

## ROMANCE OF RED CEDAR.

### A RAPIDLY VANISHING TREE.

(By A. Meston, in the Sydney Morning Herald.)

Very romantic is the history of red cedar (*Cedrela Doona*), and solemn and sad is the fact that this most valuable of all Australian timbers is rapidly approaching the period of extinction. It is the highest-priced timber to-day, and the price is increasing in ratio of the scarcity. It is a timber restricted to a very small area of Australia, not found on more than 50,000 square miles of the east coast from Illawarra to the Bloomfield River, near Cooktown and not consistent even on that area. It is found nowhere west of our Dividing Range, lying between the slopes of that range and the sea coast over a total distance of about 1600 miles. It is unknown north of the Bloomfield River, in North Queensland, and in Victoria, South and West Australia, and the Northern Territory, not being distributed over our continent like the Eucalyptus, the Melaleucas, the Casuarinas and other characteristic Australian woods. There is a red cedar in New Guinea, but poor in quality and grain, and much lighter in colour than the Australian wood. Near Cape Grafton, I saw on the shore a canoe that had drifted down from New Guinea. It was a huge canoe, about 50ft. in length, with a figure head that had been let into the prow. The tree had been about 3ft. 6in. in diameter, and the wood was hardly darker than a full-grown tree of our white cedar. *Mella Composita*, but it was a true New Guinea red cedar, a timber well-known to me.

India supplies a wood known on the London market as "Moulmein cedar," which comes chiefly from Burmah, and is sometimes called Burmese cedar, but it is far inferior in grain and quality to our Australian cedar, which stands alone in beauty and durability.

#### FIRST FIND OF CEDAR.

Our red cedar was found in the scrubs of Illawarra, and there it was first cut by convict labour, and there the old pit sawyers cut it up into planks and boards. It appealed to them by reason; of the ease by which it was cut by the axe and the saw, the beauty of the grain, the attractive odour, and the facility with which it floated in either fresh or salt water. It got the name of cedar from the resemblance of

white wood of salt water. It got the name of cedar from the resemblance of the cedar of India and a fancied likeness to the cedar of Lebanon which is not a cedar, being allied to the pines, and classed as a *pinus* by the early botanists.

Bailey says, in his *Flora*, that the Australian cedar is a common Asiatic one, and is spread over Asia and tropical America, but though of the same species, they differ widely in the grain and quality from the Australian. No such cedar as ours ever enters the London market.

An excellent odoriferous oil is obtained from the Australian cedar, and used for the same purpose as that from the sandal wood. A gum from the Australian cedar gave the late Dr. Lauterer, 45 of arabin, 36 of metarabin and 19 of water, whereas J. H. Maiden from a New South Wales cedar got 68, 6.3, and 19½ with 5.16 of ash.

The aborigines made no use of the cedar, a tree they regarded with a certain amount of veneration, as one sacred to Blamee. Being a badly burning timber it was never used by the whites for firewood, and the tree was not a resort of opossums or squirrels. Cedar was known to Brown a botanist, who was in Sydney in 1808; so specimen leaves and flowers must have reached him at that date. Brown got the first couch grass, *Cynodon dactylon*, growing on Church Hill on what is now Kent-street, and Bailey argued on that reason that it was indigenous to Australia, but Brown's specimens had grown from seed imported in horse fodder from India. Cedar was a favourite in the early days, because it was a soft wood, and there were no soft woods near Sydney. Following Illawarra came cedar cutting in the scrubs of the Hawkesbury and Hunter, and then ticket-of-leave men went gradually north to all rivers from the Hunter to the Bellinger. When Capt. Rous of H.M.S. *Rainbow*, discovered and named the Richmond and Clarence on his way from Moreton Bay to Sydney in 1828, his health was toasted at the Parramatta races in honour of the discovery. Though the two new rivers thus became known, the first cedar cutters did not visit the Clarence until about 1835, and the Richmond about 1839, or 1840. In 1836 two men named Cole and Phillips built a small schooner from red cedar at what is now South Grafton. Some of the runaway con-

Grafton. Some of the runaway convicts from Port Macquarie found a sanctuary among the pioneer cedar cutters on the Clarence and Richmond. Some were killed by the blacks, and a small number managed to reach Moreton Bay or Ipswich.

#### APPALLING WASTE.

In those early days there was an appalling waste of cedar, only the best logs being taken; all the great flanges and the great stump, all the trunk above the fork and the main branches, being left to rot. It was a sinful waste.

When a cedar-laden craft was wrecked, or had her logs washed overboard the cedar went ashore, buried in the sand and left there undisturbed. Occasionally a craft could not enter the river or refused to take the risk, and cedar was rafted out through the surf on the ebb tide to the side of the craft and hoisted on board. If a raft broke up, the logs were scattered along the beach in all directions, and left, there being no hope of collecting them.

Next to the Clarence and the Richmond came cedar-cutting on the Tweed

about 1844. When the Moreton Bay penal settlement started, timber getters who knew cedar were brought up from the Illawarra, and they first found cedar on the Logan and Albert Rivers, Nerang and Goomera being left untouched until the start of free settlement in 1842. Then cedar was found in the small rivers north of Brisbane, the Pine, Maroochy, and Mooloolah, and the scrubs of the Blackall Range. Then the cedar of the Mary River was drawn on when the settlement first started at Maryborough, followed in the 60's on the Pioneer River and then there was a vast stretch of country from there past Bowen and Townsville, with no cedar at all until reaching the scrubs of the Herbert R. and next to that came Liverpool creek and the Johnstone and the Moresby Rivers, on which large quantities of cedar were cut from 1875 to 1885. North of the Johnstone comes a quite unexplainable and extraordinary fact.

Two now well-known rivers, called the Russell and Mulgrave, enter the sea with one mouth diverting a mile and a half inland, one going away towards the west, then coming round south towards a junction with the head of the Mulgrave. Here are two rivers, with the same source, flowing through

with the same source, flowing through exactly the same dense jungle-covered country, and entering the sea by the same channel. On one side of the Russell is the Johnstone, with splendid cedar from the mouth to the source, and on the north side the Mulgrave, famous for supplies of first-class cedar; yet, on the Russell River, lying between, not one cedar tree has been found up to the present time.

Then came the red cedar from the lower Barron River, and Freshwater Creek, nine miles out of Cairns.

#### SOME OF THE BEST.

North from the Barron came the Mosman and Daintree Rivers, out of which was shipped some of the best cedar from North Queensland back to the years from 1873 to 1878.

Beyond the Daintree is the Bloomfield River, merely a creek, only navigable for about five miles by small cutters, the last place on which red cedar is found in North Queensland, for beyond that there is none for over 400 miles to Cape York. That is the total range of red cedar in Australia.

The destruction of cedar has gone on continuously since the first cut by convicts in the scrubs of Illawarra, down to the present time, when some of the last northern trees are coming by rail to Cairns from the Atherton tableland.

The biggest patches of cedar in Australia, the biggest trees, and the best and most beautiful timber, came from the Big Scrub on the Richmond River, and the Atherton tableland, behind Cairns, and this is written with a full personal knowledge of both localities, and the trees thereof. Our timber merchants of to-day can tell us where their red cedar is coming from, and how precarious are the ever diminishing supplies. Old aborigines have told me that their race would die together and their prophecy seems likely to be fulfilled.

(Here is an achievement open to the Forestry Dept., but they will need to enlist the aid of the settlers in those districts so correctly described by Mr. Weston, in some scheme whereby cedar trees will be included in all patches of shade timber left or re-grown on dairy farms. Many red cedar trees remain from which seed can be culled struck, and the seedlings distributed —Ed.)