

The Willard Gibbs Medal Award

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When Alexander Smith presented the Willard Gibbs Medal to Svante Arrhenius in the Gold Room of the Congress Hotel in May, 1911, he inaugurated an annual event which has become the high point in the yearly activities of the Chicago Section. The Willard Gibbs Medal was founded by William A. Converse. After serving seven years as secretary of the Chicago Section, he wished to do something which would contribute uniquely to the perpetuation of the Section. The Medal was founded as an expression of this desire.

The wisdom of the committee which formulated the rules for awarding the medal is amply attested by the roll of eminent chemists who have been chosen as medalists: Arrhenius, Richards, Baekeland, Remsen, A. A. Noyes, Whitney, Morley, Burton, W. A. Noyes, Cottrell, Mme. Curie, Steglitz, Lewis, Gomberg, Irvine, Abel, Harkins, Hudson, Langmuir, Levene, and Franklin. Each year the jury adds the name of another eminent chemist to the roll because it deems his "work and original contributions to pure or applied chemistry . . . worthy of special recognition . . ." In September, the name of Richard Willstätter will be added to the list.

Scientific honors are awarded to stimulate interest in significant original contributions to science. They may be divided into two classes on the basis of the method of accomplishment. One class includes the awarding of prizes for the best essay or paper, or the most significant contribution made under designated conditions. The purpose of the award is to stimulate interest in a group in order that the individuals of the group will purposefully strive to win the honor. The subsequent activities of these individuals are affected by the experi-

ence of working for the award. The second class includes the awarding of honors for significant original contributions that have continued over a period of years. The purpose of the latter is to recognize real achievements and to express appreciation of them. This type of award has little effect upon the later work of the recipient.

The awarding of the Willard Gibbs Medal belongs to this second class. It has little effect upon the medalist's succeeding activities. He has not striven for the medal, nor does he measure his success in terms of it. It may not stimulate him to any marked degree to greater original contribution, but he is conscious of his fellows' appreciation of his work. The occasion of awarding the medal is particularly stimulating and inspiring to the people who assemble to give signal honor to an eminent investigator and contributor. As the medal is deposited in the hands of the medalist, the humdrum of beaker-pushing is forgotten. All of those present rise spontaneously with sincere and enthusiastic applause. During the ceremony, there comes to each individual a new appreciation of the details of his own work, and a feeling that it is integrated within a larger whole which contributes to the progress of the human race. His succeeding work will be colored by this experience. The medal may not change the activities of the medalist, but it changes the activities of the individuals who take part in honoring him.

Endowment alone cannot perpetuate a society, but provision for an occasion which inspires and stimulates the individuals of that society to recognize their own possibilities and to integrate their achievements with achievements greater than their own, will insure perpetuation of the organization.

Across the Table

Related by W. LEE LEWIS

Into the dining room slowly filed the round table group like Roman senators, a little weighted down with their individual cares and the world's troubles. Time and circumstances had touched them

all but in this they knew they were but part of an innumerable company. Last and most beloved came the patriarch. Years had slowed his step, silvered his