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# PUTTING AUSTRALIA ON THE MAP

## Work of Prof. J. A. Prescott

Here is the man who is putting Australia on the map—Prof. J. A. Prescott, M.Sc.! Seven years' work ended this week with the finishing touch to an encyclopaedic map of what and where the Commonwealth can plant.

Prof. Prescott already has his eye on fresh fields. The economy axe does not deter him.

"If the scientist cannot have expensive equipment—then he makes use of jam jars," says he.

LIKE Jacob, Prof. Prescott has been serving here for seven years—his Rachel being the limitations and possibilities of Australia.

Study of the limitations has convinced him that "Australians must live frugally"—more frugally than they have been doing.

"That does not mean a lower standard of living; it does mean eliminating extravagance," he says.

It must adapt itself to the disadvantages of a dry climate that nothing can alter—not even the range of mountains that some enthusiasts suggest building in Central Australia to catch the wandering rain-drops.

And it must adapt itself physically to the climate—and cut out plum pudding in summer time.

"I came to Australia from Egypt and found the people living a rigidly British life in a Mediterranean climate," said Prof. Prescott.

Australia's possibilities lie largely in its irrigation, for which the Murray and the Murrumbidgee are admirably suited.

But—"no system of irrigation is foolproof, and irrigation farming needs a tremendous amount of skill." This is an important feature of Prof. Prescott's work.

"Not that we aim to teach the farmer how to grow wheat—he can do that better than I can—but to enable him to work out his own salvation." With skill and patience the whole Murray will be a series of Rembarks, thinks Prof. Prescott.

His first experience of large-scale irrigation was gained in Egypt, where as chief chemist of the Royal Agricultural Society of Egypt, he built enduringly the reputation he had gained for himself at Rothamsted in England.

A Lancashire man, Prof. Prescott comes from a family of engineers. He was a brilliant graduate at Manchester, did postgraduate work at Leipzig and Rothamsted, and all his working life has combined the industrial and the academic side of agricultural research.

He went out to Egypt on a unique foundation—the research foundation of from £10,000 to £50,000 a year provided by the fertiliser trading of Egyptian farmers. They began, by the way, to break the monopoly of the Greek importers, and utilised their dividend for research.



PROF. J. A. PRESCOTT

"Cutting out the middleman" was not the only paradox Prof. Prescott found in the land of the Pharaohs; he saw Egyptian farmers who tilled the soil as Esau did, fighting over the last bag of fertiliser; he saw learned men puzzling their brains to find out why the Egyptian farmer did what he did—and why he was always so surprisingly right.

Once the grounds for this instinctive farming were established, it was not difficult to improve on these practices.

Seven years ago Prof. Prescott came to South Australia as professor of agricultural chemistry at the University of Adelaide, and chief of the Commonwealth Division of Soil Research, stationed at Waite Institute. He began with one assistant; today he has a personal staff of several promising research workers, including men from overseas universities.

Of their loyalty Prof. Prescott cannot speak too highly. He gives them credit for magnificent work, including the monumental soil map of Australia just completed—the first accurate one ever made.

Soils of the Murray Valley—with which are bound up the problems of the returned soldier—are an important consideration; not only to safeguard the large sums of money sunk there, but also for the psychological effect of successful reclamation.

It is a youthful figure that sits at Waite Institute—and more often ploughs through the hinterland—working to ensure Australia's prosperity 10, 20, 100 years hence.

Surprisingly youthful, considering the international fame of the man who looks at the most vital of all vital statistics with one brown eye and one blue, through a shock of dark hair. He is incidentally vice-president of an international federation of scientists. South Australia has made him vice-president of its Royal Society.

He is, moreover, refreshingly free from the deprecatory attitude toward "colonial" effort.

"Thanks to the generosity of the Waite, Melrose, and Darling families, and the sympathetic outlook of Adelaide University Council, the equipment and facilities of the institute are equal in opportunity to any in the world," says Prof. Prescott. "The laboratory is considered one of the best in Australia."

## PROF. OSBORN RETURNS

### Studied Saltbush IMPORTANT WORK

Prof. T. G. B. Osborn, D.Sc. (formerly professor of botany at the University of Adelaide), who is back in Adelaide after an extended study of the growth of saltbush—the most important fodder plant in arid Australia, outlined today the nature and extent of his investigations.

IMPORTANT and interesting results have been obtained. They should be of great value to those engaged in stock-raising, and will be communicated to the Commonwealth Council for Scientific and Industrial Research and the University of Adelaide.

Prof. Osborn now occupies the chair of botany at Sydney University. He returned to Adelaide last night by train from Koonamore, in the North-East, where the University of Adelaide has a vegetation reserve, and field laboratory for the study of saltbush flora.

#### WORK BEGUN IN 1926

The investigation was begun when Prof. Osborn was professor of botany at Adelaide in 1926, when Hamilton, Wilcox Limited, the then owners of Koonamore Station, gave the University a reserve and laboratory for research work to be conducted by the botany department. Since 1928 the investigation has been carried on



PROF. T. G. B. OSBORN, formerly professor of botany at the University in Adelaide after an extended study an extended study of the growth of saltbush in the arid North-East portion of South Australia.

under the direction of Prof. Osborn with the aid of a grant from the Commonwealth Council for Scientific and Industrial Research. The grant terminates on June 30, and Prof. Osborn has just returned from his final visit.

"The work has been conducted in conjunction with Mr. J. G. Wood, M.Sc. (lecturer in botany at the University of Adelaide," stated Prof. Osborn, "and with the assistance of Mr. T. B. Paltridge, B.Sc. (field officer stationed at the reserve by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research), who has made observations for the past three years under my direction.

#### GRAZING EXCLUDED

"We have been studying the growth of the saltbush and the accompanying vegetation. The reserve itself was selected as one of the worst cases, out portions of Koonamore. It was enclosed by a fence, and since then all grazing has been excluded from the area. In spite of the fact that the past five years have been one of the worst drought periods known in the history of the North-East, much regeneration of the native plants has occurred.

"In addition to the work on the reserve itself," continued the professor, "much time has been devoted to the study of saltbush and allied plants under conditions of commercial grazing on the neighboring stations. The co-operation of the various owners and managers in the district has been extremely helpful."

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#### REGENERATION OF ARID LAND

Mr. J. G. Wood (lecturer on botany at the Adelaide University), who has been working for years with Professor Osborn at the research station at Koonamore, told a meeting of the Royal Society last night that the regeneration of arid land was a difficult problem and that response was slow. On a 1,200 acres reserve in arid land at Koonamore the rate at which the saltbush came back was studied. Plants were charted every three months. Lack of effective rainfall in the last three years had militated against the work, but results were cheering. The semi-arid country had been badly overstocked, and little was yet known about the reaction of saltbush to grazing. Rabbits, however, did much more damage than sheep.

The union committee of the University to hold office during the 1931-1932 session comprises:—President, Professor A. L. Campbell; vice-president, Mr. C. B. Sangster; representatives of the University council, Professor J. McKellar Stewart and Dr. Helen Mayo; representatives of the teaching staff, Professor A. L. Campbell and Mr. C. T. Madigan; representatives of the graduates, Mr. A. Grenfell Price and Mrs. J. C. McKall; registrar of the University, Mr. F. W. Eardley; hon. treasurer, Mr. A. W. Bampton; chairman of men's union committee, Mr. J. L. Hayward; chairman of women's union committee, Miss H. B. M. Walter; men student representatives, Messrs. W. C. Beerworth (law), A. M. Bills (arts), G. T. Colebatch (engineering), R. A. Duncan (engineering), A. H. Finlayson (engineering), R. L. S. Muecke and C. B. Sangster (medicine), I. H. Seppelt (science); women student representatives, Misses L. M. Angel (science), E. Cleland (medicine), C. M. Eardley (science), and K. Polkinghorne (arts); secretary, Mr. P. C. Greenland.

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Dr. Alister McEacharn, a son of Mr. Alister Alexander McEacharn, of St. Peters, has been given charge of the King George Hospital, Ilford (Eng.). A new section of the hospital will be opened by the King of July 18.

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ADMINISTRATOR OF W.A.

#### Justice Northmore Sworn In

Perth, June 9. The Governor of Western Australia (Sir William Campion) having retired, Mr. Justice Northmore has been sworn in as Administrator of the State, pending the appointment of a new Governor. Mr. Justice Northmore has been acting Chief Justice since the sudden death of Sir Robert McMillan at the opening of St. George's College. Sir William Campion left for England by the Naldora on Monday.