

SCIENCE

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ARTHUR GORDON WEBSTER

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THE death of Professor Arthur Gordon Webster by his own hand on Tuesday, May 14, was to all scientific circles in this country one of the most shocking and astonishing events of the kind that could have happened.

Few Americans have done more than Webster to promote the higher study of physics in this country. He had remarkable gifts and corresponding accomplishments; and, like other men who have been largely effective, he came at the right time for the exercise of his powers.

He was a scholar and a teacher rather than a discoverer or explorer in science. He acquired knowledge easily, copiously, joyfully, and he imparted it in the same way, though he was perhaps somewhat impatient of the drudgery and seclusion of original research; and America needed such a man when he came on the scene.

Rowland and some others, but Rowland more than any other or all others, had already shown the way and set the fashion of experimental investigation for young physicists in American universities; but Rowland was hardly a systematic scholar and was certainly not a systematic teacher. His famous remark, "I neglect them," described accurately his method of dealing with his students, so far as general instruction was concerned, and the example he set in this respect might well have been, perhaps was, injurious to sound scholarship in this country.

European physical laboratories, the best of them, had still much to teach us, and of course many individual Americans had profited by this teaching. B. O. Pierce, for example, understood the matter and labored quietly within his personal sphere of action to improve conditions in America, but he was not the man to proclaim his gospel from the housetops.

Webster took his A.B. at Harvard in 1885, the first scholar in his class, with *summa cum laude* in both mathematics and physics. He remained, as instructor in mathematics, a year more at Harvard, in the course of which he undertook, naturally without great success, a new determination of the mechanical equivalent of heat. Then he went to Berlin to study under Helmholtz. Professor Pupin, in his interesting autobiography, *From Immigrant to Inventor*, tells of meeting him there and of being induced to accompany him to Paris for a few weeks, "to see what physical science was doing at the Sorbonne and at the

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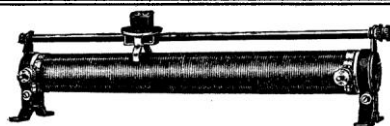
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