

CUTTING MAHOGANY IN HONDURAS.

While the camp is being made the "hunter" is off exploring. The precious swietenia mahogani does not grow in clumps and groves like our pine and walnut, but each monarch stands alone in solitary state, amidst a dense growth of other huge trees, its trunk concealed by a wild tangle of vines, orchids and underbrush, requiring the closest attention of the experienced woodsman to detect it. In a tropical wilderness where the trees are so thick that one can hardly force his way between them, the whole hung with an impenetrable mass of verdure as with a curtain, their mingled tops a solid wall which makes eternal twilight below, and every trunk twined round and round with creepers—it is not an easy matter to distinguish species. The hunter climbs the tallest tree that he can find comparatively clear, and from its top his practised eyes detect the foliage of the coveted mahogany. He then counts the trees in line, notes carefully the direction, distance and every landmark, slides down from his leafy observatory and proceeds to blaze a trail to his "find." This done he marks the trees with his machete and returns to camp.

Each man in a company is assigned his particular work—some to fell the trees, others to cut truck-roads through the jungle, others to collect and haul the wood and water, etc. The cutters turn out from camp as soon as it is light enough to see which in the tall, dense woods means a much later hour than in the regions where the sun has a better chance to show itself; and generally by noon tree cutting for the day is finished. All work is done by the task system, which is said to be the only way of handling native labor; that is, one man's "stent" is to cut two trees, from 8 to 10 feet in circumference; two men are given three large trees to bring down, or four men are detailed to lay low some forest giant, perhaps 25 feet in circumference.

To the tenderfoot that seems a task impossible of accomplishment. Owing to its enormous buttresses the trunk can not be cut near the ground, so the axemen are obliged to rig up a platform, 10, 15, 20 or as many feet high as the buttress extends. These platforms are called "barbecues," though how that word applies nobody but an Englishman who prides himself on correct use of the language can say. The "barbecue" is made of slim poles, one on

each side of the tree, on supports, and two other poles laid across them; also, one on each side of the tree. The axman mounts this platform, with one foot on each pole, two men to a tree, on opposite sides, and rapidly fell the tree. It is a marvel how men can stand on these slender poles and chop down enormous trees; but they do it, and quickly, too. In an incredibly short time the stately monarch of centuries totters and falls, crashing its way through the crowd of smaller trees. The trunks and branches are then squared, and are ready for transportation. In felling a valuable tree every precaution is taken against breaking or splitting it, and thus spoiling the lumber. This manner of cutting on a platform seems very wasteful, as it leaves in the stump an average of 400 feet of the best part of the tree, so far as beauty of grain is concerned to say nothing of the gnarled and twisted roots, which bear the same proportionate additional value that our walnut roots do to the rest of the tree; but no better way has yet been devised. Three hundred trees are considered a good season's work for one camp, each tree yielding 2,000 feet of timber, on a modest estimate of the average. Quebec Chronicle.

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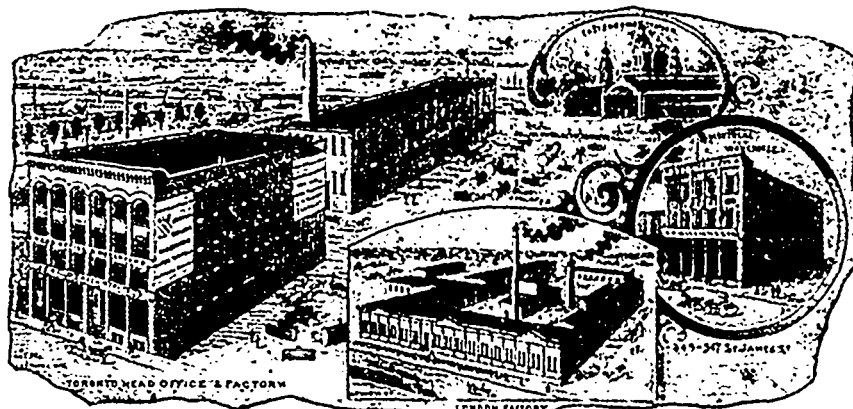
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