

REMINISCENCES OF GIBBS BY A
STUDENT AND COLLEAGUE*

BY EDWIN BIDWELL WILSON

When last spring I was asked to agree to give the Gibbs Lecture on this occasion, I assented on the assumption that before the time came for the lecture to be delivered I should have been entirely relieved of my executive responsibilities to the Social Science Research Council and should have had opportunity to prepare from a considerable dossier of investigations in progress a scientific paper somewhat fit to take its place with the previous lectures given in this series. As it has turned out, I have not had in full the expected relief and must appear before you with a very general talk of a personal and reminiscent nature. I will not apologize; it may well be that you prefer that type of address from me, and in view of its type I must be expected to speak without apology a good deal in the first person. After all one's personal recollections are his own; they may have little of truth in them, for memory is not infallible; to use a detached third-person style of composition may give them in appearance a greater substance of objective fact than they really merit.

To give you some appreciation of the very inadequate background with which, at the early age of twenty, I came into contact with J. Willard Gibbs, may I state that my undergraduate work was at Harvard and in mathematics, which meant pure mathematics. In the spring of 1899, Professor W. F. Osgood, with whom I had taken a number of courses and who was good enough to take a real and much appreciated interest in me, suggested that I go to Yale for my graduate work. Some of you who have a knowledge of the relative standing in pure mathematics of the departments at Harvard and Yale at that time may think the advice extraordinary. It was, but it was extraordinarily good. As Professor Osgood pointed out, I had been long enough at Harvard and had specialized sufficiently in mathematics to

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