

occur year by year is due principally to causes which are more or less preventable—though, unfortunately, in some cases the preventive measures necessary are such as to be in a degree opposed to the most advanced methods in practice and, for that matter, necessary for commercial success in sheep-farming—and in these cases the sheep-owner is faced by the proposition whether it is not better to take the risk of some possible loss rather than to accept the certain loss of profit which is entailed by taking the necessary measures to ensure the greatest possible immunity from sickness or mortality.

THE QUESTION OF ENVIRONMENT.

New Zealand is, on the whole, an excellent country for sheep-farming, much of its area constituting ideal country for it from a health point of view, but other portions, particularly in the North Island, have so copious a rainfall, so good a soil, and so plentiful a growth of herbage that sheep, unless carefully managed, are apt to suffer through life being made too easy for them. The sheep is an animal particularly well adapted for living on dry hilly or undulating country, with a sufficiency but not an excess of food, and when in such an environment a high standard of general health and vigour is maintained in the flocks. By a process of gradual natural adaptation of the character and constitution of sheep to environment—in which the principle of the survival of the fittest doubtless played an important part—followed later by careful breeding and selection, various breeds of sheep have been evolved which have become specially adapted to different classes of country, and thus animals have been produced which, given proper management, can be more or less successfully kept on land which in itself is not naturally suitable for sheep. A notable instance of this is seen in the Romney breed, whose original home was in the low-lying, marshy, alluvial tract situated in the southern part of Kent, and known as Romney Marsh. Not only is the land there low-lying and wet, but the climate is usually more or less moist, and the conditions, as a whole, are opposed to those usually looked upon as being best adapted for the maintenance of sound health in sheep. Yet the breed persisted, and has now made a high reputation for itself for its capacity for withstanding soil and weather conditions of a nature detrimental to most other breeds. Certainly the breeding and rearing of Romney sheep is not now confined to Romney Marsh alone, higher and drier country being also utilized, but the fact remains that the breed was originally evolved in this wet, low-lying area.

Within a comparatively short distance of Romney Marsh are the low chalky hills known as the South Downs, which constitute the native home of the Southdown sheep, an animal of entirely different