

A. T. R. Mattick, C.B.E., B.Sc., Ph.D. (Lond.)

Alexander Torovil Robert Mattick, joint Editor of the *Journal of Dairy Research* from 1933 to 1958, was born in the west country in 1894 and died on 2 July 1962, about two months before reaching his 68th birthday. He received his early education at Sexey's school, near Bruton, a small school which has given the initial stimulus to a disproportionately large number of boys who have later distinguished themselves as men of science, and throughout his life he retained his keen interest in the scientific traditions of his old school.

Like most of the fit young men of his generation, he was caught up in the 1914–18 war, and did not graduate till 1919 with a London B.Sc. (Agric.), following a course at University College, Reading. As an undergraduate he had become interested in dairy bacteriology, and his first post-graduate appointment was that of assistant to Dr R. Stenhouse Williams, who, in three rooms in an early Victorian house near University College, Reading, was endeavouring to collect a staff for the new Dairy Research Institute to deal with the scientific and technological problems—many of them bacteriological—of that industry.

As the numbers and influence of the young Research Institute grew, and as the duties of directing, and securing funds for, the Institute's work took Williams more and more from the laboratory, Mattick, with his flair for research, his great capacity for work, his pertinacity and his rapidly deepening knowledge of the bacteriological problems of the dairy industry, soon emerged as leader in this section of the Institute's activities. His position was officially confirmed in 1930, when he became Head of the Bacteriology Department. His doctor's degree was awarded in the same year.

From that year till September 1958, when he became acting Director of the National Institute for Research in Dairying, he was not merely the inspiring Head of an active department from which came a steady flow of new bacteriological knowledge, some academic, much of it directly applicable to the problems of milk production and processing, but was the acknowledged leader and father confessor of all the dairy bacteriologists in this country. Many of them had, indeed, spent months or years as members of his staff. Nor was his influence confined to Britain, but stretched abroad into most of the laboratories where bacteriological problems, whether of milk production, processing or manufacture, were being attacked. Not a few of the workers in these laboratories had benefited from a period of study and research at Shinfield.

It has been said that few scientific men, after the age of 45, conceive significant new ideas. Mattick was one of the few, as evidenced in 1945 by his discovery—the story is too long for an obituary notice, but it was the result of a shrewd piece of detective work—that a group N streptococcus, occurring from time to time in milk, produced a powerful antibiotic. With the collaboration of several colleagues this substance, called by him 'nisin', was isolated and shown to have a valuable antibiotic 'spectrum'. As most readers of this journal will know, this antibiotic has found wide uses in the food industries. (Summaries of much of his scientific and dairy technological work were published in May 1955 and July 1960 in *Dairy Industries*.)

Mattick, the senior colleague of the Director of the N.I.R.D. for over 22 years, was appointed Assistant Director in 1946 and Deputy Director in 1948, still retaining his post as Head of the Bacteriology Department. Whether as Head of Department or as Assistant or Deputy Director, his wisdom (sometimes obliquely and sometimes bluntly expressed), his willingness to look both facts and folk in the face, his wide experience of affairs (whether scientific, industrial or concerned with milk and dairies legislation), together with his loyal support of any agreed research policy, secured the respect and appreciation of all his colleagues and, as the present writer is in the best possible position to testify, not least those of the Director.

On the lighter side, some of us will remember with no less appreciation his repertoire of good stories, both in French and English, by which he would bring a smile to a gloomy situation or cut down to size a looming problem.

When Mattick was appointed, in October 1958, Acting Director, his health had become uncertain, but he carried the new burden with cheerfulness and administrative ability, though at serious cost to himself. He handed over his duties to Professor R. G. Baskett in August 1959. In the Birthday Honours list in June 1960 he was appointed C.B.E.

He married in 1920 a colleague on the Institute staff, Mrs Elfreida C. Venn (formerly Miss Cornish) an able chemist, who, as Dr E. C. V. Mattick, remained on the staff of the Institute till her death in 1943. There were no children and in the last few years though he was happy enough in his work Mattick, living by himself, became outside his Institute hours somewhat of a recluse. He still maintained pleasant contacts with friends who were willing to visit him at his home.

Mattick will be long remembered as the outstanding British dairy bacteriologist of his time.

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