

SOPHUS LIE.*

BY PROFESSOR GASTON DARBOUX.

SOPHUS LIE was born on the 17th of December, 1842, at Nordfjordeid (near Florö) where his father, John Herman Lie, was pastor. The studies of his childhood and youth did not reveal in him that exceptional aptitude for mathematics which is signalized so early in the lives of the great geometers: Gauss, Abel, and many others. Even on leaving the University of Christiania in 1865, he still hesitated between philology and mathematics. It was the works of Plücker on modern geometry which first made him fully conscious of his mathematical abilities and awakened within him an ardent desire to consecrate himself to mathematical research. Surmounting all difficulties and working with indomitable energy he published his first work in 1869, and we can say that from 1870 on he was in possession of the ideas which were to direct his whole career.

At this time I frequently had the pleasure of meeting and conversing with him in Paris where he had come with his friend F. Klein. A course of lectures by Sylow revealed to Lie all the importance of the theory of substitution groups; the two friends studied this theory in the great treatise of our colleague Jordan; they saw fully the essential rôle which it would be called upon to play in all the branches of mathematics to which it had then not been applied. They have both had the good fortune to contribute by their works to impressing upon mathematical studies the direction which appeared to them to be the best.

A short note of Lie "Sur une transformation géométrique," presented to our Academy in October 1870 contains an extremely original discovery. Nothing resembles a sphere less than a straight line and yet, by using the ideas of Plücker, Lie found a singular transformation which makes a sphere correspond to a straight line, and which consequently makes possible the derivation of a theorem relative to an ensemble of spheres from every theorem relative to an aggregate of straight lines, and vice versa. It is true that if the lines are real, the corresponding spheres are imaginary. But such difficulties are not sufficient to deter geometers. In this curious method of transformation, each property relative to asymptotic lines of a surface is transformed into a property relative to lines of curvature. The name of Lie will remain attached to these concealed relations which

* Translated from the *Comptes rendus*, February 27, 1899, by Professor EDGAR ODELL LOVETT.