

The Wool Industry of New Zealand.

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THERE was a time when they used to say in Ireland that it was the pig that paid the rent. In this colony that never was a saying because the pig never loomed large in the statistics. But if anyone is in search of the animal that does pay the rent of New Zealand he will find him in the first column of statistics he comes across. That column will tell him that the exports of the colony last September were seventeen and a half millions, and that of that large aggregate, the one item wool contributed no less than £6,650,193 while the export of frozen mutton aggregated some £2,000,000; sheepskins found a modest £680,000 and the unprecedented sausage skin swelled the catalogue by a steady £55,000 bringing the aggregate contribution of the sheep industry up to nearly ten millions. The sheep then contributes considerably more than half the export of the colony; this is of course a good year but we must take things as we find them. The wool of the flocks bulks up to 150,765,232 lbs. It is the quantity shorn off the backs of the twenty million sheep returned in the Government account. These roam the great mountains of the South and the North, they wander over the plains of the two Islands, they fatten in the rich pastures and they evade disease in recently drained swamps they spring up as if by magic as soon as the forest has been cut down in all its glory.

By the way this upspringing of sheep on the ashes of the forest is one of the most remarkable things about the sheep industry. The settler secures a section in the usual way at the public balloting; he repairs thither.

sets up his tent, and takes out his axe and puts on as many other axemen as he wants to enable him to do the possible in the way of clearing. They chop for a while when the

between twelve and eighteen months. That is the period between the first cut of the falling axe, and the readiness of the grass on the site of the departed forest to take stock. The above is the period in the Auckland district. In the Hawkes' Bay country the period is sometimes as short as ten months, in Marlborough it comes down to nine occasionally, but the general average to be reckoned on is accepted as twelve to fifteen months. Of course the sheep depastured on the new grass under these circumstances do not clip at their first shearing with all the advantages of a first class clip; naturally the wool is stained black and the fleeces are torn,



HORORATA HOMESTEAD, THE SEAT OF SIR JOHN HALL

timber is down they burn the same, and, the burn over, they sow grass seed over the ashes. Of course much depends upon many circumstances. These are the nature of the season, wet or dry, the condition of the bush, fit for the fire or otherwise; and, above all, the time of the year. But after every allowance for these things the average time between axe and grass is set down in the official guide at

besides being full of twigs and burrs. Still a beginning has to be made and the land is carrying sheep after the clearance of the timber. The people who carry on the wool industry under these circumstances are the pioneer settlers who live laborious days and do without the luxuries of civilisation.

In the beginning it was not so. The pioneer of the early days in the South Island came to a land marked, quoted and signed for the carrying of sheep. That was not the original object of the pioneer settler. He was an expectant agriculturist who had selected a section in the country near some country town, like his section in the paper map stage, and on arrival his eyes were opened by the wilderness all around him. Then the tales of the prosperity of the squatters of the Australian Continent reached his ears, and very soon he saw representatives of that enterprising class of men riding round his boundaries and disappearing into the unknown behind the stacks of mountains which constitute the southern interior.

One can hardly blame the ignorance of the early settlers in the face of the well-known fact that science was singularly at fault in the matter. It is on record that Darwin declared the Australian Continent to be so totally unsuited to the feeding



CONVERGING POINT OF A MUSTER HILLS LOOKING LIKE RIDGES OF MOVING WOOL. (SEE PAGE 215)