

Obituary Notices

Prof. A. Pictet

THROUGH the death, on March 12, of Amé Pictet, Swiss chemists have lost their doyen, and organic chemistry one of its foremost investigators. Descended from a family of bankers, Pictet was born at Geneva on July 12, 1857, and in 1876 he entered the local university. In deciding to devote himself to scientific investigation, he followed a Swiss patrician tradition which has given us, to name but a few, De Saussure the physicist and De Candolle the botanist, both citizens of Geneva, the Bernoulli brothers and the two cousins Sarasin, respectively mathematicians and oceanographers of Basle. After some years of study at Geneva under Marignac, Pictet migrated to Dresden, then to Bonn, where he attended Kekulé's lectures and wrote a doctor's dissertation on the esters of tartaric acid, under the direction of Anschütz. After further study in Paris, he returned to Geneva and became in 1882 *Privatdozent*, in 1894 extraordinary professor of organic chemistry, in 1897 ordinary professor of biological and pharmaceutical chemistry, and ultimately professor of inorganic chemistry.

Pictet's early work on heterocyclic compounds, such as phenyl indole, phenanthridine and isoquinoline was connected with his interest in alkaloids, dating from the time of his doctor's dissertation, and showing itself more fully in his book "Constitution chimique des alcaloïdes végétaux", Paris 1888, of which a second edition (1897) and several translations appeared.

The synthesis of nicotine by Pictet (1895-1904) attracted universal attention, like that of tropine, completed by Willstätter a few years earlier. Up to that time, only a few quite simple alkaloids such as coniine had been synthesized. From nicotine, Pictet passed on to the still more complex isoquinoline alkaloids, and his syntheses of laudanosine and of papaverine, both in 1909, are among his most notable achievements. About 1912, Pictet abandoned the study of the alkaloids; questioned many years later, he gave as the reason that he could not afford to let his students waste expensive material. He found a new field in the extraction of hydro-aromatic substances from coal by benzene, and was the first to study coal tar produced at low temperature in a vacuum. This led him to distil starch and cellulose under reduced pressure, when (in 1918) he obtained a large yield of lævoglucozan, $C_6H_{10}O_5$, an anhydride of glucose prepared previously in small quantity by Tanret from certain glucosides. Then, entering further into the field of carbohydrates, he synthesized maltose and lactose, and published in 1929 a synthesis of cane sugar. The latter work could not be confirmed by others and it would appear that, in his old age, Pictet was duped by his collaborator; some two years later he retired from his professorship.

Pictet was a corresponding member of the Paris Academy of Sciences, an honorary fellow of the

Chemical Society of London, and an honorary member of the Dutch Chemical Society. Although until the foundation of the *Helvetica Chimica Acta*, his work was principally published in German, Pictet was more at home in France; he loved Paris, and was a connoisseur of French cookery. The writer well remembers Pictet's disdain when the latter asked a Dutch colleague for his impression of a famous restaurant, at which they had just lunched, and obtained the reply: "Mais c'était bien cher!"

G. B.

Mr. A. M. Sillar

ARTHUR MOLYNEUX SILLAR, one of the early pioneers of electric lighting, died on March 6 at the age of seventy-two years. He was educated at Shrewsbury, and from 1882 until 1886 he was engaged with the Jablochhoff Electric Light and Power Co. He was chief engineer to the Electrical Engineering Corporation until 1890, and in 1895 he with Mr. E. M. Lacey started practice as consulting engineers. His firm carried out the electrification of the Blackburn tramways in 1897, and in 1902 completed the Bournemouth tramways, this being the first example of a side rail slot system in Great Britain.

In conjunction with his partners, Sillar designed and inaugurated electric power systems for many local authorities and companies both in Great Britain and abroad. Amongst them were Belfast, Blackburn, Bournemouth, Colchester, Pekin, Salford, Swindon and Tientsin. He acted for many electric power companies and railways. He was also consulting engineer to the Post Office and to the London Chamber of Commerce. During the Great War, he was director of National Gauge Factories.

In 1922, Sillar was appointed chairman of the Association of Consulting Engineers, and took a leading part in the social functions of many engineering institutions. The long-established success of the Electrical Engineers' Annual Ball was mainly due to him and largely helped the Benevolent Fund of that Institution. He was well known and highly esteemed in engineering circles. He has left a son who is an engineer with the Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation.

WE regret to announce the following deaths:

Sir Henry Hadow, C.B.E., principal of Armstrong College, Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1909-19, vice-chancellor of the University of Sheffield in 1919-30, on April 9, aged seventy-seven years.

Dr. William T. Hornaday, formerly director of the New York Zoological Park, known for his work in connexion with the protection of wild life, on March 6, aged eighty-two years.

Prof. Sydney Young, F.R.S., formerly professor of chemistry in Trinity College, Dublin, on April 8, aged seventy-nine years.