

COMPLIMENTARY DINNER TO MR. A. VAN ROMPAEY.

Mr. A. Van Rompaey, of the firm of Ostermeyer, Dewez, and Van Rompaey, who is on a flying visit to Sydney, was entertained at dinner on Friday evening by representatives of the wool selling firms whose business relations with him have, in many instances, extended over the whole period covering his operations in this market during nearly 16 years. Mr. R. Whyte, who is the local representative of the firm, was also present.

The following firms were represented :—Australasian Mortgage and Agency Co., Ltd. (Messrs. B. B. Allen and W. R. Bennett), Dalgety and Co., Ltd. (Mr. J. L. Row), Goldsbrough, Mort, and Co., Ltd. (Messrs. I. C. Frazer and A. Schute), Harrison, Jones, and Devlin, Ltd., (Messrs. A. H. Moore and C. Hope), Hill, Clark, and Co. (Messrs. P. E. Wynter and S. Le Quesno), New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Agency Co., Ltd. (Messrs. W. F. Lawry and E. R. Graham), Pastoral Finance Association, Ltd. (Messrs. W. F. Jaques and J. Ewing), Winchcombe, Carson, and Co., Ltd. (Messrs. F. E. Winchcombe, M.L.A., C. L. Wallis, and E. J. Turton). Mr. J. Louch (secretary wool selling brokers) was also present.

Apologies for absence were received from Messrs. George Maiden (Goldsbrough, Mort, and Co., Ltd.) and Duncan Carson (Winchcombe, Carson, and Co., Ltd.), on account of recent bereavements ; from the Hon. Richard Jones, M.L.C. (Harrison, Jones, and Devlin, Ltd.), on account of a prior engagement ; and from Messrs. T. F. Knox and W. Kilgour (Dalgety and Co., Ltd.), owing to severe colds.

Mr. A. H. Moore occupied the chair, and Mr. F. E. Winchcombe, M.L.A., the vice-chair.

After dinner, the toast of "The King and the Royal Family" having been duly honoured, the Chairman proposed the toast of the evening, "Our Guest." In doing so, Mr. Moore said : The next toast that I have to propose is that of "Our Guest." I know of nothing more embarrassing than for a man to have to sit and

embarrassing than for a man to have to sit and hear nice things said of and to him, but the present must be taken as an exception by Mr. Van Rompaey, as whatever will be said of him will have the ring of genuineness about it, and I need not assure him that we mean every word we say. It is now over 20 years since Mr. Van Rompaey came to Sydney. At that particular time the wool season here extended over six or seven months of the year, and the total sales in a season did not amount to the quantity we now sell in a month. The whole of the trade was then in a state of chaos, and Mr. Van Rompaey set to work to put matters in a smooth working order. In all his suggestions he never aimed at the impossible or the improbable, but always at the practical, and we can safely assert that the basis of the present smooth working of the wool trade was laid by that gentleman. (Applause.) I find, on turning up the proceedings at a picnic given to the wool buyers in the year 1893, that Mr. Van Rompaey, in referring to the rapid strides of the trade, said that "ten years previously he bet his esteemed friend, Mr. Richard Jones, a now hat that within ten years from that time the whole of the wool grown in New South Wales would be sold in the Sydney market. He had lost his bet, but still, if not in another ten years he felt certain that within a few years his prophecy would be fulfilled." The record of the sales of last season here have shown that this prophecy has nearly been fulfilled. We know that, although Mr. Van Rompaey may have left the Sydney market, his firm, I am pleased to say, still holds a very high position in the wool purchases of Australia, and we know that Mr. Van Rompaey is doing yeoman service for the wool selling trade in his advocacy of direct buying from the other end of the world. I certainly should like to be present at an interview that might take place between Mr. Van Rompaey and Messrs. Buxton, Ronald, and Co., of London (who have used every argument without avail to stop the sales in the colonies),

with Mr. Van Rompaey pointing out where

WITH MR. VAN ROMPAEY pointing out where they were wrong and the advantages accruing to the wool grower by direct selling. I am quite sure as to who would have the best of the argument. Time does not permit me to go so fully into this matter as I could wish, and I will conclude my remarks by saying to our guest how pleased we are to have him here, how sorry in one way we are that he is not staying with us, and how much we appreciate his efforts at the other end of the world to keep the Australian wool selling trade well before the Continental buyers. We wish him every success and prosperity, with long life and happiness, and trust that on his return home he will find his wife and family in health, and prepared to give to him the same hearty welcome that we are giving him to-night. (Applause.)

The toast was drunk with much enthusiasm and with musical honours.

Mr. A. Van Rompaey, in responding, returned sincere thanks for the courtesy extended to him, and said that he should have been very embarrassed in accepting such an unmerited distinction had he not recognised that at the bottom of it was a sentiment of fellowship in the big work in which they had laboured together for over 15 years—he alluded to the building up of the Sydney wool trade. (Applause.) When he arrived in 1880, as far as he could remember, Sydney sold something like 40,000 bales of wool, and when he left in 1895 the annual clearances in the sale-room had swelled to 400,000 bales. These fifteen years represented the pioneering stage of what was now-a-days one of the finest trades in the colonies. It was pleasant to look back and reflect upon those times when, as young buyers, they used to come out here every year to complete orders from people at home, who, perhaps, did not know where Australia was, bringing to Sydney new business ideas adapted to the new state of things which they saw coming on. It was pleasant also to think of the hard work they were called upon to do whilst they were here—the chartering of steamers, the organising of wharves, and, in fact, all their endeavours to build up a big trade. One of the most pleasing recollections he had, however, was that of the fights they used to have

and most pleasing recollections he had, however, was that of the fights they used to have at times. (Laughter.) He believed that those fights had contributed more than anything else to the progress of the Sydney wool trade. (Hear, hear.) On both sides they were always fought in deliberate earnest and for the welfare of their common object, and he was glad to find now that with 520,000 bales sold last year (representing about 70 per cent. of the total production of New South Wales) that object had been nearly attained. The margin for further development was getting very small now, and in proposing the toast of "Prosperity to the Sydney Wool Trade," he need not wish for much further extension. He considered that the wool trade of Sydney had very nearly attained its climax, but what he did wish was that the cloud which had hung so long over the State might lift, or rather that it might break in a thousand showers from here to Bourke, raining prosperity and abundance all over the country. (Applause.) In conclusion, he had great pleasure in proposing "Prosperity to the Sydney Wool Trade."

The toast having been duly honoured, Mr. Winchcombe responded. He said he felt that he was now becoming one of the veterans of the wool-selling business, since, with the exception of Mr. Moore, there was scarcely one round the table who was not his junior in regard to the length of his connection with the trade. He considered himself, therefore, fully justified in taking the responsibility of responding to this toast. He would admit, with the Chairman, that the conditions under which the wool trade was carried on twenty years ago were somewhat chaotic. Lack of foreign experience had much to do with this. And when the Continental buyers came on the scene—amongst them Mr. Van Rompaey, with his experience of other markets, and his remarkable energy and ability—they were able to lead the way in many reforms. Their guest that evening had been a prominent man in

achieving these reforms; and it was greatly to his honour that while not neglecting his

to his honour that while not neglecting his own business, he was always ready to take a share in any movement calculated to benefit the trade in general. As a result of the improved methods adopted, the wool selling trade of Sydney had rapidly increased in volume, as indicated by the figures quoted just now by Mr. Van Rompaey. Considerably more than half the clip was now sold in the local sale rooms; and the Sydney wool sales had reached a position of importance in the eyes of the world from which they were never likely to recede; for he felt sure the benefits accruing to growers by selling in Australia were now so thoroughly understood and appreciated that nothing could affect the position of Sydney as one of the world's leading wool markets. He regretted that Mr. Rompaey could not remain with them; but his firm was well represented; and the Sydney wool market would have a good friend and advocate in their guest, in whatever part of the world he might be. He joined with the chairman in extending a hearty welcome to Mr. Van Rompaey; and on behalf of the selling brokers he wished him a pleasant time while in Sydney, and a successful voyage back to his home and family.

At the conclusion of Mr. Winchcombe's speech the party proceeded to the Palace Theatre to witness the performance of "San Toy."

It is scarcely necessary to add that, from beginning to end, the evening proved most enjoyable to all concerned.