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ROMANCE IN THE AUSTRALIAN WOOL

How George III. of England Got Spanish Rams to Breed With His Own Stock.

IN THE SHEEP COUNTRY

A Picture of the Unusual Conditions Under Which the World's Best Wool is Obtained.

Men have made of Western Australia a country where sheep can live. The herders have made themselves home-lands, little redoubts fifty or a hundred miles apart where they can defend themselves securely enough when they get there. But over the wide spaces in between they have to stage from water to water, from tank to tank or well to well, and it was not for them the water was dammed or these wells sunk. It was for the sheep. Except for these sheep the rest of Australia would be as the untamed centuries left it, as the first white man when he came over the red sandhills on the horizon to the edge of the pine scrub land.

How can he realize the hardships attending the wool raising industry, the terrific nerve racking strain of a herder's life, the intense loneliness which has sometimes driven men into raving lunacy or the anxiety of proprietors and managers in times of draught or floods.

If a circle is drawn well inside the map of Australia about four hundred miles from the coast line the country inside that line is quite different from the country outside of it, in the eastern half of Australia at any rate. The country outside that line has in parts a heavy tropical rainfall, heavy tropical forests and a heavy tropical atmosphere. In other parts it is not so very different from Europe. But the country inside that line is the problem of Australia. If an American saw the country in some years he would probably say it was a good imitation of the desert of Sahara. A return visit a few years later to the same spot would elicit surprise at the beauty of a pastoral region with grass waist high. In some years the centre of Australia becomes a red desert with surface blown off, it piled into sandhills. Then comes the rain in the proper month and in a day or two it comes the greenery of a wheat field. It is as if England and the Sahara Desert got mixed.

WHERE THE MOST WOOL GROWS.

This is the greatest wool producing country in the world. The yield of wool from Australia is nearly as much as that from North America, the Argentine and Russia put together. And each of these nations has a pound production of 300,000,000.

But a great change is rapidly taking place in the Australian sheep situation. The Australian sheep is being interbred with English species which have less wool but more mutton, for Australia, with an eye to the by-products, is making a bid for the world's mutton supply.

It so happens that the sheep which have the most mutton on them have the least wool, the short wool sheep, the Shropshire and Southdowns, predominating in the species. The long woolled sheep are the Leicester, Lincoln and Romney Marsh sheep.

The history of Australian sheep is interesting, especially as there are 150,000,000 of them. They were originally brought by the King of England for his royal farm on the King of Spain, or, as the sheep breeders had it, from the wife of the British Ambassador in London, at the time of two creamy white horses. There are, however, other humbler ancestors of the Australian sheep, but they came from more remote lands. These were given by the King of Spain to the Dutch Republic and sent by that country to the Cape of Good Hope to the Dutch colonists there. They were later exported to Australia by the British.

THE AUSTRALIAN SHEEP BREEDER. The Australian sheep farmers are graded by the King George III. of England. He was a great experimental farmer and had a vast flock of sheep on his farms in England. But his collection was not complete. He dearly wanted some Spanish rams and these were not to be had for money. The Spanish were doing so well with their merinos that they made a formal offer to export them. A Spanish fleet happened to be passing the English fleet and after an interchange of compliments the Spanish Admiral offered the British confederate with some of his own stock. These were not eaten, but sent to England, where Sir Joseph Banks, a scientist, happened to see them and presented them to the King. A friendly breeze arose. All the sheep breeders and the King could not get enough. The Spanish Ambassador was told that he dared not promise them, but the Ambassador was approached.

It was discovered that she had a fondness for cream colored horses. Two were ordered from Hanover and brought over to England at a cost of \$40,000. What could the lady do in recompense but ask the donors if they would accept a few Spanish merinos in return?

It was impossible for her to ask the Spanish Government; so she applied to the Spanish smugglers to select a few. They applied their methods of selection to various flocks and drove them through Spain and France and shipped them to Hamburg. That is the story of how the King of England came by his Spanish flocks.

Later in 1804 Capt. John MacArthur bought eight of them in pretty bad condition at his Majesty's sale at Kew. Thirty Saxon merinos were also brought from Germany in 1824. The ship Cumberland was chartered to bring the sheep out to Australia. She brought the sheep out, sailed home and came back again.



VIEWS OF WELL KEPT OPERATIVE'S HOMES. THEY RENT FOR ONLY \$1.50 PER WEEK.

On her return trip to the old country the vessel was captured by pirates. The Cumberland's captain, who was with his son and daughter, was ordered to walk the plank. He caught his daughter by the waist and jumped overboard, the son following. Even the bringing out of the first sheep to Australia provided romance, but romances on the sheep ranches are accepted as everyday occurrences.

THE THEORY OF CROSS BREEDING.

Between the big framed, coarse woolled, pure bred English sheep and the little fine woolled pure bred merino there have been any number of crosses. But because Australians bred their merinos and little else for a century for the sake of the wool alone and thought seriously of the fat English lambs only quite recently, when some one invented a way of sending them frozen to Europe, they have come to call every pure bred sheep, except the fine wool merinos and Vermonts, as well as the real cross bred between the two, "crossbreds." The theory of cross breeding is quite simple, in fact much simpler than the practice. The more merino the better for the wool and the worse for the meat. The more cross bred, especially "Downs," the better the meat and the worse the wool.

Consequently on the inside Australian stations there are quite a few English crosses. But outside on the wide, pebbly strewn plains where a belt of figum throws the only visible shade, the proud little sheep with big ruffles round his neck and little yolk in his wool who lives as long as the Australian climate allows him and dies when it doesn't, the Australian sheep par excellence is the merino. The wool of such sheep as are not killed comes to the shearing shed. The wool of such as are killed, merino or crossbred, comes mostly to Sydney on their backs.

MacArthur, who started the woolen industry, when he wanted to claim something very flattering for Australian sheep said that they had improved so that their fleeces in 1802 had gone up in weight from three and a half pounds to five pounds. To-day there are rams in Australia with a fleece of forty pounds. The average fleece of a good flock on a central run to-day has gone as high as twelve pounds. The culls, the sheep discarded as unfit, at one northern station last month, were expected to average nine pounds.

This is a result of a century of careful selection by men who have been brought up with the business. It is by selecting rams and culling heavily the ewes, discarding probably 30 per cent as unfit to breed from, that an animal has been evolved that did not previously exist. It was not a simple job, because heredity is not a simple thing to play with. Animals have an inconvenient way when left to themselves for a generation or two of reappearing in the form which

their ancestors discarded centuries back. The squatter has to discover the wool handle or the leg joint which the hungry man thinks ideal to eat and to manufacture them out of the sheep which are to hand. This man who understands the business and is responsible for the present condition of the sheep may have a surname and one or two Christian names of his own, but they are not in use. He has only one name up country, and that is Boss.

He has the selecting of animals for breeding and probably is the only man on the run who can tell the earmarks on sheep. And a man who does not know the earmarks cannot draft and therefore has not begun the elements of the science of sheep breeding. Perhaps there are ewes and wethers in the same paddock which have to be separated. They are mustered, driven to the drafting yard and penned. From



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this big pen down the middle of other pens leads a long passage, a race wide enough for one sheep only. Along this one after the other in batches, the sheep are led. At the end of the race is a man and a gate. The men at the gate has to spot the sheep as they bolt toward him. If it is an ewe it is marked on the right ear and if a wether on the left. Gradually amidst the scuffle and the dust and the yapping and the slam of the gate one realizes that the pen at the side is filled with wethers and the pen at the end of the race with ewes. This is drafting. Probably the boss learned it in his father's time and his sons in their turn learn it from him.

When he first rode on to his country thirty or forty years back he could sit in his saddle and tie the long kangaroo grass round his horse's neck. There was No. 9, as thick and tough when dried as No. 9 wire, and tufts of mulga grass on the red country, which always means on the high country, though country is "high" out there if it is ten feet higher than the black river soil. Best of all, on the flats there was Mitchell grass, square miles of it. There was not a fence or a tank or a hoof upon it and not a rabbit. To-day the mulga grass which used to grow on the edge of the red country is the stock for the sheep. The kangaroo grass and the Mitchell grass are gone and as often as not in their place is gorse or Spanish thistle or some rubbish brought down by the floods.

THE SHEPHERD DISPLACED.

The sheep has a fence to look after him nowadays, and strictly speaking the place of the shepherd is taken by a post and rail. But in so far as his mantle has fallen on any human being it has fallen on the boundary rider, the man who looks after the fence.

On inside runs the boundary rider is nothing like the preconceived notion of shepherd. He lives in civilization and as such has his own estate every day or two. He has a cottage and sometimes a wife. He looks after his sheep as a business, not as a hobby. He has a run of 4,000 acres and often has to look after five or six paddocks. "Outside" there are paddocks too, but they are paddocks enclosing a hundred square miles. One could walk in these paddocks till one died without seeing a fence. Lost men have before now found the fence and died alongside before it led them anywhere.

The business of the boundary rider is to be out in his paddock and to ride round the fence. He may ride the western fence one day and home through the middle of the paddock, a distance of forty miles, and the eastern fence to-morrow. In a day or two he may spot something in a line of posts which is probably a line of sheep in mirage on the horizon. Occasionally he cuts through a wing of them. What happens to the sheep during

the year is recorded in the wool like a barometer.

Watching a man in a shearing shed, one saw him take a tuft from one fleece and tug the two ends of it. It came slowly apart. The tuft was a record of the history of the sheep since last year's shearing. The line of shadow where the wool fibers showed that at one stage of the year the sheep became so poor that the wool ceased to grow. Probably the food had been bad. Afterward rain came, the boundary rider noticed the condition of the animal and put it in another paddock and the fleece grew again. For the paddock has an immense influence on the wool. The sheep that have been feeding in the back paddocks on the red sand of the real Australia come in looking utterly different from those that have been on the modern river soil on a Darling River frontage. The sheep carry the evidence of each separate paddock into the wool shed.

THE WOOL SHEDS.

These wool sheds are long buildings with door pens at one end from which the sheep are brought in to the shearers, who, some twenty or thirty strong, stand at their machines. The shearers are ranged three to each shearer. They sweep up the wool and place it on the boards, where it is classified and sent to the baling room.

If the shed is near a town the sheep are driven by easy stages to it. After half a day outside they are scuffled up a wide gangway into the back of a huge dark shed and there penned in a set of small yards, each the size of a bedroom. If the sheep were wet yesterday a shearer dives in and sees if they are dry.

Some say that in the scramble up to the sheds the ewes rise in the wool and it is better for the sheep to cool a while in these first sweating pens. Next day there is sometimes a line of smaller fenced pens for further subdividing the mob. There they wait till the last sheep in some catching pen is caught by one of the two shearers who work just outside of it. Each of the great steps into the pen, takes one quick look, dives at a sheep and catches it, bundles it out and starts. The belly wool is first shorn and thrown on the floor, the locks along the legs and extremities also fall separately. The rest comes as one fleece.

For one second the fleece has a soft swirl on the floor. A boy immediately fathers it up carefully by the bin and places it on the boards. If a sheep bleeds from a fair sized cut the shearer immediately takes out the fleece, which he holds for the sheep dip and dabs it on the place to save it from the flies.

They invented in Australia a pretty machine, the size of a toy, which shears sheep by itself and only needing guiding to-day nearly every shed has these machines, but some of these great, lonely sheds are putting in another Australian invention run by an electric motor. The wool of the sheep is steered to a shoot and thence out to the yards. Most sheep shed five minutes to shear. Rams take about thirty and ewes about double for the men, for each shearer is paid by the number of sheep he shears.

WHAT BECOMES OF THE FLEECE.

The wool which is placed on the board comes from three places, old locks on the floor, the belly on the floor in one piece and the fleece picked up. These three never come together again, the first classification follows right to the shop counter. The locks are always being swept up by boys. The dirty, clotted, unrepresentable scraps gradually form a line of large clothes baskets, sheared along the floor and dumped into a bin called the floor lock.

The bellies are cleaner and more even and are also put in separate bins. The fleece, the most precious part of the clip and the biggest, is not touched at all, but taken by the picker ups, who race with it, spread it with one clever throw over one of the tables at the end of the shed and race back again. These sheep fleeces have been brushing through the herbage during the year and have all the burrs and uneven. The fleece itself, once on the back of the sheep and so away from the herbage and burrs, and only containing a few grass seeds, they roll into a woolly round muff and put on the wool classer's table.

The tables in the wool sheds are not solid like dinner tables, but have tops like pavement gratings. Any odd locks that are not wanted fall through the bars and mount like snowflakes in fair sized heaps under the tables. The locks under the table are swept away and sent away with the dirty old locks that fall on the floor around the shearer. But if there is enough of the table locks and they are too clean to mix with the floor locks they go to a bin of their own.

The rolled fleeces are piled before the wool classer, the expert in wool in every shed. He sees bins of strange wool straying into places where they should not be the overseer of the shed soon knows it, but his main work is to settle the fleeces during the year and make up the fleeces. And his doing this work is badly as everything to do with the price.

SORTING THE WOOL.

The long wool will be used for combing; only wool with a long staple can be so. Those with a staple of about two inches he pitches into a bin behind him marked "first combing." If when his fingers run through the flock he finds the wool fine, clean and even in length he pitches it into the first combing bin. If it is long but coarser and stronger with more waste and unevenness, he throws it into the second combing bin. Shorter wool will be used for clothing. It is pitched into bins marked "first clothing" and "second clothing." A bad fleece never

gets among these combings. It comes innocently along, but he detects it; others come along untried or wasty; they are shot at once, like sparks in a foundry, into a bin labelled "cast fleece."

Some squatters have different methods of gradings, but must stick to these five broad classes because a few big even lots sell better than a crowd of little ones. Of these classes it is not the first combing but the first clothing that reaches the highest price a pound.

There are refinements in wool classing. For example, nearly half the weight of fleece cut from most sheep is due to the grease in it from which lanoline is afterward made. Lamb's wool is scooped up in one bunch and taken to the classer, who classifies it as first, second and third lamb's. Heaps of looking like flock from torn mattresses are now lying in the bins with various labels. From any one bin they bundle it into a wool press, filling the receiver and presser up to the brim with wool, and with levers ram this double filling into the single bale below and sew down the flap. This business of transportation is interesting. The bales are stacked on a

bullock wagon to the number of fifty or sixty. A span of twelve oxen are hitched as a team and a long cross-country journey begun to the nearest river steamship landing, if the wool shed is near a river. Sometimes the Darling has been known to be too dry for the river boats and barges have been necessary.

It is impossible to realize the immense field that these wagon drivers wander over in their business. As an example, bullocks bring wool from a place some where near the frontiers of Queensland to the railway in New South Wales, a distance of 240 miles. In getting there they have to cross miles of red and white country of which every hundred square miles probably contains one man and most probably one water hole.

The freight charged by these men on a rough average amounts to \$20 a ton for each 100 miles, but it mostly depends on whether there is good grass or not. With luck a man may make three or four trips back to the shed before the clip is over. There is often a race between rival drivers and a good deal of competition as to which gets back first. Stories are often told of that competition.

tion, but as a matter of fact the rivalry here, as in other cases out in the bush, is always good natured. Not only is there a strong etiquette, which may not be talked of but is well recognized in all callings in the bush, but these men are too generous to leave a mate in trouble. Two men may be racing for a railway, but if one gets bogged in a creek or cowed in a swampy depression often met with in the red country, the other will never leave him there. He would not feel right if he let a man wallow when he might be lending him his team to get out of the difficulties.

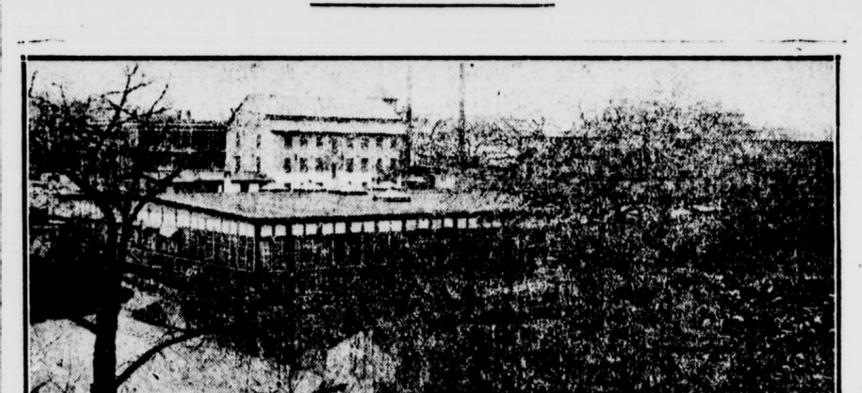
It is not always the boss bullocky who brings the bales to the station, for some of the stations have their own bullocky and often a horse team or two as well. There is probably more wool brought in by the horse teams than by bullocks in the west. There may be twelve horses in a team as against twenty or twenty-five bullocks. The horse teams are faster and taking it for granted, the Australian prefers to deal with horses. Much more is caught on yet, but a

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