OBITUARY NOTICE.

JOHN WEBSTER.

JOHN WEBSTER, who died on January 20th from sudden heart failure following influenza, was a member of an old Quaker family, of Birmingham, where he was educated at Mason's College. He was a Fellow of the Chemical Society, of the Society of Public Analysts (of whose Council he was at one time a member), and of the Royal Society of Medicine. He was a member of the Medico-Legal Society, and of its council at the time of his death, and was also a member of the Biochemical Society.

Mr Webster was a most experienced toxicological analyst. About 1900 he became assistant analyst to Sir Thomas Stevenson, who was then senior scientific analyst to the Home Office, and remained in association with him until his death in 1908. Sir William Willcox succeeded Sir Thomas Stevenson, and Mr Webster became assistant analyst to him; and in 1919, when Sir William Willcox retired, Mr Webster was appointed senior scientific analyst to the Home Office.

Mr Webster was an analyst in whom absolute reliance could be placed as regards accuracy, which was essential in work connected with poisoning cases where the life of an accused person might depend on the result of an analysis. His ability was shown in many of the most famous poisoning cases in recent criminal history; he was engaged in the scientific investigations connected with the trials of Seddon, Greenwood, Armstrong, Bywaters and Mrs Thompson, and Vacquier, as well as in a number of smaller investigations.

During the past twenty years he had been on the staff of the Pathological Chemistry Department of St Mary's Hospital, Paddington, and had held the position of pathological chemist to the Hospital.

His great analytical skill and experience were of the utmost value in the clinical investigation of the pathological problems associated with cases in the wards of the Hospital, and they furnished a reliable guide in diagnosis and treatment of many of the difficult cases.

Mr Webster was a most painstaking, careful and neat investigator. He would be seen at his best when carrying out the toxicological investigation of viscera where great difficulties were encountered in consequence of putrefactive changes. The extraction of chemical poisons such as vegetable alkaloids in such cases requires the utmost skill and experience, and at work of this kind he showed a masterly ability and a brilliant technique which had been acquired by long experience and meticulous care.

He would always be absolutely sure of the accuracy of his results and if necessary confirm them by repeated analyses.

His work on the excretion of arsenic after the administration of either arsenic by the mouth or an arseno-benzene derivative intravenously has been of the utmost value not only in toxicological investigations but in guidance as to the correct time for the administration of repeated doses of arseno-benzene compounds.

In the recent Armstrong case the amount of arsenic found by Mr Webster in urine passed three days after the taking of the poison enabled him to say that the amount administered three days previously was a possible fatal dose. He published several papers on research work, especially with reference to arsenical poisoning and the toxicology of salvarsan.

During the War Mr Webster's time was fully occupied by his toxicological work for the Home Office and his Pathological Chemical work at St Mary's Hospital. He did not work on trinitrotoluene poisoning. The "Webster Test" of the urine in this condition was discovered by Mr T. A. Webster working in conjunction with Dr H. H. Dale and Dr Barger¹. The "Webster Test" has been, in a recent obituary notice, incorrectly attributed to the late Mr J. Webster, F.I.C., F.C.S.

During the past twenty years, while at St Mary's Hospital, Mr Webster had closely identified himself with the work of the Hospital and Medical School. He was ever ready to help in the teaching of Forensic Medicine and Chemical Pathology, and whenever his great experience was required in any analytical investigation he was always most willing to help any student in difficulties.

He was a Vice-President of the Students' Musical Society at St Mary's Hospital and had conducted Concerts for them. He also had been for some years a member of the Sancta Maria Lodge and during that time had held the post of Honorary Organist.

His kindly disposition had endeared him to many of his friends and colleagues at St Mary's Hospital, and he will be much missed by them. His death will be a great loss to toxicological science.

He leaves a widow and one son.

¹ Medical Research Council Special Report Series, No. 58, *TNT poisoning and the fate of TNT in the animal body*.

W. H. WILLCOX.