Dr. Charles Vancouver Piper

It is with unmeasurable regret that the Green Section announces the death of its chairman, Dr. C. V. Piper, Thursday, February 11, 1926. He had been in poor health for several months prior to his last critical illness but remained at work almost constantly to the last. On the previous Monday morning while at his desk he had a slight paralytic stroke — "the warning bell," his physician said. Uremic poisoning was the immediate cause of his death.

It is quite impossible to measure a man of Dr. Piper's character, qualifications, and attainments by the usual standards by which men are commonly measured. The classes into which men fall, when analyzed, do not well fit him, for reasons only fully appreciated by those who were intimately acquainted with him and his work. He had an unusually analytical attitude toward all phenomena of nature except human reactions—these he regarded with unfeigned sentiment and charity.

As a scientist, Dr. Piper was nothing less than brilliant. He not only had a remarkable comprehension of all biological and closely related sciences, but he was also an active, creative investigator—a man with a marvelous scientific vision. By training and predilection he was primarily a botanist, but his study and research covered the field of entomology and other branches of biology as well. He was a prodigious worker who knew no relaxation; and while he thoroughly enjoyed play, to him the best kind of recreation was more work. This characteristic ultimately exhausted his store of energy and greatly shortened his span of life.

It would be only natural to suppose that a man of Dr. Piper's tendencies would have devoted his attention to what is commonly called pure science; but as a matter of fact his best scientific work was along utilitarian lines. He scoffed at the idea of pure and impure science. To him science was science, and no science was impure. In the field of economic botany he had a special sense for the potentialities of plants. His intimate knowledge of their relationships and their geography enabled him to see possibilities in the species that were before him and in the introduction from remote parts of the earth of species which he had never seen. Possessing this knowledge made him what might well be regarded as a botanical forecaster; for it was on such a basis as the chemist predicts the existence of an unknown element that Dr. Piper conceived the idea that a forage grass closely related to and closely resembling one of the highly valuable but weedy forage grasses of the South but without the characteristics which make this grass a noxious weed, must exist in some part of the world. He suspected that it might be found in Africa. His dream materialized, and directly as a result of it the very grass he had visioned, Sudan grass, was found in the vicinity of Khartum, 2,000 miles up the Nile. In the past decade and a half it has added literally millions of dollars to America's agricultural wealth. While this is the most outstanding example of his botanical vision, there are scores of others of a truly spectacular nature. The golfers of America are well aware of some of them. In the past 20 years no man has taken more interest in the research work of agriculture than was taken by him. He was always thinking ahead, and was continually visualizing the broad problems of production that

confront the American farmer. No man could see them more clearly than he. He was an inspiring leader in research, and the men who came under his influence and training are unanimously agreed that theirs was an unusual opportunity. They may not have appreciated this fully at the first, but they learned to do so as the keenness of his mind became evident to them.

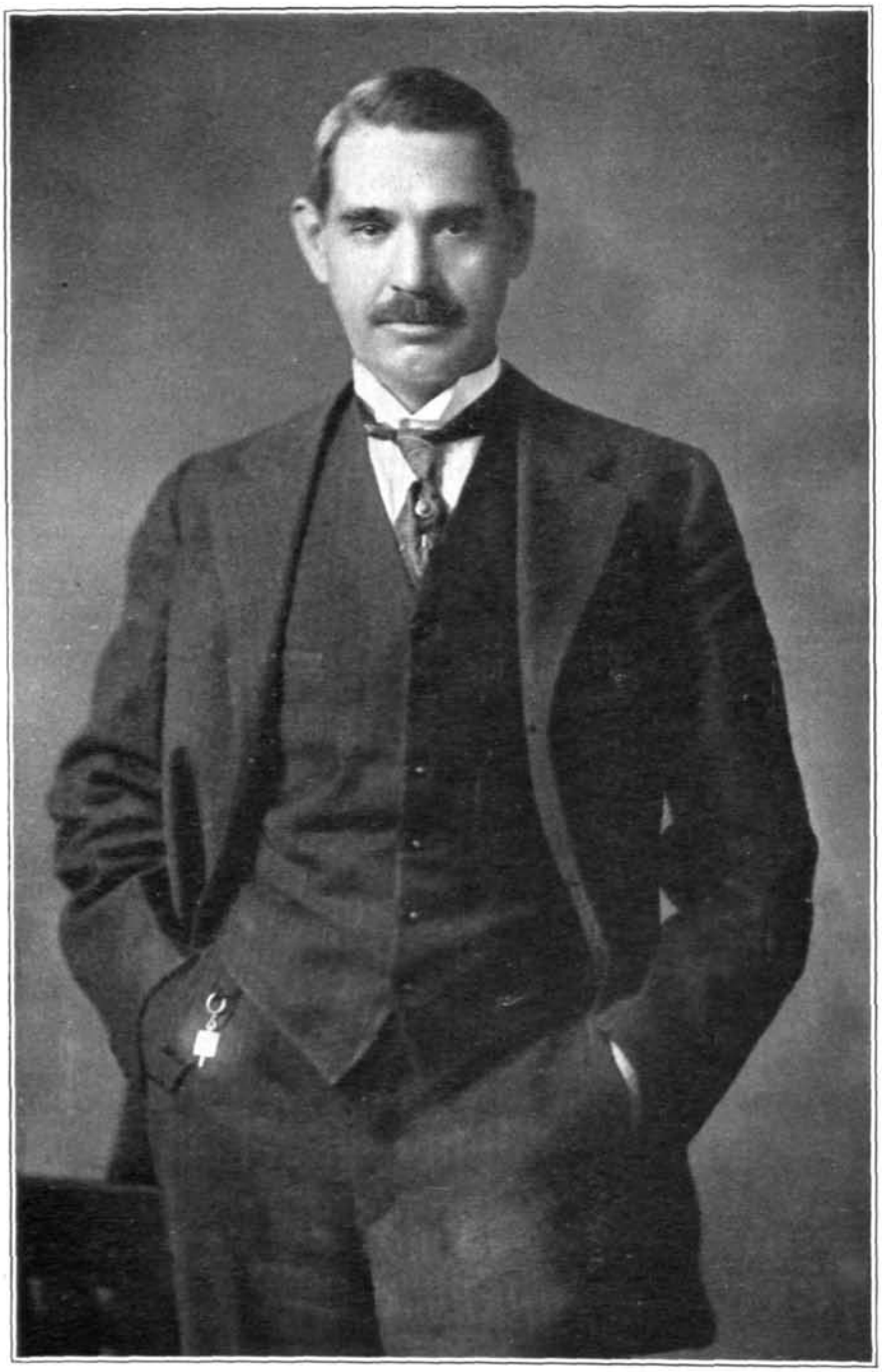
Dr. Piper's scientific publications are numerous—in all upward of 130, comprising books, bulletins, papers given before scientific societies, and magazine articles. These cover a variety of subjects, including botany, entomology, zoology, agronomy, and various features of golf course making and maintenance. His writings are of the highest order.

In fields other than science Dr. Piper was also a clear and constructive thinker. He had worth-while views on all the important every-day questions, and he was able to express them convincingly. Although not an orator, he was an entertaining and forceful speaker who held the close attention of his audience whenever he was called upon to speak. His personal magnetism added much to his success in this rôle.

Few men have been able to make the friends that Piper made. He liked men and they liked him. To meet with him in his home, on the course, or at the club, or to chat with him at lunch or dinner, was a treat men would gladly travel miles to enjoy. He was good to know. Piper recognized only the aristocracy of intelligence. The social scale, except as it reflected this, meant little to him. He was impatient of sham and show, tinsel and gold braid. A man could not by his own decree or by the trappings of office or a sentimental public make himself worthy in his estimation if he lacked merit. He never sought his own preferment. Accomplishment was his object in life; and if preferment did not follow, he would not pursue it. His motives were always of the highest, and he attributed such motives to others. The scales with which Piper weighed his fellow men were not the nice scales of the petty-minded but the large balances of charity and justice. He was loath to think ill of his friends or acquaintances. In fact, he did so only when their wrongdoings stood out confessed, and even then his thoughts were tempered with liberality. Jealousy was not a part of Piper's make-up. He rejoiced in the good fortune of his friends and associates, whatever the nature the good fortune might be.

By some, Piper's frankness was regarded as a want of tact and diplomacy. They refused to see beyond this feature of his nature to his greater self and therefore denied themselves the large benefits of his friendship. That he was free with professional criticism is admitted; but he was not more free to give it than to receive it. Furthermore, his criticism was usually of a constructive nature, and in it the personal element was always absent.

The metaphysical did not draw heavily upon Dr. Piper's time or thought. His views on religion were not essentially different from those of a large majority of his fellow scientists. He could not, as many have done, secure happiness through abject faith. He preferred to search for the truth. He once said, "I do not object on all occasions to believing where I can not prove, but I do object, and very seriously so, to believing where I can unquestionably disprove." The love of nature and fellow man were to him the high points of religion.



Charles Vancouver Piper
1867-1926

Although thoroughly devoted to work, Piper was nevertheless a lover of outdoor sports. Of these, needless to say, golf was his favorite. Before ill health came on him he played a very creditable game, frequently qualifying in the upper flights in tournament play. But as much as he loved to play golf his first and greatest devotion was to the game from the broad concept, and from this viewpoint the course itself appealed to him most of all. It was fortunate that such was the case; for while ill health made it necessary for him to give up playing the game it was unable to keep him from his real hobby. He often jokingly observed that when a man becomes interested in golf turf, golf architecture, or golf course construction and maintenance, his game at once declines and soon is abandoned altogether.

While few will remember Piper for his game of golf, hundreds will remember him for what he did for golf. Golf has had great players and benefactors without number, but it has had only one Piper. He was admirably equipped by nature, training, and experience for the part that he elected to fill in it. By nature he was a lover and close student of plants. He was trained under some of the best botanists of his time, and his position in the State College of Washington, and later in the United States Department of Agriculture, gave him exceptional preparation and opportunity for the service he chose to render.

Dr. Piper's active work in golf turf investigations began in 1912. With his associates in the Department of Agriculture he worked along for several years on the simple phases of the subject. It was one of his fondest dreams that he might be instrumental in making the game of golf less expensive and in putting it within the financial reach of all. He preached the gospel of better turf through the golf magazines and through a book entitled "Turf for Golf Courses," of which he was the senior author. It was as it were by slow attrition that he wore away one stone after another from his path to acceptance by the golfing public of the message he sought to deliver. Recognizing the merits of his work, and the possibility, through its utilization, of rendering substantial service to clubs in their golf course problems, the United States Golf Association came to his assistance. In 1921 the Green Section was established. What it has accomplished under Piper's direction and dynamic influence in the five years of its existence must be left to the golfing public finally to evaluate; but certainly its service has been very great. Piper put into the work the best efforts of his last years of life. He was the Green Section, and it was a part of him. Almost from the time it was created to the time of his death his thoughts were of its future. He knew that he could not go on forever, and he realized that there was unlimited work yet to be done. At the last he had but one desire, which was that the Green Section be put on a permanent basis so that its functions of investigation and education might enlarge and endure.

Piper's place in America's golf history is secure. What he has done for golf will live as long as the game is played. But what he had done is only a part of what remains still to be done. Surely the host of appreciative golfers of America will not permit to languish the work he so well started.

R. A. OAKLEY, March 1, 1926.