,000 for an endowment of a "Museum and Professorship of American Archaeology and Ethnology in connection with Harvard University." Jeffries Wyman served as Curator of the new museum until his death in 1874. Following him, Asa Gray was appointed Curator *pro tem*, as he felt he could not assume permanent charge of the Museum. Putnam, who had been associated with Wyman in his archaeological field researches and had been doing independent work in mound exploration, was appointed, in 1875, Curator of the Peabody Museum, a position he held for thirty-four years, when he became Honorary Curator, and from 1913 to the time of his death he was Honorary Director.

Starting in 1866 with a case of fifty specimens housed in Boylston Hall under Wyman the museum had grown rapidly. Putnam became Curator about the time that the Peabody gift had grown to the figure set by the donor and in 1876 the first part of the Peabody Museum was begun. The rapid growth of collections made it necessary to enlarge the building in 1889, and in 1914 Putnam's tireless efforts made a further addition possible, thus completing the building, as originally planned by Agassiz, by joining the geological section of the University Museum. Putnam happily lived to see the fruition of his hopes. For almost forty years, in spite of numerous other positions, his main interest was the Peabody Museum. Soon after his appointment as Curator, he included scientific monographs in his annual reports; in 1888 he started the "Papers of the Peabody Museum," and in 1896 the series of "Memoirs" was added. Not the least of Putnam's abilities was his success in raising money for scientific investigations. His first public appeal for aid was in 1882 when he was able to undertake extensive archaeological research in Ohio and among the Indians of the Plains. In 1890, Charles Pickering Bowditch became the Museum's most generous benefactor, and the following year marked the first of a series of archaeological expeditions to Central America which has continued almost down to the present time. The able direction of Putnam is seen in the conduct of these expeditions and his editorial ability is demonstrated in the long series of Papers and Memoirs published under his Curatorship.

The endowment given by George Peabody to found the Peabody Museum included a Professorship in American Archaeology and Ethnology, but nothing was done about the appointment until June, 1885. The Harvard Corporation then appointed Putnam Peabody Professor. Confirmation by the Board of Overseers was not given until 1887. This postponement deprived Putnam of the honor of being the first Professor of American Archaeology in an American university. During the previous year Daniel G. Brinton was appointed Professor of American Archaeology and Linguistics in the University of Pennsylvania. Three years later the Division of American Archaeology and

Ethnology was established at Harvard and the Hemenway and Thaw Fellowships were established in 1891. In spite of severe opposition, mainly from Charles Eliot Norton, the name of the Division of American Archaeology and Ethnology was changed in 1903 to the Division of Anthropology. The courses offered now embraced many fields outside those of American Archaeology and Ethnology. Putnam saw very early that the Museum should not limit itself to American Archaeology and Ethnology, but should widen its scope to include collections from the whole world. By the deed of gift, this was possible. Today the Peabody Museum, one of the great anthropological museums of the world, stands as Putnam's greatest monument. This zeal for the new cause brought him ample reward in students, a notable increase in collections and research funds, and money for building and equipment purposes.

The archaeology of the Mound Area of the United States became Putnam's special interest, and his long-continued excavations at the Turner Group and at Madisonville, Ohio, brought this area to the notice of the scientific world. For almost the first time, methods of exact measurements coupled with topographical maps, sections, and other scientifically determined data were employed in American archaeology. The old haphazard methods of digging for objects gave way to a knowledge of the context of specimens—the manner of their occurrence. His field notes are models of recording archaeological data. Through Putnam's effort, the famous Serpent Mound in Ohio was bought by Harvard University, later to be turned over to the Ohio Historical Society for permanent preservation. One of the first to recognize the importance of removing archaeological monuments from the vandal "pot-hunter," he played a part in the laws for the preservation of several of these works of ancient man, especially some of the most important of the "cliff dwellings."

In connection with his work for the Peabody Museum and for the other institutions with which he was connected he personally conducted or directed archaeological work in thirty-seven different states, in addition to extensive expeditions to Central America and Mexico and more limited investigations in South

America, Canada and Europe. His energy and enthusiasm, coupled with great perseverance, are markedly shown in these several fields of investigation. Perhaps the best example was the search for geologically ancient man on the edge of the glacial gravels at Trenton, New Jersey. In spite of opposition and much discouragement, he insisted the work here should be kept up. For thirty years he had one or more men constantly at work investigating this site for the possible presence of early man. The work at Trenton was supplemented by similar lines of investigation in California. He lived and died with the firm conviction that man lived on this continent in glacial times. He felt that he had been able to prove this with the human femur found in the glacial gravels in New Jersey. It is a pleasure to note that excavations later carried on by the American Museum of Natural History serve to substantiate Professor Putnam's thesis and the accuracy of his observations. There is perhaps no other single point of investigation within the whole field of archaeology that has been so long-continued and so carefully carried out as this work at Trenton. However much one may differ with Professor Putnam as to the subject in question, no one can fail to admire the persistence of his search for the truth.

Throughout his life, Putnam gave few formal courses of instruction. Following Agassiz's example, he much preferred to have his students meet him in the laboratory for informal instruction. During the first years of anthropology at Harvard, he often gave lectures on subjects in which he was especially interested in regular courses offered by his colleagues. A list of his students would contain names on the teaching staffs of many colleges and on the staffs of practically all the anthropological museums of the country. One of the great reasons for his success was his remarkable and unselfish interest in the work of his students. The sincere and sympathetic personal contact was always present. He never turned anyone away who showed any interest and any aptitude for anthropology. He always found a way to provide for a poor student, even if the means had to come out of his own pocket. He never was too busy to listen and he was always filled with an abundant optimism. As a public lec-



turer, he was at his best. He appeared most successfully before many different scientific societies, associations and clubs. He never entirely left out of consideration the fact that he was a pioneer in the new subject. With an infectious enthusiasm and seeing the great opportunities for anthropological work in America, he realized the necessity of student recruits in this field and money to support the work.

Attending his first meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Toronto in 1857, he very rarely missed a session of this organization. Becoming Permanent Secretary in 1873, he retained this office for twenty-five years. As the one permanent official in this "great mother organization of American associations of learning," the policies he inaugurated and kept alive made a very deep impression on scientific research in America. On laying down this ungrateful task, he was made President in 1898. Dr. W J McGee, at a dinner in Cambridge in celebration of Putnam's seventieth birthday, said in part: "I desire especially to signalize one feature of Professor Putnam's career which seems to me distinctively national and permanent in character. Throughout the entire formative period of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Professor Putnam was Permanent Secretary, practically the sole continuous officer of the Association; and his efforts in its behalf were ceaseless and constantly successful. This, too, was the formative period of American science. Now what the Association (which I regard as our most typical and most useful scientific institution) would have become without Putnam—who can say? Certainly his impress is large; certainly its character and standing must in no small measure be credited to him. And what American science would have been without the Association—who can say? Certainly its character and prestige are the greater because of the work of the Association and because of Putnam's efforts in its behalf. It is doubly pleasant for one coming from another center of thought to acknowledge the debt of the nation to a man and to an institution that have done so much toward preparing the way for that

larger knowledge of humanity made necessary by the modern view of nature in which the resources loom so large."

His appointment as chief of the ethnological section of the World's Fair at Chicago in 1892 marked an epoch in American anthropology. One of his first moves in his new office was to have the structure in which his department was housed called the "Anthropological Building." This, so far as I know, was the first official use of the word "Anthropology" in the New World. Among those whom he gathered around him as his co-workers at Chicago was Dr. Boas, then docent in Anthropology at Clark University, whom he made his first assistant. As part of the out-of-door exhibit at Chicago, Putnam had full-size models of several of the Maya buildings in Yucatan. The interest aroused by the collections and exhibits brought together in Chicago resulted in an immense impetus being given to the study of this subject in colleges and to the creation of anthropological museums. The "cabinet of curios" now gave way to scientific collecting. As a direct outcome of the Chicago Fair, the Field Museum was started. Its conception was due, in large part, to Professor Putnam, and one of his students was the first Curator of Anthropology in this institution.

Another result of the work at the World's Fair was an opportunity for Putnam to organize the Anthropological Department at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, where he was Curator from 1894 to 1903. He called Boas to New York to assist him. Under their joint leadership, some of the most far-reaching anthropological investigations ever inaugurated were undertaken, more especially the Jessup North-Pacific Expedition. The Hyde Expeditions to the Southwest were also carried out at this time and Putnam spent several seasons in the field surrounded by his students and directing the excavations.

Never too busy to lend a hand at organizing and extending anthropology, in 1903 he was called to the University of California to organize a department and a museum on the invitation of Mrs. Phoebe Hearst. Here he was Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Anthropological Museum from 1903 to 1909, afterwards Professor Emeritus, spending a part of each

year in California. Professor Kroeber writes in this connection, "He was then sixty-four years of age; but in spite of the handicaps of remoteness during a large part of the year, he threw into his California service all the habitual vigor and unremitting care of his youth, plus the seasoning of his mature experience. The writing of his hand remains in the broad outlines of this institution as visibly as in those on which he had fashioned before. In spite of ill health in which there became manifest before long the symptoms of the disease to which he was ultimately to succumb, he continued to the utmost of his strength his activities in California, until his retirement at the statutory age of seventy in 1909."

His ability as an organizer seen at Cambridge, Chicago, California, and New York, was evident during his earlier years. He played a major part in starting *The American Naturalist* and *Science*. There should also be mentioned his share in the establishment of the Archaeological Institute of America in 1879. The others on this organizing committee were Charles W. Eliot, Charles Eliot Norton, Alexander Agassiz, William Endicott, Jr., W. W. Goodwin, Augustus Lowell, Martin Brimmer, T. G. Appleton, W. E. Gurney, Henry P. Kidder and C. C. Perkins. The traditions of Classical Archaeology were broken for the first time and American Archaeology, perhaps reluctantly, was invited to enter the fold. This new departure was due in great part to the personality and to the enthusiasm of Putnam.

Recognition outside his own field came tardily, and, it must be confessed, rather grudgingly in some cases. Starting with no academic background in the usual sense, and in a new field of learning, he had to meet the criticism of the classical archaeologists who saw nothing in American archaeology and in Indians. There were, at first, few affiliations with other branches of science. He had to wrench the study of "early man and his work" out of the hands of the amateur and of the dilettante and place scientific foundations under a structure which, at first, had only very vague outlines. His accomplishment was great in direct proportion to the many discouragements he met in his early endeavors. He received an honorary A.M. from Williams

as early as 1868, but Harvard did not recognize his arduous labors in behalf of anthropology until 1892, when he was made an honorary member of the Phi Beta Kappa. Two years later he received an honorary Doctor of Science degree from the University of Pennsylvania. In 1896 he was given the Cross of the Legion of Honor from the French Government, and in 1903 the Drexel Gold Medal from the University of Pennsylvania, an honor shared by Flinders Petrie, Evans, and Hilprecht. He had been selected as the recipient of an honorary degree from Oxford in 1912 at the meeting of the International Congress of Americanists, but his health prevented him from taking the trip to England. He was elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 1885. He was also a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the American Philosophical Society, the Massachusetts Historical Society, and a large number of other learned societies of the United States. He was an honorary or corresponding member of scientific societies in London, Edinburgh, Paris, Brussels, Berlin, Stockholm, Florence, Rome, and Lima.

His seventieth birthday in 1909 was made the occasion for presenting him with a *Festschrift* to which his friends and colleagues contributed. The subjects of the papers offered in his honor covered the whole field of anthropology, including physical anthropology, archaeology, ethnology, sociology, religion, folklore, and linguistics. A bibliography of Putnam's writings is also included in the volume. Professor C. H. Toy presided at the celebration and President Eliot, representing Harvard University, was the first speaker. He touched upon the many difficulties which surrounded the early attempts of Professor Putnam in establishing the teaching of anthropology in Harvard University, the way these difficulties were overcome, and the gratifying results of Professor Putnam's work. He spoke of the growth of the Peabody Museum from small beginnings and the development of research connected with the Museum, and drew a parallel between the pioneer work of Asa Gray in botany and Professor Putnam in anthropology.

Professor Franz Boas, through whose initiative the volume was undertaken, was the second speaker. He read a long list of the learned societies which had sent felicitations to Putnam on this occasion, including various learned bodies of the United States, South America, England, Sweden, France, Germany, and Italy. Dr. Boas said in part: "I consider it a great privilege to be allowed to express to you the good wishes of your many friends—those here assembled, and of the many more who could not join us tonight to do honor to you. Many years of enthusiastic work, not only in your chosen field of science, but also in behalf of every subject that has appealed to your generous sympathy, have knit firmer bonds between you and your wide circle of friends. I wish to give expression particularly to the feelings of those who are working with you toward the advancement of anthropology. When we look back upon the growth of our science during the last forty years, three names stand out prominently among American anthropologists—your own, that of John Wesley Powell, and that of Daniel Garrison Brinton. We owe to you the development of steady, painstaking methods of field research and of care in the accumulation of data; not detached from the ends sought by Powell, not without ideas as to their interpretation, but looking forward steadily and firmly toward a goal that cannot be attained in a few years, nor in a generation—that must be before our eyes all the time, and the attainment of which demands our whole energy. No trouble has been too great for you in the pursuit of this aim; and to your facility of creating enthusiasm among half-willing friends of science, anthropology owes much of what it is. We can hardly turn to one of the great centers of anthropological research without finding that its very existence, or at least much of its work, is due to your inspiring personality. It is not for me to speak of the work that you have built up in Harvard University, but I have been witness to the success of your inspiration in Chicago and in New York. Without your unselfish work for the World's Fair, the Field Museum of Natural History would not be what it is. You laid the ground for the anthropological work of the American Museum of Natural History in New

York, and the periods of its great anthropological activity were when you were there. In the Far West, in California, anthropological work has grown up under your influence and under your watchful eye. If I were to count the institutions that have benefited from your wise counsel, I might go on without end. Much as you have thus done for the advancement of anthropology, we should not do justice to you if we were to forget the personal influence that you have exerted upon all those whose good fortune it has been to work with you. Through your kindly interest in his scientific work and in his personal welfare, you have succeeded in making every one of us your warm personal friend. It has been our desire to give permanent expression to our feeling of gratitude to you; and it seemed to us that this could be done in no better way than by presenting you with a book containing some of the results of the investigations of your former collaborators and of those who continue work in your special field of research. Your many friends here and abroad, personal friends, patrons of science, institutions in whose behalf you have labored, and your colleagues and collaborators have joined in the preparation of the book that I have the honor to present to you in their behalf. It is meant to be a token of our friendship and gratitude, and a witness for all time to come, not only of the important services that you have rendered to science, but also of the bonds of friendship that you have established between yourself and your younger colleagues."

Putnam's writings number more than 400 papers and reports, about equally divided among those devoted to natural history, to archaeology, and to scientific administration. His own research in archaeology is shown in reports upon shell mounds in Maine and Massachusetts, the mound builders of Ohio and Wisconsin, the use of copper by the American aborigines, the human deposits in the caves in Kentucky, the geological antiquity of man in New Jersey and in California. Perhaps the most far-reaching papers are those on conventionalization in the ancient art of Panama, and symbolism in the ancient art of America. These served as the point of departure for many studies in primitive art. His largest work is the report in *Archaeology*,

forming Volume VII of the Wheeler Geographical Survey, in which he reviewed the pre-history of California.

It was not as a writer, however, that Putnam will be remembered. He gave freely of his time, his advice and ideas to others who profited largely therefrom. He was a painstaking and most efficient editor of the publications of the different societies and museums of which he was the head. The annual reports for twenty-five years of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and for thirty-four years of the Peabody Museum are models of excellence. His fame rests upon the organization and development of the new science of anthropology. Not only in Cambridge, but in New York, Chicago, and in California, he has left a never-to-be extinguished impress upon anthropological institutions and the teaching of anthropology. Students came to him from all parts of the country and his great enthusiasm sometimes failed to separate the able from the mediocre. In the early days of anthropology, recruits were few, and perhaps there was no other way to gain students for this study. This does not mean that he had no discrimination, but he felt he had to use the material available. Excellent men also came to him and his kindness, unselfishness, encouragement, and direction were exhaustless. His interest was more than purely scientific; he wanted to know his students and their backgrounds, and he shared in all their interests. Professor Kroeber wrote in 1915 in this connection: "Professor Putnam's helpful influence on men, especially young men, at the outset of their scientific careers, was no less profound than his accomplishments for science through his upbuilding of institutions. He never encroached on their freedom, met even abnormalities of thought with patient tolerance, and if he requested heavy drafts of their time, he was always and instantly ready to reciprocate with equally generous measures of his own hours. Above all, he looked upon them as friends; they were human beings in need of encouragement and assistance, not mere thought machines to be perfected and turned adrift. Each and every one of his students he helped. Their existence for him did not end with their departure from the university or exploring

camp. His most valuable aid frequently began only then, and if occasionally the relationship thus established atrophied, instead of becoming warmer with the passage of years, the fault was never his and the regrets were on his side. It is no exaggeration to say that at least half of the anthropologists of the country today owe not only counsel, but their first professional recognition to the influence of Professor Putnam. In the vast majority of cases they admitted and continued to appreciate this debt toward their Dean, whose hours in his later years were frequently cheered by visits that bore testimony to the unwavering friendship and respect of former pupils and assistants.

“In all his relations with men, Professor Putnam showed the same high qualities of sincerity, helpfulness, and unassuming modesty, charged at all times with a genuine and practical benevolence. The humblest of those dependent upon him regarded him with affection; and it was precisely the qualities which on the one hand caused janitors and doorkeepers at institutions he had long left to mourn his death, which on the other hand accorded him the respect and the hearing of men of affairs and endowed him with an unvarying influence upon his boards of trustees.”

As the then President-elect of Harvard, A. Lawrence Lowell, said at the Seventieth Anniversary, Professor Putnam had enjoyed the very unusual opportunity of opening an entirely new field of research and of developing a new science which had come to be of such great importance, an opportunity not given to many.



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