

WHEN IS A FORESTER NOT A FORESTER

By E. M. Davis, '16

Several foresters recently solved the riddle of being able to answer such questions as: How is linoleum made? Who was Rossini? What is the distance to the nearest fixed star? Where does most asbestos come from?

The great indoor sport of the jobless is reading the want ads. During the spring and summer of 1921, several issues of the New York Times contained the following one: "College men for plant executives. Large manufacturing plant has opening for several between the ages of twenty-two and thirty. They will be so placed that their instruction and work will enable them to be used in positions of especially desirable nature that are opening up, advancement depending entirely upon themselves. They must come prepared to prove their qualifications and have enough ambition and vision to carry them through a period of training under pleasant but difficult conditions." A reply to a letter of inquiry stated that the plant in question was the Thomas A. Edison plant, (employing about 8,000 when running at full capacity) and that the applicants would be selected by competitive examination, or, in other words, by the Edison Questionnaire.

A few days after taking the questionnaire, word came: "Mr. Edison has looked over your answers to his questionnaire, and asks if you will call and see him on Monday morning between 9:30 and 10.00." Monday morning found a few successful ones giving their names to the gateman, entering the laboratory, meeting his assistant, and finally waiting in the library to see Mr. Edison himself. The library is a high room having a balcony with a series of alcoves lined with bookshelves. Below are other alcoves containing more books, small offices, and various gifts and prizes awarded by scientific and commercial organizations. Seated at a desk in the center of the room was a slightly stooped, white haired man instantly recognized as the inventor. He seemed in a very pleasant frame of mind as he reviewed each questionnaire with its writer, correcting and commenting. "The nearest fixed star is about three trillion miles, you said one million, that's a rotten guess. Roentgen discovered the X-ray, not Becquerel. What is a geometric lathe? Look that up. Bound Persia; the rest missed that one. You got that production problem right. Not a bad paper. We'll take you."

The questionnaire has had so much publicity in the newspapers that further mention is unnecessary, except for one point that has not been made clear. Ninety percent was re-

quired for a passing grade and a rather brief time was allowed for the hundred and fifty questions. This largely explains why only five per cent of the men passed. A total of about sixty passed the different questionnaires given from time to time, almost every sort of college course except divinity and medicine being represented, and last but not least were four foresters. However, the sixty were alike in one particular. Practically all of them had had their plans completely upset, first by military service, and more recently by the business depression.

Things had not been going to Mr. Edison's liking in certain parts of the plant, particularly in the disc record division. With few exceptions the questionnaire men were put in as inspectors in these departments without regard to their training, experience, or inclination. It is the duty of the inspector to study the product and the processes of his department, making a written report every night to Mr. Edison. He reports defects in the condition and operation of the equipment and suggests possible improvements of any sort whatever. In short, he is a sort of amateur efficiency man. To make good, the inspector must quickly familiarize himself with the details of his department, be able to see things and to report them completely and clearly, and as far as possible, make his criticism practical and constructive. One copy of the report goes to the head of the department concerned who usually has comments to make. They are sometimes favorable, but more often such expressions as, "trivial, impractical, cost prohibitive, would not work," etc., are found in his reply which goes to Mr. Edison. It is then up to the inspector to prove his case. This sometimes results in long arguments that are only settled by Mr. Edison's endorsement of one side or the other. The questionnaire was intended as a preliminary mental test, and it was Mr. Edison's idea to make the inspection a training school to further try out the men and see if they had the right qualities for manufacturing executives. About half made good in this second test and were as a rule promoted to better paid and more responsible positions in a few months.

The first of the foresters to enter Mr. Edison's employ has now been very capably managing one of the departments of the disc record division for several months. The second, after a few months as supervisor in electroplating, resigned to take a position in the Forest Products Laboratory. The third is now doing experimental and research work in connection with diamond points for the phonograph reproducers for Mr. Edison himself. The fourth and last forester spent several months as inspector of the electroplating department, and

has recently resigned to enter the employ of a large lumber company.

Forestry students are often apt to consider their studies as preparation only for the U. S. Forest Service, rather than as good all-around training. The average forestry course can be divided into three classes of subjects:

1. Subjects common to most courses, such as English, mathematics, economics, and the various sciences. This is the largest class.
2. Subjects of practical use in the various wood industries as well as in pure forestry.
3. Pure forestry subjects with comparatively little application outside the U. S. Forest Service. This is the smallest class.

The fact is that such a course is not so highly specialized that a graduate is necessarily handicapped in entering other lines of work, and in competing on equal terms with graduates of other courses.

While this article is founded on fact, the writer wishes to follow the example of every author of fables from Aesop to George Ade, and end it with a moral. "A forester can do anything if he wants to."

