



DAVE'S DAIRY

The Adelaide Stock and Station Journal, 3 April 1946

Monday. We graded the seed wheat today. Just as we started on getting the graded wheat back into the barn, the shearer arrived and wanted to know why the sheep weren't ready for him to start crutching. I told him that I thought they were too wet. "Don't be silly, Dave," he said. "Of course they aren't wet/ I've got to do Clarkson's after I've done yours this week, and I've just become a father again, and can't afford to lose any time." So I went off to get the sheep in, wondering all the while why it's that sheep are never too wet to shear when it has been raining steadily all the day before, yet if there's a football final or something, and we have a bit of dew, they are always soaking. Anyhow, I got the sheep in while the shearer was getting his plant off and straightening up the shed. He went through the usual procedure of condemning the sheep, the shed and the owner, but that didn't stop him doing three hundred today. Every now and again he would get a real spurt on. He said he thought he could hear his kids crying for bread. Of course, I had to do the catching, which I always thought was the hardest part -that is, until I tried shearing those lambs last year. But the shearer (Wally's his name) kept growling about my not leaving the rough sheep in the pen till the last. "It doesn't make any difference," I complained. "You've got to do them all, anyhow. It isn't as though there were two of you, and you both wanting the good sheep. What's the difference if I do bring out the rough ones first?" So he went on to explain that it was mainly a matter of principle, and a good shearer always leaves the worst till last, and anyhow, the shed might get burnt down, or the engine might stop, or he might fall over dead, and then how silly would he look if he had done all the crook ones, and had half a pen full of good sheep? So I had to spend half my time dragging the good sheep out from the far corner of the catching pen. And whenever I tried to sweep the wool up on the floor he'd say, "Don't worry about that, Dave. Do it tonight. There's a good sheep right at the back." Consequently, half the crutched wool went out stuck to the sheep's backs. When I complained about this, he said I could rake up the yard after he had gone.

Tuesday. Still crutching. We got started on the wethers that I'd bought. Wally thought they were a poor lot and said bitterly: "I hope you sell them before shearing time, Dave. Look at the wrinkle on their necks." I hoped I'd be able to sell them, too, and so does the bank manager. They are doing quite well, but now I'm haunted by the fear that some may die of enterotoxaemia, or that the feed this year may look good, but may not be fattening. It's often like that in a flush year.

Arthur gave me a short lecture today, because he thin}s I ought to do the crutching myself. "Look at all the money you'd save," he says. I might save some money, but I certainly wouldn't save myself.

Wednesday. We finished crutching today, and I had the usual trouble working out how much I owed the chap. It's just as well they are done, too, because Clarkson has just rung up to say that Mr. Reed and Mr. Muirhead, both of the Department of Agriculture, are coming up on Friday afternoon to give a demonstration of the Mules operation on those sheep which I bought for 31/and which are getting fly struck. I wish Clarkson would mind his own business. I told him that there'd be no more trouble now that the sheep were crutched -at least, not for a month or so. But Clarkson seems to think that they ought to be done now, so they will never

be any more trouble as long as they live. But all the same, it is a nuisance because I wanted to go on getting the stacks covered, and now I suppose I will have to be waiting on these Government chaps, sharpening shears for them, and doing all the hard work while they sit around criticising and giving orders, and, of course, Clarkson will be talking to Mr. Muirhead all the while about planes of nutrition and birth-weights, and toxæmia of pregnancy, and so on, and I won't know what it's all about.

After Wally had gone we got all the grain back in the shed again, so that is a relief.

Thursday. I should have got a start roofing those stacks, but really, I felt so ashamed of the appearance of my sheep yards that I really had to fix them up a bit ready for the demonstration. Arthur is very critical of the whole idea of the demonstration, saying that I had enough work to do without helping other people, and what was the good of the Mules operation, anyhow? The thing to do was to breed the wrinkles out, not cut them out. And I'm inclined to agree with him. I certainly wouldn't have done anything about it if it weren't for that coot Clarkson.

Friday. Mr. Muirhead and Mr. Reed arrived this morning. After dinner we went to the sheep yards. I was still feeling rather bitter about this demonstration business, and I couldn't help noticing that the two gentlemen looked very spick and span, and I thought to myself: "They look much too clean to do any work". And when they disappeared into the woolshed while Arthur and I got the sheep ready, I was certain that they had gone in to get out of the dust. But in a little while they came out in very dirty overalls and old boots and four pairs of shears, and I began to feel more hopeful. And by the way that Mr Reed sharpened the shears you could tell he had done it before. Then Clarkson and a lot of other chaps arrived, and Clarkson wanted to make a speech, but Mr Reed wouldn't let him, but told him to catch a sheep and hold it up on the rail. Then he grabbed his shears and showed us how the Mules operation was done, slowly the first time and then a few fast ones, to show how it could be done if you knew how. Then he let me have a shot at it, and he wouldn't let Clarkson tell me how it should be done. "He's doing all right, Clarkson," he said. "Leave him alone, and catch some more ewes." When the other chaps saw that I could do it without killing the sheep they all wanted a shot. So before long there were three of us using the shears, and four chaps catching, and Mr Reed was buzzing up and down the line, telling us of our mistakes and sharpening shears. It isn't hard to do once you know the way. Everyone was very interested, but easily the most interested was Wally, who had come across with Clarkson. He watched me taking off pieces of skin about four inches long and two inches wide, and then he said to me: "By cripes, Dave, don't you think you're a bit rough?" Then he wanted to get the wethers in and do their necks.

But what surprised me most was that we weren't supposed to be cutting off wrinkles, but taking off a slice of skin so as to increase the bare area around the tail. And it's simple to do and if it proves as effective as Mr Reed says -well, I wish I'd done it before. The ewes looked a bit bloody and Mary saw a few that had been done and started to howl, but I noticed that the sheep were all eating grass before nightfall. When all the ewes had been done, Mr Reed gave a short talk about it and he didn't waste a word, either. Then they changed into their town clothes and left.

When everyone had gone I asked Arthur what he thought of these Government chaps now. "By cripes, Dave," he said, "they must have been farmers once, by the way they worked."

At this stage the editor of the Stock Journal and I had a disagreement so I stopped writing the column until January 28th, 1959.