

## JAMES PIERPONT—IN MEMORIAM

James Pierpont died in San Mateo, California, on December 9, 1938, at the age of seventy-two. During the last year he had been in ill health.

James Pierpont belonged to an old New Haven family which has been associated with Yale in various ways. His forefather and namesake, the New Haven minister James Pierpont, was one of the founders of Yale College. James Pierpont's father, Cornelius Pierpont, was a wealthy business man in New Haven. He had four children, three sons and one daughter.

James, the second son, was born on June 16, 1866. He prepared for college at New Haven High School and then went to Worcester Polytechnic Institute. Originally he wanted to become a mechanical engineer, but it may be surmised that he gradually found that the practical applications of engineering appealed less to him than the study of the theoretical foundations of the subject. In any case, it must have been during his stay at Worcester that he discovered his love for the pure sciences because his plans were already laid. Shortly after his graduation in 1886 he left for Europe to begin a prolonged study of mathematics at various universities.

Most of the time he studied in Berlin and Vienna. In Berlin he became familiar with the works of Kronecker, and all of Pierpont's early papers show the profound influence of this algebraic school. The last years in Europe were spent in Vienna where he obtained his doctor's degree in 1894. Here he made many friends, and it seems that the "Gemütlichkeit" of university life in Vienna suited his own jovial temperament particularly well. His associations with Wirtinger and von Escherich were close and cordial and the friendships were renewed by Pierpont's occasional returns to Vienna. This period of studies was a very happy one, and in his later years Pierpont liked to reminisce about it, repeating often what a revelation the acquaintance with European mathematics and mathematicians had been to him.

After having received his Ph.D. degree Pierpont returned to New Haven and was appointed lecturer at Yale the same year, 1894. He was thoroughly imbued with the ideas of modern mathematics and he set to work with the zeal of a missionary to spread them among American mathematicians. In his first period he was particularly interested in algebra and equation theory. Together with Bôcher he gave the first Colloquium Lectures of the American Mathematical Society in Buffalo in 1896. Pierpont's topic was the Galois theory of equations. It was a set of lectures obviously inspired by Kronecker's and Weber's expositions, but Pierpont's presentation had, as most of his contributions, a clearness of its own which dissolved the complications of the theory. This colloquium lecture [7] is one of the few which have not been published in book form, and Pierpont sometimes expressed regret that this had not been done.\* Pierpont was one of the outstanding leaders in the meetings of the Society in this period. After the meetings Bôcher, Osgood, and other friends often stopped in New Haven on their way home to continue the discussion of the problems which interested them.

Pierpont's academic career may be described in few words. At Yale he was rapidly promoted. In 1895 he was made an instructor, in 1896 assistant professor, and in 1898 professor in Yale College, a position which he held until his retirement in 1933. In 1923 he was appointed to the Erastus L. DeForest professorship in mathe-

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\* In the following the numbers refer to the list of Pierpont's printed articles appended to this article.