OBITUARIES

Dr. Isaiah Bowman

THE sudden death of Dr. Isaiah Bowman at Baltimore on January 6, eleven days after his seventy-first birthday, has robbed the world of its premier geographer and the United States in particular of an elder statesman in the true sense of the word, whose wise counsels had for forty years been at the disposal of successive Presidents.

By birth a Canadian, his childhood and schooldays were spent in Ontario, and it was to secure better training as a teacher that he went to Ypsilanti in Michigan in the United States, which was henceforth to be his adopted country. From Ypsilanti he went on to take a degree in science at Harvard, and after one year back at Ypsilanti he returned to Harvard as assistant professor of physiography. The following year, 1905, when he was twenty-six, he joined the Department of Geography at Yale, where he remained for ten years. His work there serves as a model for all young geographers. He combined a thorough study of his own continental area with pioneer exploration in South America. He was a leader in 1907 of an expedition to the Andes of South America promoted by Yale University, and in later years took part in many other exploratory journeys in that continent. As a result of his home studies, there appeared in 1911 the volume entitled "Forest Physiography". The contents of this book to some extent belie its title. It is, in fact, a very thorough study of the physiographical conditions in the United States as they influence the natural vegetation cover, and so provide the essential environments for human settlement. His journeys in South America resulted in a series of scholarly monographs, culminating in his book, "The Desert Trails of Atacama", issued as a special publication by the American Geographical Society in 1924.

In the meantime, after leading the American Geographical Society's expedition to the Central Andes in 1913, he had been appointed director of the American Geographical Society in New York, a post which he held for twenty years, from 1915 until 1935.

During the First World War, the American Government found in Dr. Bowman the ideal man to collect vital geographical information on an immense range of topics, and it was natural that he should play a major part in the Versailles Peace Conference. Few universities in Britain, or indeed in many other countries in the world, had at that time either undergraduate or advanced courses in geography. This fact was reflected in the inadequate factual knowledge at the disposal of many of the delegations to the Conference. In contrast, the American delegation showed itself amazingly conversant with the intricacies of European political geography. It is enormously to Dr. Bowman's further credit that he quickly gave to the world after the Peace Conference his book "The New World", which has run through many editions and which described with utmost lucidity the political geography so largely determined by the post-war settlement.

From that time onwards, Dr. Bowman remained in closest touch with successive Presidents of the United States. With his guidance, the American Geographical Society became the focus of much important research; under its auspices came the stream of 1:1,000,000 maps of South America. Dr. Bowman himself turned his attention to the problems

of the development of marginal lands. His book in this field, "The Pioneer Fringe", is one which we should all do well to study at the present day, in that it shows the difficulties met by pioneers both in the past and at present, and how frequently adverse natural conditions have succeeded in driving back the over-bold, a fact which is being forgotten by those who talk at present too eagerly of the development of tropical lands.

In 1935, Dr. Bowman became president of Johns Hopkins University, from which he retired only shortly before his death on reaching the age of seventy. Again his clarity of vision saw a way of overcoming one of the major difficulties before the universities of to-day, where the professor or head of the department is so often swamped by routine duties resulting from immense numbers of students. He established at Johns Hopkins University a Department of Geography under the chairmanship of a young, energetic geographer, leaving such senior teachers as Owen Latimore and R. L. Pendleton free to pursue their own researches. The School was designed for a relatively small number of carefully selected students; but the principle of appointing a relatively young head of department to shoulder administrative responsibility is one that has since been copied with advantage elsewhere.

During the Second World War, Dr. Bowman's immense range of knowledge was once more in constant demand. On several occasions he had such delicate missions as conveying personal messages from President Roosevelt to Mr. Churchill, and it is not too much to say that he was an important architect of both the League of Nations and the United Nations Organisation.

Honours from many universities and learned societies included an honorary degree from Yale in 1921, the Livingstone Medal of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in 1928, the Patron's Medal of the Royal Geographical Society in 1941, and an honorary D.C.L. of the University of Oxford in 1944.

Dr. Bowman was a man of great personal charm. To many of the young geographers, like the present writer, he was not only a readily accessible counsellor, but also a very real friend. He had a flair for almost instantaneous appreciation of good or promising work. He was very practical in his outlook. He found philosophical discussion on the delimitations of fields of study arid and irksome; but he was immensely alive to the possibilities of the application of geographical methods to world problems, as shown by his "Geography in Relation to the Social Sciences" (1934). Only three weeks before his death, when the Commission appointed by the International Geographical Union had drawn up at Worcester, Mass., its scheme for a Land Use Survey of the World, the main proposals were read over the telephone to Dr. Bowman at his home, and in the course of half an hour's conversation he not only gave his blessing to the scheme and his promise to further the objective, but also made many valuable comments on detail. The loss of such a vigorous mind and a great world figure is a world tragedy. L. DUDLEY STAMP

WE regret to announce the death of Prof. Richard Fosse, a former occupant of the chair of chemistry applied to organisms in the Natural History Museum, Paris, and member of the Section of Rural Economy and Veterinary Practice of the Paris Academy of Sciences, on December 18, 1949, aged seventy-nine.