

We steamed slowly along the lightly ballasted line—only laid yesterday, and over which no engine has yet travelled—two men running on in front to tap the rails and joints, and to see that all was safe. About three-quarters of a mile of rail is laid each day.

We were taken by another branch line to some saw-mills, where the sleepers for the railway are prepared. Here some of us got into a light American buggy, drawn by a fine strong pair of cart-horses, in which conveyance we took our first drive through the bush. To me it seemed rather rough work, for in many places there was no track at all, while in others the road was obstructed by "black-boys" and by innumerable tree-stumps, and we consequently suffered frequent and violent jolts. From the driver—a pleasant, well-informed man—I learnt a good deal respecting the men employed on the line. There are about 130 hands, living up here in the forest, engaged in hewing down, sawing, and transporting trees. These, with the women and children accompanying them, form a population of 200 souls suddenly established in the depth of a virgin forest. They have a school, and a school-master, who charges two shillings a week per head for schooling, and has fourteen pupils. He was dressed like a gentleman, but earns less than the labourers, who get ten shillings a day, or £3 a week. The married men who live in the forest have nice little three-roomed cottages, and those I went into were neatly papered and furnished, and looked delightfully clean and tidy.

From the saw-mills we penetrated farther into the forest, in order to see more large trees cut down, hewn into logs, and dragged away. Some of the giants of the forest were really magnificent. The trees were from eighty to one hundred feet in height, all their branches springing from near the summit, so that the shadows cast were quite different from those one is accustomed to see in an ordinary wood. In the course of our rambles we heard the disheartening intelligence that, owing to some misunderstanding, our train had already gone back to Albany, taking with it not only our luncheon, but all the wraps. Everybody was tired, cold, and hungry, and the conversation naturally languished. At last Mr. Stewart brought the welcome news that the distant snort of the engine could be heard. In due course it arrived, and the basket and boxes containing the much-desired food were quickly unpacked. Never, I am sure, was a luncheon more thoroughly appreciated than this in the depths of an Australian forest. When we started on our return journey it really seemed bitterly cold. We had also to be taken to shelter ourselves from the shower of sparks from the wood fire of the engine, which flew and streamed out behind us like the tail of a rocket.