

RICHARD THORNTON FISHER

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THE sudden death of Richard Thornton Fisher, Director of the Harvard Forest, on June 9, 1934, took from the ranks of forestry a man who had made significant contributions to its advancement in America. As teacher, investigator, and manager of a forest where the primary purpose is to demonstrate that forest management can be carried on for profit, Fisher built up a reputation which brought him well deserved recognition. His name will ever be indissolubly joined with that of the Harvard Forest, for he made it the unique institution for forest research that it is today.

Because of his striking traits of character he was liked and respected by all who knew him. By those who were privileged to closer intimacy, and so came under the charm of his personality, "Dick" Fisher will be vividly remembered.

To all his friends his death came as a grievous shock. For him it was a beautiful way to go. While playing golf,—his favorite pastime,—with a friend in Canton, near his home in Weston, Mass., he was stricken with an attack of a disease of the heart. He died within a couple of hours. His funeral was held in the Unitarian Church in Petersham, where the casket was completely covered by a great mound of mountain laurel, one of his favorite flowers, gathered near the Harvard Forest.

Richard Thornton Fisher was born November 9, 1876, in Brooklyn, N. Y. He was the son of Edward Thornton Fisher and Ellen Bowditch (Thayer) Fisher. He had two sisters. He was

prepared for college at the Harvard School in Chicago, Ill. In 1898 he was graduated with the degree of A.B. from Harvard University. That summer he served in the west as a field collector in the Biological Survey of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. For the college year 1898-99 he was Assistant in English in Harvard College, under the well known teacher Professor Barrett Wendell. From 1899 to 1903 he was employed in the Division, later the Bureau of Forestry, now the Forest Service, of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, first as student assistant, then as agent, and finally as field assistant.

Fisher was thus one of those early in the field in forestry in the United States; a member of the closely knit group of men who helped Gifford Pinchot get the practice of forestry under way. Two bulletins in the "old series" of the Bureau of Forestry bear his name: No. 38, "The Redwood," the first careful study of that important tree, and No. 42, "The Woodlot." Of the latter he was co-author with H. S. Graves. Both were published in 1903. While on furlough in 1901-02 Fisher joined the first class at the Yale Forest School, receiving his M.F. as of that class, although the degree was actually conferred in 1903.

In 1929 Yale granted to him the honorary degree Master of Science in recognition of "enduring achievement." He became a member of the Society of American Foresters in 1903 and in 1925 he was elected a Fellow because of the outstanding merit of his work on the Harvard Forest. He was a member of the Ecological Society of America, of the

American Association for the Advancement of Science, and of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

In 1903 he visited and studied in the forests of Germany. Then, after another short period in the Bureau of Forestry, he was chosen by President Eliot to organize the School of Forestry at Harvard. From 1903 to 1905 he was Instructor in Forestry; from 1905 to 1920 Assistant Professor of Forestry; and from 1921 to 1924 Assistant Professor of Forestry and Lumbering. He was a member of the Faculty of the Bussey Institution from 1913 to 1931, of that of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Division of Biology, from 1931 to 1934, and of that of the Graduate School of Business Administration from 1914 to 1924. He became Head of the Harvard Forest in 1907, when the Division of Forestry, of which he was the Chairman, was reorganized on a strictly graduate basis. From 1915 he held the title Director of the Harvard Forest.

Coincident with the reorganization in 1907 occurred the gift to the University of the tract of a little over 2,200 acres in Petersham, Mass., some 60 miles from Boston, since known as the Harvard Forest. In its management Fisher had these three objects in view: to build up and maintain (1) a model forest to demonstrate the practice of forestry; (2) an experiment station for research in forestry; and (3) a field laboratory for students of research in forestry. To bring these things to pass was the task which Fisher set for himself as Director. Their accomplishment is his enduring memorial.

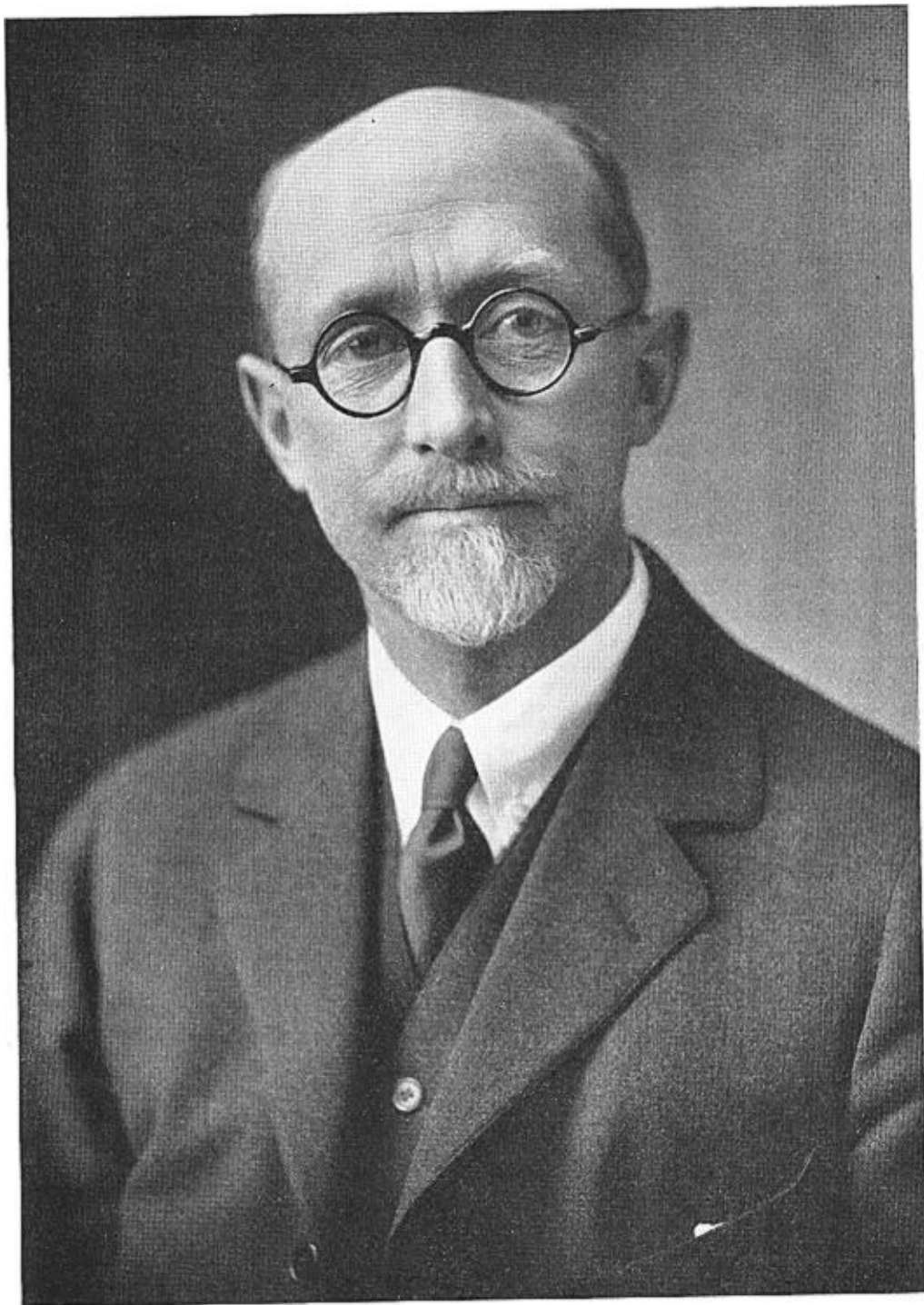
This is not the place to enlarge on what has taken place on the Harvard Forest, but it is in point to mention the long series of bulletins which record the results of the silvicultural and economic studies made under the guidance and supervision of the Director. With characteristic modesty Fisher permitted his

associates to have the credit for these publications. Bulletin No. 1, issued in 1921, "The Management of the Harvard Forest, 1909-1919" is the only one of the series which bears his name as author. But that the various and diverse activities of the Forest were under his personal supervision is well known. It may also be noted that over ninety men, working under him, have received from Harvard advanced degrees for studies in forestry.

The results achieved are due in very large part to the quiet but contagious enthusiasm, the will persistently to follow an ideal, and by no means least, the practical level headedness of the Director. In his keen interest in the scientific aspects of his work, and in the training of graduate students, he never lost sight of the economic considerations in forest management. As a research worker Fisher was by no means a prolific writer, but when he did publish contributions in the *JOURNAL OF FORESTRY* or elsewhere, they were sure to command attention. A number of such articles are enumerated in the Cumulated Index of the publications of the Society.

Fisher's interests were, however, not confined to the Harvard Forest. He was actively associated with projects of the Massachusetts Forest and Park Association, particularly in connection with the setting up of the Massachusetts Forest Taxation Law of 1922 and the establishment of town forests. He was always ready to cooperate with the offices of the Massachusetts State Forester and of the Metropolitan Water Supply Commission of Massachusetts, and with the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests.

He maintained close and cordial relations with the forest industries in his neighborhood, and indeed throughout New England. He was often called in as advisor by those representing these groups, as well as by the owners of



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estates near Petersham and of smaller woodlands elsewhere in Massachusetts. He took his part in local civic affairs, serving for many years as Tree Warden of Petersham and being active in the local Improvement Society and in the Country Club. He was influential in the New England Section of the Society of American Foresters. Had he so desired he would have been much more in the public eye, but it was ever his way to shun publicity while working earnestly to bring about desired ends.

For some years, from 1907, Fisher was associated with the firm of consulting foresters in Boston made up with himself of Austin Cary, E. S. Bryant and later, for a time, Frederick E. Olmstead.

In July, 1913, he married Miss Georgina Paine, a daughter of Charles J. and Julia (Bryant) Paine, of Weston, Mass. They had five children, three sons and

two daughters. The eldest of the sons is R. T. Fisher, Jr. Mrs. Fisher and the children all survive him. The Fishers divided the year between their two homes, in Weston, near Boston, and in Petersham.

The work which Fisher did on the Harvard Forest will continue to influence forestry in America for many decades. His approach in attacking both silvicultural and economic problems will remain an incentive to stimulate other workers to renewed effort. He will be remembered as an outstanding forester in whom were combined the qualities of an excellent teacher, unusual powers of keen observation, love of beauty, sound and practical business ability, and a personality which endeared him to those who knew him well. Forestry in America has been enriched by his work and his life.