

PROFESSORSHIP FOR RUGBY STAR

M. M. Cooper Appointed to London University Chair

"I SEE 'Mac' Cooper's going to England."

"O, he's not joining up with League, is he?"

"What League?"

"Rugby League, of course."

"My dear chap! 'Mac' Cooper's going to a professorship in England. He's an expert in agricultural science. Didn't you know that?"

"To tell you the truth, I didn't. I only know him as a footballer. Captained Oxford. Came back and captained the Wellington Club's senior XV, when they won the championship—just before the war, wasn't it? I think he captained the Wellington reps., too."

Ignorance of Farming

This conversation, so far as I know, did not take place, but it is possible. In this country Rugby is a much more familiar path to fame than learning, just as cricket and soccer are in Britain. To be learned in animal husbandry, as M. M. Cooper is, to be head of the dairy husbandry department at Massey Agricultural College, which specialises in an industry worth so many millions to us, is not as spectacular or exciting as dancing behind an All Black scrum or flying down the touch line, though butter and cheese help to pay the wages (off-field of course) of these stars. A good many New Zealanders, one suspects, know little about animal husbandry. They might even be put to it to tell a Lincoln from a Merino, or a Hereford from an Ayrshire, and though they are fond of bacon, the proper care of pigs (who seem to need as much attention as babies) may be quite beyond their ken.

If M. M. Cooper had his way, this would be changed. His main interest is in agricultural education, for which, indeed, he has a passion. He thinks all New Zealanders should know something about farming, including the farmer's mode of life, and he would have this life taught as a cultural subject in our University Colleges.

New Zealand to Oxford

"Mac" Cooper has a first-class background for this enthusiasm. The son of a mixed farmer (if the expression is in order) at Havelock North, he was one of those fortunate boys who know at an early age what they want to do. He wanted to be a "vet," or study agriculture. He spent four years at Massey Agricultural College, graduated, and was awarded a Rhodes Scholarship in the first year that the two agricultural colleges were invited to send in nominations. In 1934 he went to Oxford and studied in the School of Rural Economy under Professor Scott-Watson, now head of the Advisory Service in the British Ministry of Agriculture, and Dr. K. A. H. Murray, now Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford. (Heads of Oxford Colleges are not all "classics"). He gained the Diploma of Rural Economy and took the degree of Bachelor of Letters in agricultural economics.

At Oxford "Mac" Cooper captained the University side against Cambridge—the first New Zealander to do so—and against the 1935 All Blacks (a teammate was the Russian flying three-quarter Obolensky, who left his mark on the All Blacks of 1935), and he played for



M. M. COOPER

Scotland against Wales and Ireland. He also played a little cricket, and some New Zealand listeners may remember a diverting radio talk he gave in which he described a one-evening match between a team from his college and a neighbouring village. It might have been this village ground that gave rise to the famous description of a country match in A. G. Macdonnell's *England, Their England*. The ground really sloped away so sharply from one wicket that the fast bowler disappeared from sight as he walked back to take his run.

"Mac" was appointed to the New Zealand Department of Scientific and Industrial Research while in England, and made a tour of research stations before he returned. The early months of the war found him back at Massey lecturing, and doing territorial training and helping with army education in the district. Appointed to take charge of education in the Fourth Division, he transferred to the 2nd N.Z.E.F. in 1943, and served with the 22nd Motor Battalion through the Italian campaign, finishing as a major.

In the intervening years he played a good deal of football. "Mac" Cooper is the antithesis of the Auckland forward who, celebrating his club's victory in the senior championship, declared that a footballer should go on the field "prepared to meet his God." He is quiet-spoken, and gentle in manner. You feel at once that he is a thoroughly good sportsman, and though he played Rugby, as he would do anything else, with all his might, he has kept games in their proper place.

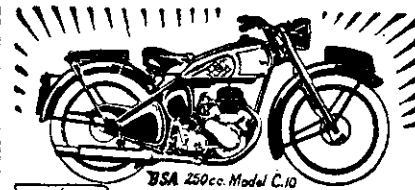
Post in England

Now he has been appointed to the Chair of Agriculture recently established by the University of London and tenable at Wye College, near Ashford, in Kent, formerly known as the South-Eastern Agricultural College. London degrees have always ranked high, and there is no reason to suppose the standard at Wye College will be any lower. The College was founded in 1894 by one of the great figures of British agriculture, Sir Daniel Hall, who became the first Director of Rothamsted Experimental Station. Mr. Cooper has got this job against international competition, and London University's choice is a

great compliment to him, to Massey, and to New Zealand.

Mr. Cooper's appointment is bound to be cited as another example of outstanding brains lost to New Zealand. However, he won't be entirely lost to this country. For one thing, he will be able to help our students when they go abroad. And, as Mr. Carrington of the Cambridge University Press remarked the other day, there is a reverse stream of brains. Of the many students of Wye College who have taken posts throughout the world, six have come to New Zealand. We may hope that "Mac" Cooper will return some day with some years of English experience added to his already very exceptional equipment.

—A.M.



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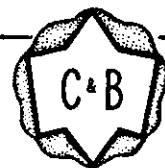
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