

### **Transcript of D3434L : Letter by Edward Child**

Nerkinge, Sheep Station,  
Mount Remarkable, So. Australia  
June 1 1856

John Sutcliffe : Esq. Halifax

My dear Friend,

I have many times intended writing to you, but have repeatedly been obliged to put it off, as my time is: so seldom at my own disposal; today therefore it is a source of pleasure to me to be able to write a few lines to you. Of course you would wish to know how I like this country, I can say that on the whole, I like it well; I do not repent of the step I took of emigrating to South Australia, in December 1852. On arriving at, Adelaide my stay there was very limited, and I soon proceeded into the outside Settlements or what is called the "Bush", engaged with a party of the name of Swinden as a shepherd, then went hutkeeping and finally became his Overseer ; on my first arriving at his Head Station, situated on the River Gilbert, he had about 20,000 Sheep, kept a few Cattle, and was likewise an Agriculturist, thus I got a little insight into all.

At that time I was only 60 miles from Adelaide, now I am about 180 at a rough guess. Mount Remarkable district is very good as a grazing country, rather indifferent as an Agricultural one, consisting of rough low hills, well timbered and well watered. I am the owner of about 1360 Sheep, a few hundred head of cattle and about 30 horses. The climate of South Australia, although the temperature is high, is generally considered healthy; it has only one serious inconvenience, that it is subject to periodical droughts, generally happening every four years.

During last summer in 1855 we had no rain for seven months. The soil where it is good is very productive, but it is very variable ; a considerable portion is tolerably fair, but almost the same quantity is equally barren and almost useless.

On the whole it is better adapted for a Pastoral than an Agricultural country. When I say this I refer to the country 80 or 90 miles north of the city of Adelaide. Another great want is the scarcity of running creeks and springs of water. For instance I will mention a Run I am best acquainted with, having lived there upwards of 12 months; - it is called Peachey Ritchie - extent of it is 100,000 Square Miles, more than one half is barren land with not a blade of grass, nothing but stones and a noxious prickly spear like grass called Porcupine, neither cattle, horses or, sheep will eat it or even venture amongst it; it stands nearly two feet high, the grass runs through your trousers, pricking you like a needle and causing much pain. Properly speaking it is no grass at all. I generally make a practice of burning it at the end of the summer season, although unless great caution is used, it is attended with most dangerous results, the grass being so dry and the sun so hot, that an enormous extent of county is soon consumed and destroyed. During the Summer Bush fires are of very common occurrence, being mostly caused by the carelessness of Smokers, sparks falling from their pipes and igniting the grass. At other times the mischief is occasioned by people camping out and leaving their fires burning; sometimes though but seldom the Aborigines deliberately and willfully fire the grass out of mere spite or ill

# Transcripts

---

will. The whole district south of Adelaide possesses fine land and is better watered than the north.

About Mt Barker wheat averages 50 Bushels to the Acre. Fruit is also brought to the highest perfection, apples, pears, plums, mulberries, medlars, apricots, peaches, nectarines, figs, grapes, melons, oranges, lemons, citrons, loquats, pomegranates, and in sheltered spots the guava and the banana will be found growing. Of vegetables the same holds good; so mild is the climate that green peas are gathered in winter and the potato produces two crops in the year. This however is only near the seacoast; in the interior of the country the frosts are more severe. Wheat on good soils averages from 25 to 35 Bushels per Acre; first rate and extra good, brings a return of 50.

Everything is due to nature, not to man, as farming is generally carried on in a most slovenly and disgraceful manner. The seedtime is from March to June. The price of wheat varies much; it has been as low as 4/. per Bushel, though not since the Gold diggings started. Last year it averaged 18/., now this month it is quoted at 9/. These fluctuations are I think to be attributed to the severe droughts so often experienced, and the blight from the "Hot winds".

The principal breed of Sheep in this Colony are the Merinos, the Australian wools are improving. I think myself they are to be preferred before the German wools, a superior softness of fibre makes the Australian well fitted for mixing with the harsh English wool. The principal complaint some time ago made against us by the London and L'pool was the unclean state in which it was sent to the market; where it can be washed. I believe more care is bestowed on the cleaning of it than in England, but the great objection here again is the want of water; all the So. Australian Sheep Farmers north of Clare Village, 90 miles from Adelaide are compelled to send home in the grease.

The last Shearing Season I and my Partner, Mr C Swinden, had some beautifully got up Wool; in fact without egotism I never saw cleaner, whiter, or more silky fleeces. I looked to the washing of it myself, intending it for home, but owing to correspondence I sold it in the Colony for 14 \_ d. per lb. In England I should have expected to realize, 2/. per lb. These sheep were washed on the River Gilbert Station; now they are Mount Remarkable, where we have not a sufficient body of water so in future we shear in the grease.

The shearing months are September, October, November; each fleece averages 3 to 3\_ lbs, being one-year growth of wool. Each Shepherd has under his charge from 1500 to 2000; sometimes he has a man to cook or hut keep for him, or he manages both himself at the rate of, 20/. per week including Rations. Certainly it is a most solitary life. The flock is led out to graze before Sunrise and brought home to their Camp about Sundown. The main enemies to fear are the wild native dogs; they generally attack the flock at night, sometimes kill as many as 20 or 30, which is rather a heavy loss, as fat sheep are now fetching 18/. or 19/.

Some people have sheep yards, made of either Brush or Hurdles, but I do not approve of them except for drafting purposes. In the first place, when they are on camp, the shepherd is compelled to move after them when they go off to feed; in the second place, flock yards are apt to get diseased, scab and foot rot being the principal; furthermore the wool becomes so dark and dirty.

# Transcripts

---

The lambing time is in the month of May, when the green and young feed is springing up. Some absurdly lamb down in summer, and others worse still attempt to have three lambings in two years.

The Sheep farmer holds his Run under lease from Government for the term of 14 years, subject to 6 months if required for agricultural purposes, when such portions as are needed are put up to Auction at an upset price of 20/. per acre. Thus unless the Stockholder buys in the land, he is compelled to push out for a new Country. What Captain Sturt, characterized as desert country is now covered with thousands of sheep and cattle.

The Shipping Port for we northern settlers is a place called Port Augusta, so named after the lady of Henry Young (late Governor ). It is quite a new place, there is a large Store there, a Public House, and a Blacksmith's shop - the population includes, altogether 9 souls. Land Freight to Mount Remarkable two years ago was £16 per ton, now by Ship Hand Cartage together it is £ 7.10.0. The distance from Port Augusta to Mt Remarkable is 40 miles. There is no standing water or springs near the Port; its distance from the first water is reckoned about 20 miles. There is a well about 7 \_\_, but the water is rather brackish.

The first steps in forming a new Station amongst our wilds are not only toilsome, but very disheartening ; even the natural beauties, which induces a Settler to make his choice of a certain locality, are converted almost into ugliness. The forest must, be hewn down, and nothing can be more desolate looking when this is done. The timber is first cut down, then the stumps either grubbed up or burnt.

To a stranger a Bush life is disagreeable and uncomfortable, but to one not over particular, the Bush is the place - rough fare, but plenty of it, is at any rate better than none at all. Flour, Tea, Sugar and Salt are the only eatable requisites of a sheep station. You have got the whole fling of the flock to pick your mutton. Then you keep a Slop Chest, containing strong boots cotton, shirts, Blue Serge Shirts and Guernseys, Cabbage Tree hats, Trousers (fustian) and monkey Jackets. Tobacco and Soap. Some time ago I wore fustian or Cotton Corded trousers, but being troubled with the Rheumatism I gave them up and took to cloth ones, which I believe are cheaper to me, owing to my being as much on horseback, as a day never passes without my riding out. It is wonderful to what extent a horse can be worked, 60 miles a day is ordinary travelling with me, and when I want to do more than that I take a leading horse with me.

People out here are as fond of law as they are at home. The Juries are often formed of characters not of very high standing, men of no principle, such cannot command the confidence of the Public. Some two years ago a case was tried at the Supreme Court for cattle stealing. The Jury was charged by one of the Public Journals with having cast lots for their verdict, but no enquiry was instituted! No notice was taken of the charge, the only remark was by a paragraph published in another paper, in which it was said, that this must be a fast country where men play at pitch and toss in a Jury room.

I was very sorry to hear of your late and severe attack of illness, but my Brother and Sisters now inform me that you are much better. My hope is that you may get as strong and well as before. To your Sister I desire to be most kindly remembered, hoping that she and all the family are well.

# Transcripts

---

Mr T Akroyd has now joined me, he is at present in good health and desires to be very kindly remembered to you. I am very sorry and much troubled to hear that you still continue so weak, but truly hope you will become as strong as you formerly were. Give my love to my Brother and Sister Kirby and their children. I am writing to John, and have filled his letter with uninteresting matter till I almost forgot my sister.

In conclusion  
Believe me to remain,  
Your True. Affect. Friend  
Edward I Child