

# Farming in Canterbury

NEW ZEALAND owes a great debt to Canterbury's pioneer farmers and pastoralists, who, perhaps more than any others, successfully adapted English and Australian experience to the new environment and established a firm tradition of careful cultivation and management. Despite its late start, Canterbury was by 1860 the premier agricultural and pastoral province in New Zealand, a position maintained for many years. Experienced men have gone from Canterbury to the North Island and have successfully adapted themselves and their methods to help in its development. Today New Zealand is peculiarly dependent on Canterbury in other ways. Not only does the province produce most of the cereals consumed, but produces most of the high-quality grass seed which is the basis of New Zealand's grassland farming. With the Canterbury Centennial now being celebrated, a survey of the progress of farming in Canterbury over the past 100 years is opportune. This article is the first of a series which traces the history of farming in Canterbury and discusses the influence of that farming on agriculture in other parts of New Zealand.

IN this series the development of Canterbury's farming has been divided into four periods, each of which is treated in a separate article. This article deals with the first period, 1850-1880, and describes the initial settlements and the partial occupation and concludes with an account of the more intensive development of land and public works during the 1870's. The second article, which will appear in next month's "Journal", will discuss the next period, from 1880 to 1900, the salient features of which are the fortunes of the wheat industry, the development of refrigeration, and the cutting up of larger estates for closer settlement. The third article, which will be published in the January issue, will describe the period 1900-1920 and will deal with the continued development of the frozen-meat industry and the effects on farm management which it brought about; the progress of closer settlement; the effects of

war; and the beginning of farm mechanisation. The final article, to appear in the February issue, will bring the story of Canterbury's farms up to the present day and will discuss the impact of depression and war; the effects of changing patterns of farm management; the effect of mechanisation; the development of minor industries such as fruit and vegetables and poultry; improvements in farm amenities; and the changing structure of Canterbury's population.

Throughout this series it is intended to deal with the area included in the Canterbury Land District and not with the provincial district alone. The counties of Amuri and Cheviot were always economically allied to Christchurch, even if a historical accident led to their being annexed by Nelson. Practically uninhabited before 1864, Westland was included in Canterbury from 1864 to 1867, when it was created a county with administrative but not legislative power. Westland Province had a brief existence, from 1873 to 1876.

These articles are based on notes supplied by officers of the Extension Division and have been compiled by P. R. Stephens, Assistant Investigating Officer, Department of Agriculture, Wellington.

## NEW ZEALAND IN 1850

In 1850 most New Zealand settlements had been established for 10 years and the settlers were slowly beginning to adapt themselves to the new unfamiliar environment. The enthusiasm of the initial stages had been damped, the hopes of easily gained wealth and security had been

abandoned, but the settlers were beginning to see what the future would hold in store for them and were prepared to set about achieving their more modest goals. Each settlement drew upon the experiences of its predecessor, and if one reason for Canterbury's success was the more favourable environment, another was the lessons that had been learnt from the earlier settlements.

By 1850 there were ten scattered settlements from one end of New Zealand to the other, with a number of smaller ones little more than mission or whaling stations. These settlements had grown up separately, had little direct communication with one another, and were strongly parochial in outlook. Auckland was the largest, having a population of 8300, and was followed by Wellington with about 5500, Nelson with about 4000, Otago with 1500, and New Plymouth with 1400; the Banks Peninsula settlements immediately before the arrival of the Pilgrims contained about 250 people.

## Large-scale Sheep Farming

In the first settlements little thought was given to what the newly established farmers would produce, farming on the English model being out of the question, but by 1850 a way out of this impasse was becoming apparent. Large-scale sheep farming, which had proved so profitable in Australia, was being pioneered in New Zealand, and on the agricultural land near the settlements a class of small farmers was replacing the imitation squires. These small agricultural settlements formed an indispensable base from which the later pastoralists could begin their operations.



[Whites Aviation Ltd. photo.]