



DAVE'S DAIRY

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Monday. We started shearing today. After the shearer had unloaded his one-stand plant he leaned over and gazed long and earnestly at the sheep in the catching pen. He looked for a long while and then said: "By cripes, they're rough, Dave -rougher than last year." I told him that they were the same sheep he shored last year, but I could see he didn't believe me. "I see you haven't done anything about fixing the shed up decently. Now, you ought to be like Clarkson. He's got a real shearing shed." And a bit later: "By cripes, they're a rough lot of sheep." And a bit later. "This door is still wobbly, Dave. Why don't you fix it up? By cripes, the sheep look rough, Dave!" At last he decided to get going and started up his machine, after he had borrowed some petrol from me, and went in and caught one, dragged it out and picked up his hand-piece and then said: "By cripes, they're a rough lot, Dave. You ought to see Clarkson's sheep, Dave." This didn't worry me like it used to. We have the same conversation each year. Clarkson says he says the same thing to him. I don't know why it is that shearers are always like that. I saw a shearer smile once, or thought I did, but found out later it was only wind.

Tuesday. Still shearing. The sheep aren't cutting at all well and most of the fleeces are a bit tender and the backs are very mushy. The shearer still tells me about 20 times a day how rough the sheep are and how inconvenient the shed is and how the shearing award is ridiculously low. Clarkson came over about lunch-time this afternoon. He said he came over to see if I wanted a hand. But all he did was to keep on about how the fleeces ought to be skirted and classed. I don't hold with all this classing. I pick out the dags and put them in a bag, and just roll the rest up and put it straight into the bale. Clarkson has wool bins and a wool press and a wool table and he skirts each fleece, picks out the backs and puts each fleece into its right bin. Fussy, that's what he is. It'll be a bit of a knock to him if I get as much for my wool as he does. He says I can come over to give him a hand when he starts shearing if I like. Anyone would think he was doing me a favour.

Wednesday. Still at it, but we should finish tomorrow morning about dinner time. I'm not surprised/ I've noticed we always finish up in time for the shearer to have an extra big meal before he goes away.

We had to shut some sheep up in the header shed yesterday, because it looked as if might be showery. It kept them dry all right, but it didn't keep them clean. I supposed I should have had them in the yard earlier to let them empty out. As it is, they got in rather a mess, and the shearer kept muttering about these "cockies' sheds." I don't think he likes shearing much. And he keeps talking about the new award and the "three-minute bell." As far as I can make out, in the big shed someone rings a bell every three minutes and when it rings the shearer lets his sheep go and grabs another, whether he's finished it or not. At least, that's what the shearer says. But perhaps he was only pulling my leg. When I start to grizzle about the price of shearing he always points out that a lot of shearers don't last very long at the game and he says it's because the work is so hard. But I think it's because they eat so fast. He usually allows himself ten minutes for dinner -that is, if he's shearing in the afternoon. Probably tomorrow it will be different. And he expects it to be ready on time too. He doesn't seem at all frightened of Mary and I notice she doesn't make him wash up afterwards, either.

Thursday. Just as I thought, we finished up just before dinner. While the shearer was having what he evidently thought was his last meal before Monday, I was busy reckoning up how much I owed him. This is a job I always hate, but today I went at it very calmly. The first time I made it out to £73/14/3, but thought that this was a bit too steep, so I had another shot. The second time I found that the shearer owed me 15/-6, but I didn't like to tell him this. So I tried again, but I'd got myself muddled up by this time, so went in and rang Clarkson and he worked it out in no time, and it came to the same as what the shearer had said when he pushed the last sheep out. But it was an awful lot of money. I don't know what the bank manager will say. Perhaps he'll send me out shearing. But when I took my cheque book out to settle up, the shearer said that I had to deduct stamps. I didn't know what he was talking about, so he got out his copy of the award and it said there that I had to deduct a certain amount in income tax stamps within an hour of finishing shearing. Then I had to send the stamps to Adelaide, or something. I told him I wasn't going to go rushing off into the town to get stamps. He took another plateful of food and said he didn't mind waiting. Anyhow, I persuaded him that I would pay him the whole amount and he could buy his own stamps. He said it wasn't legal, but gave in after a while.

When he was leaving he mentioned in passing that he hoped it would be all right to come back next year. Then I went back to the shed and finished baling up the wool. It didn't take long: 7 bales and 2 bags altogether. Not nearly as much as last year and not as good quality wool, either.