

SHEARING



— By —

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SHEARING is a phase of farming activity in New Zealand the end of which is signalled by most people concerned with a big sigh of relief. As shearing time approaches the farmer is, of course, exceptionally busy, what with dagging and that last-minute rush to do those odd jobs around the shed and yards he meant to do after last crutching, but somehow didn't manage. The farmer's wife is, however, even more busy, as it is on the catering side that so much is required just prior to shearing.

THIS article has been written for the benefit of the man who is not a shearer, but who would like to become one. He will find shearing full of pitfalls, and to be a successful shearer he must be prepared above all to listen and learn from experienced men. He must also have a back made of rubber, and a heart of cast iron.

The need to-day is particularly urgent for shearers, and although it is only by practical experience one can ever become a shearer, this short article may give anyone interested some idea of what lies in front of him, and the main essentials necessary to master before one can claim to be a shearer.

Shed Apprenticeship

A large number of shearers serve their apprenticeship as shed hands, and it is necessary to know and be familiar with the atmosphere of a shearing shed before any attempt at shearing is made. By observation one learns the rudiments of the job, and then the first step, perhaps, is to be able to shear the last side for one of the shearers when the bell has gone. So a shearer is born, and perhaps by the end of the first season he has become used to the feel of the handpiece and, given the time, could shear a sheep reasonably well.

Perhaps two or three seasons may have to be spent as shed hands to be able to get enough practice to enable one to secure a learner's pen. If possible an attempt at

crutching is an advantage for a man not familiar with either handpiece or sheep, as, although it is hard work, it enables one to get used to the feel of a handpiece and also used to handling and holding sheep.

There is a fascination about shearing, and although many a shearer has said, "This is my last season," yet the following season sees him shearing again and out to do a little better than he has done in previous seasons. It is one of the few jobs where so little time is purposely lost and where a man's energy and attention are fully extended from the commencement to the end of the run.

To the layman shearing looks easy, and it is not until he has tried it and finds himself, sheep, fleece, and handpiece all tied up together on the board and calling for a "rousy" to pull his machine out of gear that he realises it is not as easy as it looked. If one is prepared, however, to listen and to be shown, and to endeavour to apply what has been shown, it does not take long to grasp the fundamental principles of shearing, although it may take several seasons to master them. After commencing you will find yourself crawling off to bed done in and wondering whatever you saw in such a back-breaking, intricate job. At 4 o'clock next morning, however, you will be ready and determined that you are going to take that "belly" off a little faster this time, or that on your long blow you are going to fill your comb fuller and cut less air and so save yourself an extra blow or two.

Attention to Gear

Prior to commencing shearing a shearer will spend some time on overhauling his shearing gear. His handpiece will receive his first attention, and although handpieces are available in shearing sheds as part of the equipment, most men prefer to carry their own. With the modern handpiece very little is required in the way of maintenance, excepting, perhaps, new cutter pins, or, in the case of automatic forks, new tips. Most attention will be given to the combs, as these require much time and labour spent on them before a shearer is satisfied that they will "cut."

To the inexperienced a new comb looks as if it should shear without any further attention. Such, however, is not the case, and a lot of careful work is needed before a comb is considered right. It is a common sight to see a shearer with a comb, table knife, and emery paper or a comb stone working on a comb during "smoke-o" or in the evenings to bring these points of the comb up to a degree of perfection which will enable it to lead into the wool with the minimum of effort. It is recognised