

I WENT SHEARING

(Written and illustrated for "The Listener" by N.B.)

I OPEN my eyes and look at the clock. Six-thirty a.m. Good, it will be fun to be first "on the board." I find, however, that my back has seized up since yesterday's "dagging." Fortunately, it isn't necessary to pick up my shorts, because they are so stiff with oil already, and are standing up on the floor and just have to be stepped into!

I tiptoe out the door so as not to wake the silent house, and hobble to the sheds. A muffled whirr, punctuated by thuds and bleats, greets me as I near them. Sliding back the door, I am met with a blast of hot air—a Dante's Inferno in full swing! "Golliwoggles!" I am about to retreat when everything suddenly stops. "Breakfast ready, eh?" gasps Heke, the boss of the gang, wiping off more sweat than I thought any one person could produce. "Come on boys." Alas for my project. I am shocked to find that the whole 10 shearers actually arose at 4.30 a.m. And Heke's tally is already 48 sheep, although he informs me that he hasn't warmed up yet!

Heke tells me during breakfast that he lost two stone in three weeks last season. So I hardly eat any breakfast and dash back to the sheds, my enthusiasm restored. We are off again—full swing. At least they are. I don't seem to be able to make any headway. I stand near the door and get hit in the eye with a fleece which hurtles by and lands all spread out on "the table." I move quickly to the middle of the floor, and narrowly miss being flattened by the press which is being lowered from the roof. The two Maori boys giggle delightedly, as with a yell I make for comparative safety—but not for long!

I find that the corner I am in is destined for "belly-wool," and after several minutes, during which I am too dazed to do anything, I realise that I am shortly going to be buried if I don't move. I am already knee-deep and more in these choice clippings!

Suddenly I see salvation ahead. Is that a broom? Yes, and all one has to do with it is sweep! Thank heaven. Here is something I can do, although the Augean stable isn't in it! I keep up enthusiastically till "s m o k o," but although I get a word of praise from Heke—"I can see you have done a bit of that before"—I feel like a change. So this time, having also had a little experience throwing tablecloths on tables, I endeavour to do the same with the fleeces. Unfortunately, I completely

immerse the classer the first time! The second time half the fleece goes behind me, rather confusing Heke, as it falls on top of his half-done sheep, and for a while he doesn't seem to know if he is coming or going!

Suddenly a burst of ferocious yelling and whistling pierces the general clamour. Peering over the gate leading from the pens, I decide to help a cherub of a Maori boy who looks as though butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, and who is responsible unaided for this racket. He is trying, without much success I think, to induce sheep to file into the individual pens from which shearers drag their prey. I don't blame them for being diffident. After all, who would, of his own volition, enter a sinister waiting-room from which one of his fellows every minute or so, is dragged out kicking to face some unknown fate!

Still, they aren't called sheep for nothing, I think. So seeing one pen with six sheep only in it, I push up the gate hoping the others outside will dash in gladly to join their playmates. Alas! The six inside with one accord dash out! I hadn't thought of that! Frenziedly, I bellow, heavily I whack, with no result. Finally, I pick up several bodily, and dump them in the pen, one after the other. One or two of their bosom pals follow reluctantly, and lo, I have a pen full! So full that I can't shut the gate! So I stand on it and jump up and down on their rumps, hoping this will induce them to move the two or three inches necessary. It does! So suddenly that down falls the gate with a thud, and I nearly cut myself in half on the top rail!

When I recover, I decide to wait till the last sheep is taken from the pen, before replenishing it, then there will not be any to run out. But this is nerve-racking, too. Every minute I expect an irate shearer to burst through the gate looking for the sheep that I haven't yet induced to move in! "Oh Lord, please make them go in," I mutter feverishly, working against time.

Finally, I decided it is time to try my hand at shearing proper. Heke hands over his sheep to me. It is the last of the day, and he has done all the ticklish bits. Excitedly I arrange my feet between the sheep's, hang on to one ear, and holding the throbbing hand-piece gingerly, I zoom slowly along the back. Yoicks! It is more of a bob than a

shingle, but it is fun. Then ouch! the elbow piece bumps my leg, and it is running hot! Don't ever shear in shorts: it's a mistake. In fact, perhaps shearing itself is all a mistake!



BUILD FIRE-SAFETY INTO YOUR WALLS

★
PROVED BY RESULTS
OVER 17 YEARS
OVER ONE HUNDRED
MILLION SQUARE FEET
USED IN N.Z. HOMES

GIBRALTAR BOARD for walls and ceilings

GIBRALTAR BOARD MADE IN N.Z.

**BURNT ON GREASE
CLEANED IN A
FLASH!**

ATAMAX EATS UP GREASE ON STOVES AND RANGES

ATAMAX
THE CAUSTIC CLEANER