Presentation of the Joseph Sullivant Medal

On his fifty-ninth birthday—January 12, 1923—Mr. Benjamin G. Lamme, M.E., '88, was formally presented with the Joseph Sullivant Medal. This medal was founded by Dr. Thomas C. Mendenhall, Professor Emeritus of Physics and one of the Trustees of the University. It has been named in honor of Joseph Sullivant, who was a pioneer in science in Ohio, and who, as one of the first trustees of the University, had a great influence in determining the character of the institution. The medal is to be awarded once in five years to a son or daughter of the University who has achieved marked success in invention, discovery, science, engineering, literature, history, fine arts, or other field of work. This, the first award, was made to Mr. Lamme for his work in developing dynamo machinery.

The formal presentation took place in the Chapel. Dr. Mendenhall, founder of the medal, gave an account of the life and work of Joseph Sullivant. The speech of presentation was made by President Thompson. In his few words of acceptance Mr. Lamme very generously ascribed whatever success he has achieved to those who early had an influence upon him, his teachers, and his associates. He told of his admiration for Dr. Mendenhall, and how he used to sit in a window in the hall, studying his lessons, and hoping for a nod from the doctor as he went to his office. He told of the influence which the character and teaching of Professors N. W. Lord and S. M. Robinson had had on him, and of the debt which he owed to Dr. Edward Orton, who was President of the University at that time.

The principal address of the day was given by Dr. Elihu Thomson, who is famous as an electrical engineer and inventor. Dr. Thomson reviewed the development of electrical engineering during the past fifty years. The use of electrical appliances has become so common that they are taken as a matter of course. It was very interesting and at times amusing to hear of the development of the theories concerning electricity and of the speculations concerning the applications of this new force. "The fundamental theories evolved during preceding years have been put into practice in the last fifty years," said Dr. Thomson. "At the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, in 1876, the one at which the telephone of Alexander Graham Bell was exhibited, there were only two exhibits of electrical illumination. These were of crude mechanism, each light of the exhibition having its own circuit."

After tracing the wonderful developments of the last half-century, Dr. Thomson ventured just a little bit into the future. "Things which were formerly regarded as wild prophecy have been realized within a short time,' he said. "The past fifty years have shown such advances that we can hardly prophesy what the future will hold in the line of electrical development. Possibilities are just beginning to be discovered for the practical application of the vacuum tube and the mercury arc rectifier. The next fifty years will probably, in its extraordinary extension of the principles of electrical engineering, see the conversion of the solar rays to electric current."