

# Chat with Man Who Owns a Million Sheep

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**S**YDNEY, Australia, May 14. — (Special Correspondence of The Bee.)—I had a chat the other day with the sheep king of Australia, the biggest sheep owner of his great sheep continent. Australia is the wool center of the world. It has more than 100,000,000 sheep and it cuts enough wool from their backs to bring in \$100,000,000 a year. It has some of the largest flocks of sheep ever gathered together. Job's cattle upon 1,000 hills cannot compare with them. There are 100 men in New South Wales alone who each own 50,000 head; there are hundreds more who have 20,000, 400 who each have 10,000 and many who own flocks of 1,000 and upward. There are twenty-one men in this state who each own 100,000 sheep and McCaughey, the king of them all, has more than 1,000,000.



FRANK G. CARPENTER.

## One Million Sheep.

Think what 1,000,000 sheep means! Let them weigh 100 pounds apiece and they would give enough mutton to furnish a slice to every man, woman and child in the United States and leave enough for an Irish stew for our whole nation next day. The wool upon them would clothe the people of any one of your cities, with the exception, perhaps, of New York or Chicago, and they would annually produce enough pet lambs for the Marys of half the United States.

All these sheep are owned by Samuel McCaughey, an Irishman, who came to Australia in 1856 with practically nothing. He failed at first and started again with a small flock and from year to year has added to his holdings until he has now more sheep than any other man in the world. He has more acres of land than sheep and his possessions are in the best parts of Australia. I am told that one of his farms on the Darling Downs is thirty-six miles long and forty miles wide. He has other stations in New South Wales and altogether he owns more than 1,000,000 acres and leases about 1,000,000 or so more. His estates are fenced off with wire into great paddocks, in which the sheep are kept. He has sunk artesian wells to supply them with water and he imports the finest of Vermont rams to improve his stock. At one shearing he sold 1,250,000 pounds of wool and at another the product amounted to 12,000 bales. Some of his ordinary sheep have cut as much as twenty-two pounds of

worth a great deal. I have some sheep which will average seven and a half pounds to the fleece, and I think by breeding that I can increase this to fifteen pounds per fleece. I have had sheep which produced as much as forty-five pounds of wool at one shearing, and at one time we cut fifty-two pounds of wool from one of our Vermont rams, and thirty-five pounds from a ewe. I have distributed the Vermont sheep through my flocks both in New South Wales and in Queensland, and the result is a considerable increase in the clip. We find that the sheep which come from a cross of the Vermont and the Australian retain their wool much longer than the Australian sheep.

## How a \$5,000 Sheep Looks.

I wish I could show you some of the sheep exhibited at the Sydney sheep show. There were in all 700, representing every part of Australia. Four hundred of these were Merinos, being in the fine wool class, and 300 were fat sheep entered in the competition in the class for frozen mutton. Every sheep at the show was worth several hundred dollars. Among the latter was Mr. McCaughey's \$5,000 ram, which took first prize. It was a great oblong bundle of wool with a pair of big horns at one end of it. The wool lay on it in folds and rolls, the skin apparently wrinkling itself in order that it might hold more. Its ears were entirely hidden by the wool. The wool came out three inches over its eyes and there were small holes in it through which the eyes looked out. I stuck my finger into the fleece and could just touch the skin without putting my whole fist into it. The wool hung down in great bunches on the belly and the legs were covered clear to the hoofs. On the outside the wool was of a dirty color, but when I pulled it aside and looked in, it was of a rich creamy white. The strands of wool were spiral and springy and very fine.

In some of the stalls I saw ewes which had thirty pounds of wool on them, and everywhere I heard the praises of our Vermont sheep. I asked one man whether the sheep did not lose their wool from generation to generation in so warm a country as New South Wales. He replied that they did, and that the bringing in of cold-climate sheep, such as "the Vermonts," prevented this.

## Among the Squatters.

The sheep owners, or squatters, as they are called, were all well dressed and well educated men. There were hundreds of them at the show. They looked more like a crowd of Yankee business men than anything else, and at the dinner which was given they made speeches in response to toasts which were as good as you will hear anywhere. They were all landholders and many had farms which would be considered principalities in the United States, but which are looked upon as quite small here. For instance, I asked as to whether the vice president had a large station. The reply was that he had not, and that his possessions all told comprised only about 65,000 acres of land. Another man was pointed out who owned 200,000 acres and another who had half a million acres, all under fence.

## In the Wool Warehouses.

Sydney is the chief wool market of Australia. It ships hundreds of millions of pounds of wool to Europe every year and it has some of the largest wool warehouses in the world. Let us take a walk through one of them. We are in a great room covering many acres. It is roofed with glass and upon its floors are thousands of bales of wool. Each bale is as high as your shoulder. It is wrapped in yellow bagging, but the top is open and the white wool seems to have burst forth and to be pouring out upon the floor. It is marked with the station from where it comes.

In other parts of the warehouse are mountains of wool which have been taken out of the bales, and in other places the men are repacking the wool for shipment.

Come with me to one of these piles and examine it. See how dirty and greasy the wool is. The sheep are not washed before shearing and the wool is exported as it comes from their backs, the cleaning being done after it reaches the European markets. Thrust your hand into the pile. Now look at it! It shines as though it were coated with vaseline and your cuff is soiled with the grease.

## Selling Wool in Sydney.

One of the curious features of Sydney is its wool sales. Everything is sold at auction. The sales take place in November, December and January, when buyers from England and the continent and from the United States and Japan come here to bid. The buyers wear long overalls and linen coats, while examining the wool. They go from bale to bale, taking notes of each man's stock, in order that they may know how much to offer for it in the auction rooms. As many as 10,000 bales are sometimes sold in a day, and single sales will foot up as much as \$750,000.

I chatted with Mr. F. E. Wincombe, one of the largest wool dealers of Sydney, about the business. He tells me a few years ago almost all the wool of Australia was shipped direct by the squatters to London, and there resold and reshipped. At present the greater part of the product is sent to commission agents at the ports, the Sydney brokers shipping about 400,000 bales annually. Mr. Wincombe and his partner sell about \$7,000,000 worth of wool, skins and other such things every year, and their dealings are with all parts of Eu-



A FIVE THOUSAND-DOLLAR RAM.

rope. It used to be that Germany, Belgium and France bought their wool from Australia through London. Now each country sends its own buyers and the most of them deal directly with the commission agents of Sydney.

## One-Fourth Cent a Pound.

It is surprising how cheaply the wool can be taken from Australia to London. There are many lines of steamers and there are fleets of sailing vessels engaged in the business. Some of the steamers are of 10,000 tons, one of which will carry as much as 10,000 bales. Some of the sailing vessels will take 2,000 bales, and the competition is so great that the freight rate is now just about one-fourth of a cent per pound. It

takes less than four pounds of wool to make a suit of clothes, and for a cent you can carry the wool for the suit from Australia to London. The sailing vessels of the wool fleet go around the Cape of Good Hope, while the steamers, as a rule, travel via the Suez canal. The shortest route is over 11,000 miles, and the carrying of four pounds 11,000 miles for 1 cent is one of the wonders of modern civilization.

The prices of wool vary according to quality. The coarse wool will often bring only 13 or 14 cents, while the fine brings as much as 30 and 35 cents. There are certain brands of wool, known by the names of their owners, which always bring

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A THREE THOUSAND-DOLLAR EWE.

wool and at a recent shearing twenty-five averaged over sixteen pounds each. One of his rams, which took a premium at the recent sheep show, had a fleece upon it which, he told me, would cut forty-five pounds and, although he was offered \$5,000 for the sheep, he refused it.

It will surprise our farmers to know that it is not an uncommon thing in Australia for a blooded ram to sell for \$2,000 and upward. There are sheep sales here every year at which the best stock is sold at auction, and a number of instances have occurred in which rams have sold for 1,000 guineas, or more than \$5,000 each. I have before me the highest prices of the sheep sales during the past ten years. In 1900 eight sheep were sold from \$1,500 to \$5,000 each. In 1891 the highest price paid was \$3,550, but in 1896 the ram "President," owned by James Gibson, sold for \$8,000, while one of Mr. McCaughey's sheep

then I have bought quite a lot of Vermont stock. My pure Vermont sheep now number about 2,000 head and I have sold many during the last ten years.

"But is it not expensive to get the sheep here from Vermont?" I asked.

"Yes. My first importation, not including the cost of the sheep, footed up \$45,000, but I think that the results have fully justified the expenditures. I value my Vermont flock at 50 guineas a head. I have sold some of them at 500 guineas, or \$2,500. I sold a ram today for \$2,000, and I have sold ewes as high as \$750."

"I suppose that the chief profit comes from the improvement of your own flock," said I.

"Yes. That's where the money is," replied Mr. McCaughey. "I think my crossing my breeds with the Vermont sheep has added at least a pound of wool per sheep a year to my flocks. You see I have about 1,000,000 sheep and an increase of this kind is