

Democratic Watchman

Bellefonte, Pa., Nov. 27, 1896.

Land of the Mahogany.

How the Big Trees Look in Their Native Wilds.—The Woodmen of Honduras.—An Entertaining Description of Forest Scenes in Central America, Where Carib Woodchoppers Hunt for Precious Timber.

In this British colony, of Honduras which was first organized by mahogany hunters for the sole purpose of cutting the valuable timber, mahogany is still of paramount importance. Belize owes not only its beginning but its wealth to the early hevers of wood, who nearly two centuries ago brought over slaves and cattle and established their camps in the jungle. Princely fortunes are yet made in the same line—though not so rapidly in these days as in the days of the early hevers.

Everybody is familiar with mahogany after the cabinetmakers have got done with it; its rich red-brown and varying shades of color, its beauty of grain and wonderful susceptibility of polish, its durability and freedom from warping in all climates; but I fancy that few of my readers would recognize it in the tree if they saw one growing. The swietenia mahogni—hereabouts more commonly known as "baywood"—is a veritable monarch of the vegetable kingdom, more impressive for size and majesty than even the giant sequoias of California.

The mahogany tree is a tree of great size; it grows to a height of 100 feet or more, and its trunk is straight and clear of knots and other defects. The bark is thick and of a dark brown color, and is covered with a fine network of cracks. The wood is hard and heavy, and is of a rich red-brown color.

HOW THE WORLD LEARNED. The discovery of the value of mahogany in ship building has been credited to Sir Walter Raleigh—that unassuming gentleman to whose doors so many things have been laid for which he was not responsible. The story goes that in the year 1597, when Sir Walter was in Trinidad, his ship needed repairing, and the first big tree that came handy was used for the purpose.

Like everything else that is worth having in this treeless world, mahogany is not easily obtained. Few people realize the labor and difficulties that intervene between the great trees growing in its native forests and the beautiful piece of furniture that adorns the home of wealth. Far in the depths of the almost impenetrable jungle now stands perhaps hundreds of years old, environed with enormous buttresses of roots extending upward 15 or 20 feet around its trunk fitting props to sustain the monarch through the storms of centuries.

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Christmas holidays. His cutters secured, who are usually Caribs or half breed Indians, he pays them six months wages in advance, half in cash and half in "goods" the latter meaning provisions and needed outfit, much as our western miners used to be furnished with " grub-stake." It is unnecessary to add that the cash generally melts away like dew before the morning sun, in drinking and gambling; hence the wisdom of paying part of the men's wages in necessary commodities. From 30 to 50 men is the average number of men in each camp, and they are divided into companies of ten, each company having its own "captain." The most important and best-paid man of all, is the "hunter," an experienced woodsman, who leads the way into the wilderness and finds the trees for the rest to cut. They follow up the rivers in the trackless forests, beset by dangers on every hand, alligators and hoos, savage animals and the deadly creeping things that infest the jungle; and when they find a favorable spot begins operations by establishing their camp upon the edge of the river. A big wata (thatched hut) is built for the laborers, and a smaller one, set high on stilts to protect it from prowling creatures, in which to store the bacon, salt fish, and other supplies brought from civilization. Hammocks are hung in the wata for beds, any convenient logs serve well for tables and chairs, and the cook makes an excellent range by filling a hole in the ground with stones. They eat cazada bread, made from the grated root of the yuca, from which the poisonous juice has been squeezed, and the remaining buds of the cabbage plant, which taste very much like our cauliflower, and is a delicate morsel when not mixed with rancid greasy bacon, as one usually finds it hereabouts. The forest abounds in wild fruits and edible seeds; and as for meat, they are plenty of monkeys and huge lizzard-like iguanas, wild hogs, small red deer, tapirs rabbits armadillos, turkeys and parrots, not to mention larger game.

While the camp is being made the "hunter" is off exploring. The precious swietenia mahogni does not grow in clumps and groves like our pine and walnut, but each monarch stands alone in solitary state, amid 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 you can hardly force his way between them, the whole lung with an impenetrable mass of verdure as with a curtain, their mingled tops a solid wall which makes eternal twilight below, and every trunk turned round and round with creepers—it is not an easy matter to distinguish species. The hunter climbs the tallest tree that he can find, and from its top he scans the forest with practiced 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 conservatory and proceeds to cut and blaze a trail to his "find." This done, he marks the trees with his machete and returns to camp. Each tree is then assigned its 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 himself; 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.

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When you know a good thing tell it. It will do good to others. You can do it easily and pleasantly. There's more misery just like it. Waiting for find out how. There are lots of lame backs in Bellefonte. It's a bad place and backs are used. There's urinary troubles to a large extent. Ever notice how many people over forty complain? Seven out of ten, say colds affect their kidneys. The kidneys are the cause; not the colds. Keep them in shape and life is life. You can do it easily and pleasantly. No nauseating disturbances. No effect except on the kidneys. Painfully clear, and from its top his practiced 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 conservatory and proceeds to cut and blaze a trail to his "find." This done, he marks the trees with his machete and returns to camp.

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THE COST AVERAGES FROM \$30 TO \$40 per thousand feet. In addition is an export duty of \$8. Transportation costs \$14 the ton to New Orleans, while to distant London it is only \$5 the ton. In former times the logs were rafted down to sea with all the excitement of logging in our pineries and with much loss of valuable timber in the surf. There are many places where no other method of transit is practicable, though on some of the rivers of Central America mahogany sloops and steamers go up a hundred miles or more. When the hewn logs have reached the port somehow and the woodmen have secured the pay for their month's toil a happy season of consular begins, to be kept up until duty again calls them to the wilderness. And meanwhile the product of the former season's work has gone to decorate our palace steamers and Pullman cars and the homes of the wealthy the world over.

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TRAVELERS GUIDE. CENTRAL RAILROAD OF PENNA. Condensed Time Table.

TRAVELERS GUIDE. BALD EAGLE VALLEY BRANCH. WESTWARD. EASTWARD.

TRAVELERS GUIDE. LEWISBURG & TYRONE RAILROAD. EASTWARD. WESTWARD.

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PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD AND BRANCHES. Schedule in effect Nov. 16th, 1896. VIA TYRONE—WESTWARD. Leave Bellefonte, 9:53 a. m., arrive at Tyrone 11:10 a. m., at Altoona, 1:00 p. m., at Pottsville, 6:05 p. m., at Harrisburg, 7:40 p. m., at Philadelphia, 11:15 p. m.

VIA TYRONE—EASTWARD. Leave Bellefonte, 1:05 p. m., arrive at Tyrone, 2:15 p. m., at Altoona, 2:55 p. m., at Pottsville, 6:50 p. m., at Harrisburg, 8:30 p. m., at Philadelphia, 11:15 p. m.

VIA LOCK HAVEN—EASTWARD. Leave Bellefonte, 9:53 a. m., arrive at Tyrone 11:10 a. m., at Harrisburg, 2:40 p. m., at Philadelphia, 6:05 p. m., at New York, 11:15 p. m.

VIA LOCK HAVEN—WESTWARD. Leave Bellefonte, 1:05 p. m., arrive at Tyrone, 2:15 p. m., at Harrisburg, 7:00 p. m., at Philadelphia, 11:15 p. m.

VIA LEWISBURG. Leave Bellefonte, 6:30 a. m., arrive at Lewisburg, 8:15 a. m., Harrisburg, 11:30 a. m., Philadelphia, 3:00 p. m., New York, 11:15 p. m.

VIA LEWISBURG. Leave Bellefonte, 2:15 p. m., arrive at Lewisburg, 4:45 p. m., Harrisburg, 7:10 p. m., Philadelphia, 11:15 p. m.

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