

OBITUARY

LESLIE TILLOTSON WEBSTER
1894-1943

LESLIE TILLOTSON WEBSTER was born in New York City on July 23, 1894. After graduating from Amherst College in 1915 he studied medicine at Johns Hopkins University, where he graduated in 1919. After one year in the department of pathology at Johns Hopkins Medical School, he joined the staff of The Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research in 1920; he remained at the institute, of which he became a member in 1934, until his death on July 12, 1943.

From the beginning of his scientific career, Dr. Webster was strongly attracted to the study of factors operating in the spread of infectious diseases in different kinds of populations. When he began his work it was a matter of common observation that epidemics arise in the midst of a population, reach a maximum and then, after killing a number of individuals, wane. The reason for this cyclic course was attributed to chance contact with an infective agent. It was assumed that a highly virulent strain of an infective agent overcame the resistance of equally susceptible individuals of a population, thereby starting an epidemic. Then, as the number of cases increased, the elimination by death of many individuals in the population took place accompanied at the same time by active immunization of those that had suffered a sublethal infection. It was assumed that such a process eventually brought to an end an epidemic, leaving behind only individuals with an increased resistance. In this conception of epidemics little attention was paid to the host factor. Dr. Webster's work proved that in a given population individuals differ greatly in their susceptibility to infection, and that the host factor plays an important role in the rise and fall of epidemics.

By careful and painstaking work Dr. Webster proved that individuals have different degrees of resistance and susceptibility to infection, that these qualities are segregable and inheritable and that strains of animals can be developed by proper inbreeding so that some are highly resistant while others are exceedingly susceptible. By using properly bred animals he proved that in an experimental epidemic there is no need for an infective agent of exceedingly high virulence in order to start an epidemic; it is sufficient that the number of susceptible animals constitute a certain proportion of the population. The epidemic continues as long as enough susceptible animals are present, and, when the number of susceptibles reaches a certain low level, the infective agent through lack of proper soil ceases to be active, thus ending an epidemic. The individuals surviving an epidemic are

resistant, not through a process of active immunization but through their inherited qualities. This was Dr. Webster's fundamental contribution to epidemiology and one that has had a marked influence on all modern work on infectious diseases.

In the field of virus infections, Dr. Webster's contributions have been many and important, especially his studies on rabies. Through his investigations more accurate methods of diagnosis were developed and his studies on antirabic vaccines led to a better evaluation of their potency and to the use of ultraviolet light in their preparation. His studies of human encephalitis has thrown light on many problems in this field; he particularly showed the value of albino mice in investigations of these maladies.

At the time of his death Dr. Webster was fully occupied by the study of the influence of dietary factors on resistance and susceptibility to infectious diseases. It is most unfortunate that his death deprived him of the pleasure of harvesting the fruit of this work. To his friends and to those who had the great privilege of being associated with him in scientific endeavor, his death has caused an irreparable loss; his critical scientific qualities, his kindness and devotion to his friends will long be remembered.

J. CASALS

T. M. RIVERS

WALTER E. McCOURT

PRIVATE funeral services were held on June 1 for Walter Edward McCourt, assistant chancellor of the Washington University, St. Louis, who died suddenly of a heart ailment on May 30 at his home.

Dean McCourt, fifty-nine years old, had been a member of the faculty since 1906. He had been in charge of the department of geology and geography since 1907 and served as dean of the Schools of Engineering and Architecture from 1920 to 1928.

Besides being one of the most popular teachers at the university Dean McCourt was active in scientific and discussion groups, both of a local and national nature. He was a former president of the Engineers Club of St. Louis, and for twenty-five years served as secretary of the American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Engineers for this district.

Born in Brooklyn, N. Y., he received an A.B. degree in 1904 and an M.A. in 1905, both from Cornell University. He joined the Washington University faculty the following year. He was first an instructor in geology; was promoted to assistant professor in 1907, to associate professor in 1912 and three years later to full professorship.

He was a celebrated authority and lecturer on vol-