

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

WALTER KENRICK FISHER

Walter Kenrick Fisher Professor Emeritus Zoology, died in Carmel Valley on November 2, 1953, aged seventy-five years. This is a special loss to Stanford because his entire academic career, of over fifty years, was spent at this university. He entered Stanford in 1897, received his bachelor's degree in 1901, his B. A. in 1903, and his Ph.D. in 1906. He was assistant in zoology from 1902 to 1905, instructor from 1905 to 1909, and rose from assistant professor in the latter year to professor in 1925. He retired in 1943.

Walter Fisher's interest in biology was conditioned both by inheritance and environment. His father, Albert K. Fisher (who died only a few years before his son) was a noted ornithologist and vertebrate zoologist, one of the founders of the U. S. Biological Survey, of which he was assistant chief for 25 years. Walter was born in Ossining, New York, Feb. 1, 1878. As a boy he roamed the woods and fields of the Hudson Valley, and later around Washington, D. C., collecting birds and plants, and sketching skulls and landscapes. For some time he was uncertain whether to be biologist or artist, for he was extremely able with pen and brush. Actually, he became both, illustrating, his scientific papers, and, especially after retiring, painting many portraits and still lifes. Color, and the play of light on surfaces, fascinated him; and the esthetic aspect of nature was as important to him as the scientific - as with many naturalists.

At Stanford, botany at first interested him and he worked for a time with Professor Dudley. But he soon turned to zoology, especially the invertebrates. He spent several summers as Field Naturalist with the Biological Survey, and was Assistant on two of the famous "Albatross" expeditions of the U. S. Fish Commission, in 1902 and 1904. The wealth of collections from these cruises, and other sources, led him into specializing in echinoderms, which include starfishes and sea-urchins. He was soon an authority on these animals, has long been recognized as one of the three or four world experts on the group. He published "Starfishes of the Hawaiian Islands" in 1906, and in 1911 appeared "Asteroidea of the North Pacific and Adjacent Waters", a monograph of the U. S. National Museum with 400 pages and over 100 plates. Part 2 of this appeared in 1928, and part 3 in 1930, together making another volume as large as the first. In 1940 was published "Asteroidea" of the British "Discovery" Voyages. These are but the great monuments; dozens of smaller papers steadily appeared over the years--always beautifully illustrated by his own pen. Up to the last week of his life, Dr. Fisher was studying collections from the Smithsonian Institution, of which he was a Research Associate. He named several new species within the past year. He was a Fellow of the California Academy of Sciences, of which he had been a Curator from 1916 to 1932. He was Editor of the "Condor" from 1902 to 1906, and was a president of the Cooper Ornithological Club. He was a member of various other scientific societies, and of the Cosmos Club of Washington. A colleague recently wrote: "Systematic Zoology has lost its best friend, because he combined so many fine qualities with so much zoological knowledge".

At Stanford, for over a quarter of a century, Dr. Fisher was primarily concerned with the Hopkins Marine Station. He had, of course, collected and studied at the old Seaside Laboratory

in Pacific Grove, and taught there in various summer sessions. When the new laboratory was erected at China Point in 1917, it was Walter K. Fisher who went there as Resident Director. For some time he was the only full-time staff members working alone much of the year, except when colleagues from Stanford, or visiting investigators, came--usually in the summer. During this time the reputation of the laboratory grew, and its use so increased that a new building was added in 1928--the Jacques Loeb Laboratory, gift of the Rockefeller Foundation. By this time a resident staff had come into being. Professors Heath, Becking and Mestre migrating there from Stanford, Skogsberg from Sweden, and van Niel from Holland. A great expansion and widening of the program occurred, under Fisher's administration a balance being kept between the various disciplines of biology: zoology, botany, microbiology, embryology, and physiology. For a considerable period courses were given in the spring as well as the summer, and pre-medical students of that time especially remember their spring quarter at Pacific Grove. Dr. Fisher trained many graduate students in zoology.

On his retirement in 1943 Dr. Fisher turned over a well-organized and efficient laboratory, in which freedom of research, without dictated programs, was a cardinal principle. Of the three endowments--the Hopkins Trust, the Rockefeller gifts, and this guiding principle, the latter is not least important, and this human endowment is one we shall long remember as due to Walter K. Fisher.

In 1922, Walter Fisher married Anne Benson., who became herself well known for many books, especially about Monterey and the Salinas Valley. She survives him, as do a sister, a nephew and a niece.

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