

that the sheep are not hobbled as they are at home.

Some twenty-four men are at work, twelve on each side, and the sheep shorn by each shearer are counted in the pens outside, before they are turned adrift again in the open plains for another twelve months, to be inspected by the boundary rider from time to time as he goes his rounds through enormous fields, five to twenty miles square.

At the entrance to the sheds is the great press, lined with the canvas bag into which the fleece is put and pressed by means of a wheel turned by two men, then sewn up into a huge bale with iron hoops, and rolled on a truck to the river, where a barge lies waiting to receive it. These barges, when packed, hold over 1,000 bales. The steamers tow them on to Echuca, where they are put on the line for Melbourne, and thence go to London direct.

If it happens to be a station far from the river, bullock teams of from twelve to thirty-two bullocks are employed to carry the wool, and the deep ruts made by these drays spoil the road for many a month. During the month or two that the men are employed they live in a long building called 'the Hut.' Here they eat and sleep, bringing their own cook, and buying their rations from a storekeeper, who lays in food for the season. The men work nine hours a day; it is heavy, laborious work, stooping over the sheep, struggling with the strong old ewes and rams, no change of posture, no change of implement. A new hand will take twenty minutes over a sheep, a good hand will do 130 easily in the nine hours.

When their work is done they lie on the bales of wool, eat and sleep, smoke, and play cards.

This year there has been sickness amongst the shearers—heavy colds, with bad cough and feverish symptoms. This malady is called fog fever. In some cases it has been followed by delirium and death.

The clergyman of the nearest town will

try to visit all the sheds during shearing-time. In the evening, when the day's work is done, he rides in some thirty or fifty miles, and goes down to 'the Hut.'

He must 'feel his way' and take his customers cannily, for 'the Hut' is the men's castle, and no one has a right to enter it except by their leave.

A few faces look out from the bunks, the bush candle (sheep fat melted into a tin, with a rag for wick) gives an uncertain light, and it is hard to tell of whom the audience is composed.

'My friends, do you give me leave to hold a service? I am here for that purpose, but it is as you please.' No reply.

'Silence gives consent,' says a voice in a refined tone.

'Then shall we begin with a hymn? I have twenty books here.' The hymn takes, a hearty chorus is given, faces appear on a level with the clergyman's. Then a few prayers are said, a chapter of the Bible read, and another hymn. Lastly, a few earnest words spoken, the silent prayers going up from the clergyman's heart the while for the men thus thrown together. Many of these will probably not hear the name of God, excepting from the mouths of blasphemers, until they meet here again next year.

'Good-bye' brings the clergyman into hand-to-hand contact with his audience, and each accepts a small book or leaflet from him.

And now come out into the clear starlit sky of the Australian night—a night free from dew, mist, or damp. A pleasant welcome from the squatter on whose station the shed stands, a substantial meal, a comfortable bed in a wooden room built into the verandah; and then off again in the morning a long ride or drive on to another station, or back to the township for Sunday duties.

Such is the spring work of an Australian clergyman in the Riverina.

(To be continued.)