

SAGAS OF THE EARLY DAYS.

THE CEDAR WAS A CHARACTERISTIC TREE BY WINDSOR LANG.

BEING a deciduous plant, in Spring time the cedar tree signalled its presence amongst the surrounding evergreens by having a pinkish-green crown of foliage showing out in distinct contrast to that of its neighbours. By this it could readily be picked out in the scrub, especially from a high position. Cedar-getters frequently availed themselves of the services of the aboriginals, who were keen to assist in the detection of cedar growth.

Having ascertained the location of suitable trees, the timber-getters set out on their task of wresting from this "Big Scrub" fastness the treasure of rich cedar held in its store-house. Using axe and brush-hook to cut their way through the dense under-growth they pro-

the dense under-growth they proceeded on their path up the sloping gullies, or the steeper gradient of the hill-sides, until they encountered the desired tree. Before beginning the work of felling it was necessary to have the brush and tangled growth cut away from the foot of the tree, as these were liable to restrict the unfettered use of the axe. This closely-growing under-brush increased the possibility of accident. In most cases the lobed and spreading nature of the tree butt, together with the same closely-crowding undergrowth made it an unprofitable expenditure of time and energy if the attack were made at the ground level.

Accordingly the cut was made at a point higher up the trunk. To permit of this the cutter had to hoist himself on to a "spring-board" platform. This was a plank driven into a slit cut into the tree trunk, and anchored there by the hooked end, and by the jamming effect caused by the weight of the cutter operating on the plank.

Most of us, especially those inexperienced in bush work, would regard this platform to be unstable and the cutter's foothold to be insecure, yet the worker freely plied his axe for long stretches at a time with perfect sang froid, "as safe and as steady as if on the ground." although he might be 15

ground," although he might be 15 or 20 feet up the trunk of a tree growing on sloping ground.

Tree fellers of this present day adopt this "spring-board" method as an every-day practice, and no doubt would express surprise to learn that many of us still regard it as a praise-worthy acrobatic performance.

This practice led to the countryside being studded with feet-high stumps from which later comers were able to glean a rich harvest. The tree having been felled and trimmed, had to be moved to a spot from whence it could be later transported to the depot or mill. If the slope were of fairly easy grade the log could be slid down by means of levers, or "snare-chained" (snigged), that is dragged along the ground, with the aid of a team of bullocks.

Bullocks were preferred for tractive power when "snigging" or other work was being done in the scrub. The bullock's hide is much tougher, and more impervious to the onslaughts of the lawyer-vine, stinging-tree, and bramble than that of a horse. Again the animal has a steadier and more sustained pull. A track for use by the bullocks had

TRACK FOR USE BY THE BULLOCKS HAD first to be made by the axe and brush-hook.

Fortunately a sufficient supply of bullocks could be procured from the district stations. The "breaking in" and handling these at work called

for special aptitude. Sometimes the log was taken out by means of the two front wheels and axle of the "jinker". If the gradient of the descent were somewhat abrupt the wheels had to be double-locked, and a heavy chain wound round the back portion of the log being dragged along the ground. This chain acted as a brake, and also helped to steady the load.

Sometimes the slope down the hill-side was so steep that the log could be "shot" over the edge and down the slope, end-first. It con-

tinued its sliding career until it came to rest on a more level surface lower down.

Around the district today we can still find such places as "Cooper's Shoot" and "Possum Shoot"—spots regularly utilised for this "shooting".

regularly utilised for this "shooting". This practice called for both strength and experience in the art. If the log screwed, turned over, and rolled lengthwise down the slope, it was possibly damaged by its being split into two, three, or more pieces.

When a number of logs had been

drawn to a spot where they could be loaded on to a bullock waggon, loading became the next operation. By the use of bullocks, chains, and inclined skids the logs were rolled or parbuckled on to the jinker. Here the logs were firmly lashed to the waggon. Loading completed, the slow-moving team was started off on its leisurely journey to the depot.

In the words of Henry Lawson:--
*"But rains are heavy on roads
like these,
And, fronting his lonely home,*

*For days together the settler
sees
The teams bogged down to the
axle-trees
Or ploughing the sodden*

of ploughing the sodden loam."

Constant traffic by loaded bullock waggons over the unformed, and newly-formed road-ways on the flats during the wet season converted these highways into veritable quagmires. Incidentally, the snigging practice in the scrub gouged out the loose surface soil and, aided by the rains, the bush tracks developed into winding ruts lined with the broken ends of tree roots. On the slopes these gutters became deeper and had a bed of slippery raddle.

Fortunately, the crowns of the hills generally spread out as slightly undulating table-lands on which the bullock teams could be readily used. As settlement increased the cedar-getters infiltrated deeper into the scrubs, saw-milling enterprises were established within the scrub area.

These mills soon became places round which community settlement took place.

In his biography of the late Rev. Frederick Robert Newton, Mr. Robert Leycester Dawson commented:—

"It is a fact that in the early 70's a visitor to Lismore could pick out a 'Big Scrub' cedar-getter by his pale and bleached countenance—so different from the brown and bronzed faces of men who worked in

zed faces of men who worked in the open country. Sometimes men toiled in the shade and gloom of the brushes for months at a stretch and rarely felt the sunshine. And yet life in these sylvan solitudes was not unhealthful, and, personally, I do not recollect ever hearing of any cases of fever or malaria."

In the course of time the cedar was thinned out in this area, and men went still further afield on to the slopes and along the valleys of the Richmond Range lands drained by numerous creeks in the Kyogle district. From there the cedar was taken to the Casino saw mills, or to the depot at Irvington. Irvington had long been a centre for receiving timber that was to be transported down the South Arm.

Cedar-getting continued into the 80's and 90's although the available stock of marketable cedar was greatly diminished. Even during the early years of this century some men went out in search of rumoured "finds".

In the 60's and 70's a mixture of occupation developed. Many of the seasoned cedar-getters seized the opportunity of selecting land under Sir John Robertson's "Land Act" of 1861. They kept on with the hunt for cedar as a side-line. On the

for cedar as a side-line. On the other hand some of those who had settled here as a consequence of that Act, often joined by their sons, sallied forth in the Spring to supplement the income from the selection by going in search of cedar.

(To be continued.)