

CHARLES LEONARD BOUTON*

A MINUTE READ BEFORE THE FACULTY OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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Charles Leonard Bouton was born in St. Louis, Missouri, April 25, 1869. His father, William Bouton, was of Huguenot descent, and the family was long established in New England. At the close of the Civil War, William Bouton settled in St. Louis, where his regiment had been disbanded. Charles's mother, Mary Rothery Conklin, was also of old American stock; her grandparents were Scotch. William Bouton was an engineer by profession. His grandfather is said to have been the projector of the Erie Railroad, and was the author of the first article on its construction. Charles was the only one of the four sons who did not follow in his father's footsteps. The home atmosphere was academic and intellectually stimulating.

Bouton received his early education in the public schools of St. Louis, and took his first degree, that of Master of Science, at Washington University in 1891. Here, he came under the instruction of a highly skilled teacher of descriptive geometry, Dr. Edmund Arthur Engler. The next two years were given to teaching in Smith Academy, St. Louis, and these were followed by a year as instructor in Washington University, part of his work being to assist Professor Henry S. Pritchett. His next, and as it turned out, his last move was to Harvard. The years '94-'95 and '95-'96 were spent in the Graduate School. He took the master's degree at the end of the first year, and at the end of the second he was awarded a Parker Fellowship for study abroad. His two years at Leipzig were most profitably spent. He chose as his master that most original geometer, Sophus Lie, then at the height of his fame. As a matter of fact, Bouton was one of the great Norwegian's last pupils, for Lie returned to Norway in 1898 and died soon after. All of Bouton's subsequent scientific work bore the clear impress of Lie's genius. His two advanced courses, which he originated soon after his return to Harvard, dealt respectively with the theory of geometrical transformations and the application of transformation groups to the solution of differential equations. The graduate students who subsequently had the good fortune to prepare for the doctorate under his care generally took up subjects connected with the theory of transformations.

After receiving the doctorate at Leipzig in 1898 Bouton returned to Harvard and began a long period of work, broken only by occasional sabbatical absence. He threw himself with the greatest zeal into his duties as a teacher. At one time or another, beside the alternating advanced courses mentioned, he taught nearly every one of the lower and

* Professor Charles Leonard Bouton died on February 20, 1922. See this BULLETIN, vol. 28, p. 82 (Jan.-Feb., 1922).