

be about ten feet high, with many big leaves shooting from the parent stem in every direction. The palmata grows luxuriantly along the Amazon, in Peru and Colombia, reaching its greatest perfection in Ecuador.

These queer palms seem to possess a well-defined distaste to the ways of civilization. When planted near the habitation of man and carefully cultivated, they sulk and come as near positively refusing to grow as a plant can in the rich soil of South America. On the contrary, if the seeds are thrown carelessly in the earth in the depths of the forest, lightly covered and then left entirely alone, the little plants speedily pop up impudent and sturdy heads. If allowed to fight their own way against encroaching weeds and preying insects, they thrive amazingly, and sprout forth their valuable leaves with hearty good will.

Only the very young, tender leaves of the palm are used, and these are cut with a sharp knife while they are still folded tight together in a long roll. From these pliable leaves the jippajappa, or toquilla straw, is made. This is done by shredding the sections of the leaves into fine strands; some of these are as coarse as broom-straws, but those for the finer hats are as delicate as a hair. This work requires the greatest skill, for the delicate filaments remain attached to the parent stem, and care must be taken that none are broken off. Each shredded leaf is called a "ecollo."

A large number of cogollos are tied together in a bunch, and after being given a good bath in boiling water, they are bleached and dried by the weavers by a process known to them. All of this preliminary work is done by hand, as well as the very great labor of weaving, which is to follow. A machine never touches a Panama from the hour it is started down in the ground until it lands upon your head or mine.

These beautiful hats are made in Peru, Colombia and Ecuador, the finest and most expensive coming from the last-named country. The heat in those South American lands is very great

during the day, making the atmosphere so dry that the brittle toquilla straw breaks if it is handled; and a broken straw in a Panama means a ruined hat. So the patient weavers begin their day's work at midnight, and weave steadily on until after sunrise the next morning, that they may have the advantage of the slight humidity which the night air brings. Fortunately, those who are skilled in the work have become so uncanny with their hands that, like the blind, they can almost be said to see with their fingers.

Each weaver begins his hat in exactly the same place, which is right in the centre of the crown. Each weaver also starts his hat with exactly the same number of straws in the "skeleton," and that is eight. And the way these skeleton straws travel from the middle of the hat crown to the outer edge of the brim is the trade mark which tells is from, but the province as well.

A Panama hat weaver never pieces, or adds to, his straws. What he starts with he winds up with. As he works he keeps the tiny spot where he is braiding dampened with water, and as the hat grows he fits the crown upon a wooden block. After the entire hat is finished it is well washed with soap and water, and then bleached. Next it is beaten on a block with a wooden mallet until it takes on the shape that is so pleasing to the eye of the maker and wearer of Panamas. At this stage of the hat's development the rough straws along the edge stick up like a halo. The rough edges are all trimmed smooth, and the outer rim is turned up in a neat hem. Then it is that some weavers give the hat a thin coating of gum, and polish it off with sulphur before pronouncing the work of their hands well done. For shipping, the hats are folded flat, several hundred being packed together in large cases of wood, canvas, or hide.

The very finest Panamas never reach this country, but are bought at fabulous prices by the wealthy citizens of Latin America. The superfine hats are as soft and fine of texture as a linen handkerchief, and can be folded into an un-