

SHEARING in Canterbury

By CHARLES FRANCIS

THE TRAIN rattles and screams past flying power-line posts, trees, scattered houses, and here and there, idly grazing in the nor'-west sweetened fields, woolly sheep, who look up, then scamper away from the smoke-belching intruder. After many miles of flat, open country the train sweeps past factories and rows of houses, then pulls into the Christchurch Railway-station. Here in the city are prettily arranged windows of the big mercery retailers displaying the latest-style costumes, fit for any screen star or suburban theatre usher, and pin-striped suitings to make drab man look not so drab. And the passenger who watched the scampering sheep from the carriage window little realized that he was gazing at the suitings they'll be displaying in the shop windows to-morrow.

Canterbury supports a population of over five and a half million sheep. On the drier, lighter land of the plains the most predominant breed is the Corriedale. This is a cross between the English Leicester or Lincoln and the Merino, a half-breed that has been inbred to give the most suitable producer of wool under hardy conditions. Corriedale is the name of the Canterbury sheep station whence the breed originated. This breed is recognized the world over, and has been exported to Japan and the Argentine.

On the wetter areas of the plains, where the sheep are more subject to foot-rot, the three-quarter breed—that is, the Corriedale crossed again with the English Leicester or Lincoln—and the Romney or Romney-Corriedale cross are most common. The same applies to some parts of the foothills. The Romney, coming from the Romney marshes south-west of London, is more suited to the wetter areas and is a more heavy-weight sheep giving a big lamb and long stapled wool.

In the high back country of the Mount Cook and Main Divide areas the Merinos predominate. These are great wool-producers and may be considered the foundation sheep of Australian and New Zealand flocks.

Throughout the plains the Southdown ram is strongly favoured for breeding the type of small-boned lamb that is so popular on the London market. There is also the big-framed Border Leicester and numerous other breeds, including the League of Nations sheep, whose true breeding may be known by the owner but not always.

The number of sheep the average plains farmer carries varies from 200 to 1,000, whereas the back-country runs carry up to 20,000 or 30,000. There is a tendency for these big runs to be subdivided into smaller holdings, however, and there are not now as many big holdings as there were, say, forty years back.

Shearing commences about October, farms near the sea-coast and where the climate is milder starting earlier than the back country. At this time the dry sheep are shorn; then from late November onwards the ewes with lambs lose their



Wool Appraisal.