

SAGAS OF THE EARLY DAYS.

BY WINDSOR LANG.

The "Big Scrub", Australia's "Other Eden"

IN this week's instalment, Mr. Lang writes of the vast jungles of scrubland to which the cedar-getters turned in their search for wooden gold, as the cedar was gradually cleared from the accessible riversides. "At last the supply of cedar convenient to the navigable and unnavigable waters began to peter out, and the cedar-getter had to work deeper into the scrubs for his supply and have it transported by traction, other than that of water, to the saw-mill or to some central depot." This was the third stage of cedar getting on the Richmond, he wrote.

The "Big Scrub"—botanists' paradise—extended from Tuckian Swamp on the south to the Macpherson Range on the north, and eastward from the North Arm and Leicester Creek almost to the sea—actually to the cliffs' edges in some places.

It is difficult for us to conceive of the grandeur and beauty with which it confronted the early timber-getters. The scrub was characterised by the density and luxuriance of its timber growth and sub-tropical plant life—giant trees with massive, grotesque-looking, and deeply-fluted buttresses, which, coupled with the gnarled and angular projections, made it at once both weird and picturesque. These trees were encircled by various creepers and climbers, such as the wild ivy, interlinked with each other by stout, strong, hawser-like entwining lianes, and draped with abundant varieties of mosses, lichens, beautiful orchids, and epiphytes—rock lilies, stag-horn, elk-horn, hare's foot, and

stag-norn, eik-norn, hare's foot, and birds' nest ferns.

Except for the occasional, dim and over-grown animal foot-spoors the whole region was trackless. Here and there stately palm and pine towered majestically above the other scrub trees. The presence between the trees, of native bamboo and lawyer-vines, armed for their full length by numerous hooked thorns, which would readily catch by the clothes or by the flesh anyone attempting to penetrate the scrub, would lead one to believe the way to be utterly impassable.

Trees, such as cedar, pine, bean, beech, teak, rosewood, cudgery, tallowwood, black-apple, tulip, fig, ash, stinging-tree, silky oak, and others, struggled closely together for existence. In this struggle branches and leaves intermingled forming a shade so dense that no sunlight reached the ground beneath.

Consequently it was continually damp, and matted with decaying leaf mould, amongst which lived innumerable scrub leeches ever ready to attach themselves to any unsuspecting passer-by, whilst bush ticks could be picked up unintentionally from most bush growth.

Beneath the arching branches grew Midgimbil palms, and majestic tree-ferns some of which were many feet in height; also tree-ferns of lesser height but of softer and more attrac-

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tive foliage. Several varieties of more dwarfed ferns, in differing shades of green, from coarse bracken to the delicate maiden's hair were there also. Burrawong palms with their long, stiff, dark-green leaves clung to the hillsides.

The land, on which all this growth was found, was very irregular in contour. In places it rose into huge, sloping hills, with either rugged, razor-backed, or plateau-like spurs. In between stretched rich alluvial flats, fairly precipitous ravines or sheltered valleys through which trickled or flowed, winding mountain-streams where waters gently slid or cascaded over lichen and moss-covered rocks. At places the water from a stream gushed over the lip of rock, and leapt in a foaming tumble of water into the ravine below.

Among the numerous trees that of the Moreton Bay fig was of special interest.

The seed from which this grey and smooth-barked monster had sprung, had been laid in the resting place provided by the fork of a tree. The leaf humus therein, aided by the steamy atmosphere, caused it to germinate rapidly. As it grew it sent down long slender roots which throve in the rich soil. Additional roots were sent down

soil. Additional roots were sent down and like the first, these branched and multiplied. As the tree grew the descending roots developed, and conjoined with each other, at length completely enveloping the parent tree, and strangling it in the process. These roots formed into deeply-recessed buttresses reaching far up the trunk, and capable of housing with comfort two or three horses and their riders at the same time.

Birds of striking plumage, and of many varieties, fluttered through this vast natural aviary, bountifully fed from the plentiful supply of the berries of the lili-pili, native cherry, cockspur, inkweed and other scrub growths. The regent-birds were there with their beautiful, bright orange and black plumage; rifle-birds with gorgeous feathers of shot-purple and black, lovely satin birds, parrots, coach birds, pigeons (flock, wonga, brown, green, bronzewing), cat birds, butcher birds, white cockatoos, tailor birds, soldier birds, kookaburras, magpies, mopokes, lyre birds, and brush turkeys. These last-named provided exciting hunting sport for the men when they had decided to vary their diet.

As the hunters approached, the heavy bird would run away pursued by the hunters' dogs. At last, tired of running, the bird sought refuge on the branch of a tree, and remained

the branch of a tree, and remained "treed" by the dogs until the men came up and finished the business.

Hanging in clusters from palm or other trees were flying foxes—night-marauders of the wild scrub-fruit. They rested, and slept, by day as did those night-insect feeders—the bats, and the owl which had stealthily hunted the small-animal night-prowlers.

Denied the shelter and food bounty of the scrub growths as the scrub disappeared, these birds decreased in number—in some cases almost to extinction point.

Dingoes, paddy-melons, bandicoots, native cats, kangaroo rats, "goannas," lizards of various types and sizes were amongst the denizens of this scrub. Snakes, venomous and non-venomous, abounded and glided or slithered through this "Eden." The bush-men had neither the time nor the desire to discriminate between them, but "bruised the heads" of all and sundry whenever opportunity presented itself. At a later date certain farmers permitted carpet snakes to have undisturbed occupancy of the maize barns, so that they might effectively deal with the rat menace.

Occasionally, where some souls with a sense of the aesthetic have been responsible for such preservation, as at Boatharbour, near Lis-

tion, as at Boat Harbour, near Lismore, and at Stott Island, on the Tweed, one glimpses patches that

whisper something of "Big Scrub" beauty, but the axe and the brush-hook of the timber-getter, and of the later settler, have cut the heart out of that "Scrub," and it will not be seen again in all its tangled, primeval glory. Its distinctive wildness has given place to another type of beauty—that belonging to the well-ordered farm-lands.



As the settlement advanced district sawmills were established, the proprietors of which bought and worked much of the timber. Mr. James Ainsworth tells us that the first of these was set up at Shaw's Bay by Messrs. L. C. Snow and Hesse, in 1853. Later on this mill was purchased by Mr. James Breckenridge and shifted to Wyrallah. For some years this mill, and the community about it, buzzed with activity.

During the 70's other mills were

established in close proximity to the river by Mr. William Vahslev

the river by Mr. William Yabsley, at Coraki, Mr. Ernest Carter, at Wardell, Mr. Alfred Simpson, at Casino, Mr. J. E. Glasgow, at Lismore, and Mr. William Tudor Yeager, at Oakland. These, as well as the saw-pits established at Lismore by Mr. John Currie, were all kept busy catering for the timber getters. At a later period these mills were added to by Mr. J. E. James, at Wardell, Pidcock Bros., at Tatham and later removed to Casino; James Dorrough, at Lismore, and C. Bagot, near Broadwater.

In the vicinity of these mills little communities sprang up, and other undertakings were commenced. Storekeepers, boat and punt builders, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, saddlers, etc., had plenty of demands made upon their services. Towns such as Gundurimba and Wyrallah took the lead in importance, only to fall behind at a later period.

(To be continued).