



WINTER SHEARING

Sir,—In an article on page 9 of your June 21 issue, "Sundowner" claims that winter shearing is bad business and cruel to the sheep. As a person who has been concerned in scientific research on "pre-lamb shearing" during the last five years, and not just "noticing" the effect on the sheep, I challenge "Sundowner" to prove his claims, and explain why each year more farmers are shearing in winter, to such an extent that additional early wool sales have now become an annual event in the South Island.

In our research work we have been mainly concerned with the effect on the wool. To eliminate variable factors as much as possible we shear half of a flock of sheep before lambing, and the other half after lambing, so that all the sheep get exactly the same treatment apart from the different time of shearing. We have found each year that the wool shorn before lambing is very much superior to that shorn after lambing, as the former is uniformly sound, while much of the latter is tender and cotted. We have found no evidence of any consistent difference in fleece weight or length, nor have actual measurements of the rate of growth of the wool shown any adverse effect of shearing in winter. While we ourselves have not been greatly concerned with the effect on the ewe, the winter-shorn ewes have not "threatened to die," they have continued to produce wool, and their lambs have thrived just as well as those from the ewes shorn after lambing.

With regard to possible cruelty, I would ask "Sundowner" to consider the following facts instead of just comparing the sheep with himself and saying, "I do not take my coat off in the winter..."

(1) Sheep are less sensitive to cold than human beings, having a different temperature controlling mechanism. Thus they never suffer from frostbite.

(2) Lambs are usually dropped about two to four weeks after winter shearing. If it is cruel to shear full-grown sheep in winter how much more cruel must it be to have the lambs born in winter and suddenly precipitated from the even warmth of their mother's womb into the cold paddock (even if it is sheltered from the wind).

(3) Though it is on the average colder in winter than in spring, yet much larger temperature changes can occur in spring storms, causing greater losses for the unwary (or unlucky) shepherd.

Finally, may I suggest that "Sundowner" refreshes his memory on the facts of pre-lamb shearing by re-reading our article in the October, 1956, issue of *N.Z. Journal of Agriculture* and his own column in *The Listener* on November 30.

L. F. STORY,
Director, N.Z. Woollen Mills Research Association, Dunedin.

Sir,—The origins of the practice of winter shearing are more substantial and the reasons for its extension less capricious than "Sundowner" (June 21) would have us believe.

Wool shorn at this time is cut at, or close to, a weakened portion of the fibre

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which results mainly from stresses of nutrition and pregnancy inseparable from winter sheep management. The practice does much to reduce break in wool, the major fault of the Dominion's clip. This surely is good business.

Experimental evidence, accessible to all, shows that wool faults are greatly reduced and that the total amount of wool produced is in no way affected by the time of shearing. Further, the measurement of the growth rate of suckling lambs, a reliable indicator of milk production, shows that in this respect the capacity of the ewe is unimpaired. Certain minor considerations of practical husbandry, both for and against, do not materially alter the picture. Fortunately, these facts are known by many shepherds whose calendars, should they write them, remain unpublished.

There is little doubt that sheep grow more wool than is necessary to keep them warm. Consideration of heat regulation in animals takes us into realms of biological mechanisms which do not necessarily support the contention that wool alone keeps sheep warm or that without it they will experience exceptional distress. They may, however, be vulnerable to excessive cold, against which precautions can normally be taken. Such risks are assessed by the farmer in his own farm environment and those in rigorous climates do not winter shear.

The humanitarian basis for action, as stated, carries the peculiar implication that only unprofitable cruelties are intolerable. Should the S.P.C.A. pursue the matter it is probable that even more ethical attitudes will be supported by unscientific thinking. "Sundowner" cannot hope, however, to ennoble his cause or do credit to his journalist's calling by paying scant regard to fact.

K. H. C. LEWIS (Mosgiel).

"OWLS DO CRY"

Sir,—Janet Frame's novel is too good for cliché-ridden comment ("our finest work of fiction to date," etc.). But how splendidly Anton Vogt, in his own graceful way, vindicates the sharpness and zest of Creative Writing: "A great love of life shines through the cruel shackles to fulfilment."

His case would be a better one if it were not so shrilly overstated, implying for one thing a *mystique* of literary nationalism so inbred it can look no further than Sargeson (who should not—any more than Janet Frame—be blamed for his friends). And should he not contemplate his own apt dictum on violence?

G. W. Turner's letter I am grateful for; but I do wonder whether symbolism that requires so much explanation has succeeded. Moreover, in my review I under-estimated the elements of incoherence in *Owls Do Cry*. I have a great respect for the qualities of this novel, but I don't think we should invent excellencies for it in addition to those it already abundantly possesses.

DAVID HALL (Dunedin).

WHO WAS HITLER?

Sir,—Your editorial of May 31, "Who Was Hitler?" prompts me to write of some discussion on this subject which I had with teenagers last year.

My daughter, then a fifth-former, came across a reference to Buchenwald and asked what it was. Thinking it was a name which had been passed over, I asked had she heard of Dachau and/or Belsen. These, too, were meaningless. They were concentration camps, I told

her, and drew another blank. I found it difficult to believe that with all the irrelevant details of past history which she had had to memorise to pass School Certificate, no one had considered it might be instructive to learn a little more of our own times other than that there was once a man named Hitler who was one of the principals in the Second World War. I felt ashamed, too, for it was certainly part of my duties to give instruction regarding the horrors which can be brought about in the name of high-sounding causes. I remembered a German-Jewish girl I worked with back in 1939 who told of concentration camps: we thought of her as a "bit queer," and no one took much notice of her wild statements and dreadful warnings.

Thinking that my daughter's case was unique, I separately asked three sixth-form boys had they heard of Belsen? Did they know what a concentration camp was? All said no to the first query; they had vague ideas about the second. When I expressed my amazement, each said they thought such things were better forgotten, anyway; they felt that that was a long time ago and it couldn't happen again.

Perhaps when the secondary school curriculum incorporates some teaching of elementary psychology we will be closer to ensuring that it will not happen again.

P. (Hamilton).

MUSIC IN THE DARK

Sir,—Your correspondent "Player in the Dark" was very much in the dark when he made the statement (*Listener*, May 31) that "the Liberty Theatre, Christchurch, never had a permanent non-playing conductor." The late Ernest Jamieson, well known in Christchurch music circles for many years, conducted the Liberty orchestra (that is, to quote our friend in darkness, he stood and used a baton and was not a player) for several years, up to the time of the introduction of sound films to the Liberty. His predecessor, Mr Arthur Gordon, who is still active as a teacher of the violin, also wielded the baton in the aforementioned manner.

In view of this glaring mistake on the part of "Player in the Dark," one wonders just how much credence may be placed on the rest of his information.

E. H. SHELTON (Christchurch).

Sir,—Mr L. D. Austin is quite wrong in thinking that the leader of the Liberty Orchestra was Gladys Vincent—she wasn't even in her teens by then. The person he means is probably Mrs Christabel Twynham (nee Wells), also a well-known Christchurch violinist—who, I think, studied at Leipzig.

I disagree that the Liberty Orchestra was equal to anything heard at Everybody's. Quite clearly Mr Austin never heard the orchestra at Everybody's.

EX-CHCH (Palmerston North)

A PLAY FOR SOUTHLAND

Sir,—I have just read *The Montgomeries of Glenholme*, and I would courteously ask Mr Newman to tell us what the merits of this play are. I would also like to know what the theme of it is. The dialogue is clumsy, artificial period style, certainly not the style of 1880 in any colony. Women characters "pray" and "la" throughout, which they might have done in Jane Austen's day, but not in 1880. Further, the construction of the play is laughable. Characters appear by magic, always just when they are wanted. One scene ends with a soliloquy that runs—"And yet somehow I've

got to stop you. But how? How?" So far as I can see there is no dramatic action of any kind. I notice, however, that Mr Newman does admit the play has defects, for he says in reply to Mr Harcourt, "There were plays that were certainly more pretentious, more pompous, more incomprehensible, than the winning one." The italics are mine. If this statement means anything, it means that the play in question has these defects to some degree. It certainly has.

M.W. (Wellington).

TAKE IT FROM HERE

Sir,—Take It From Here being now 10 years old (*Listener*, June 7), might we at last see the show given its proper initials? However, the BBC or *The Listener* may have it, anyone who listens with half an ear can be in no doubt of how the perpetrators wish it; and in this world of "experts" the one point on which every man is the unchallengeable expert is the spelling of his own name. But, please, if your courage is insufficient to renounce primness entirely, better *TIFH* as it is than *TIFE*.

P. N. HEIDENSTROM (Wellington).

(It is not for us to change the name that the BBC has given to one of its own children.—Ed.)

THE MANAGER'S DOOR

Sir,—Since my own fine worsted stories (warp of Chekhov, woof of odds and ends) have unfailingly been returned by your publication, I naturally run a peevish, greenish eye over those accepted. I look for the imagery, the sensitivity and the satisfying aura of the heights. And what do I find? I find the distinct statement (opening paragraph, "The Letter of February 14th") that two doors contain two human beings—reminiscent of the Walled-up Nun. First given steam-roller treatment, I presume. Now, Sir—really, Sir!

JILLIAN SQUIRE (Lower Hutt).

(Has not our correspondent been directed to a manager's "door" at the end of a passage?—Ed.)

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

Pakeha (Auckland): Unnamed by his own request.

Mrs J. Silvester (Auckland): The interest and advantage of being able to discuss the selection with a selector have not occurred to you?

Mary Aldrich (Wellington): Thank you. Will pass it on.

A. C. Gordon (Taihape): Your complaint should have been addressed to the Department of Education, which reprinted in the *School Journal* Ian Sraillier's comical verses redressing the hare-and-tortoise story. If it is wrong to find humour in tales of trickery, the world has been wrong, and leading its children astray, since the first tales were told. The drink in this wicked poem, by the way, is tea.

D.J.P. (Timaru): You jump a long way to your conclusions from your "few instances," which are here commented on in order: (1) Not "interrupted half-way through," as you say, but about a minute from the end of a work timed to play 12 minutes 42 seconds. This was faulty presentation, however, and is regretted. (2) Standard affected by the absence of the leader in a sudden and serious emergency. That in application to 3YA: your opinion of the 4YA performance is noted. (3) Your reference to the "habit" of interrupting Sunday afternoon programmes for that purpose is not verified by the records. If you will give examples, they will be investigated.

