



By CHARLES FRANCIS

WHEN THE Rehabilitation Officer says to me, "Would you like to be a shearer?" I know what I'm going to say. No, I won't be rude, I'll just look daggers at him. I can still smell them as I write.

I was floor boy; picked up fleeces, flung them on a table, dagged them, trimmed them, denecked them, rolled them up, then ran back for the next one that was always waiting for me; and in between whiles I swept the dung and off-cuts from the floor and gave a hand pressing the wool into bales. Maybe you wouldn't know what that means. Even if I told you we started at half past five in the morning, which is half-way through the night to most of you, you'd still say, "What's he moaning about?" I know, I was a townite once, one of those parasites on the community who think no more of fleecing the farmer than the farmer of fleecing his sheep.

Yes, the golden fleece—don't speak to me of the golden fleece again, it's certainly golden in places, nauseating places that have to be trimmed off with my hands. My hands—the things I use my hands for that once I would have taken a shovel to and gloves to the shovel. And when the eats arrive I have to put more jam on my scone to take away the taste of my fingerprints. And a piece of wool burns on my cigarette, and though the butt is long and cigarettes short I throw it disgustedly away.

Surely, with all these discoveries of ersatz stuff you read so much about in the latest digests, there should be no need for man to go on working like an animal to get his clothing. What are all those test-tube artists blabbing about if all their research just ends in interesting articles? Or is the whole idea a fake by the financiers to put fear into the farmers that their labours may be profitless and thus, when the farmers sell their wool, they're satisfied no matter what the price? Satisfied, I meant, relatively speaking, for a satisfied farmer would be just as big an oddity as a shearer who'd say "No, thank you," to a beer.

Then the tics, like beetles with the antics of a flea. You find them in your hair, in your shirt, in your pants—nothing sacred. And at night when you've washed away the dirt and most of the smell and you're sitting by the stove in your nice clean clothes—ouch, a tic, the blinking little beetle, or words to that effect—and you wonder where on earth or elsewhere he could have come from.

And the girl who lives on the farm just down the road—the girl whom you've been trying to meet a dozen times before—well, she comes to see how the shearing's going on and you strike a dominant pose while heaving on the baler, then some accursed shearer yells "Floor Boy!" (not very dignified), so you scoot along to where the fleece is lying on the floor, the very greasy floor, and one boot slides one