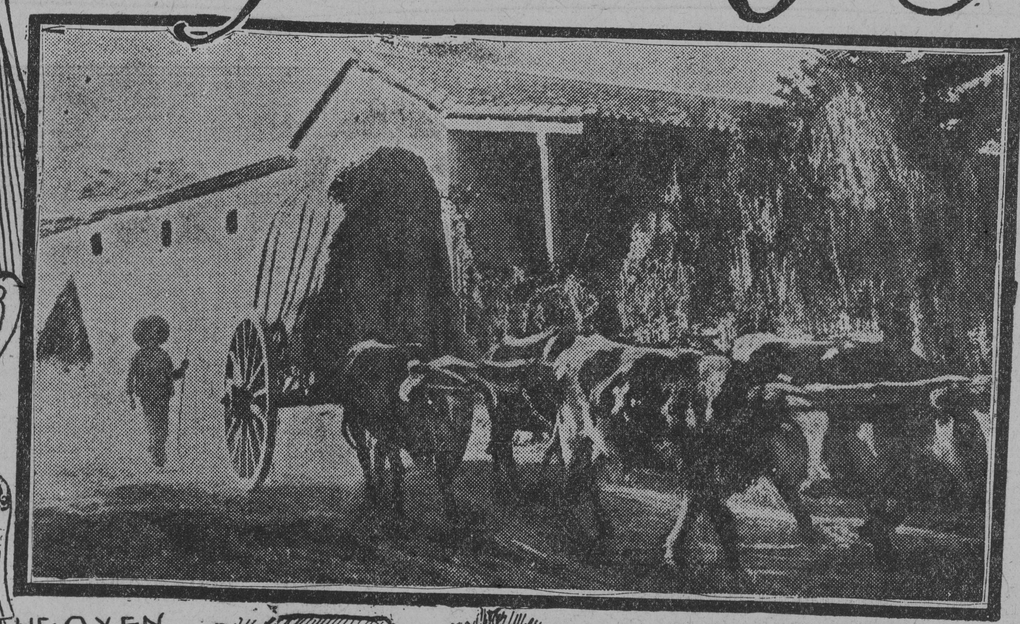
In A Land of Mahogany

Lumber Camps In The Dense Central American Forests

SAWING MAHOGANY INTO LUMBER



THE OXEN PULL BY THEIR HORNS

CENTRAL AMERICAN CATTLE

NATIVE HUT, GUATEMALA

BY FRANK G. CARPENTER.

PORT BARRIOS, Guatemala, January 4.

I WRITE you from the edge of Mahogany Land. This Motagua Valley, which lies at the foot of the Guatemala Mountains, back of Port Barrios, has hundreds of mahogany trees, which are being cut down by the United Fruit Company, that the land may be used for banana plantations. The mahogany is so valuable that it sells by the pound, and a few trees would make a good income. I have been in the mahogany country off and on ever since I left Panama, and I learn that valuable timber is being taken from the northern part of the Panama Republic. I found them exploiting the forests in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, and am told that many mahogany camps are now working in both British and Spanish Honduras. There are American lumbermen sending mahogany to Panama all along the west coasts of Central America. The logs are sent over the isthmus by rail and thence shipped to Europe or the United States. The trees they are now cutting here still lie in the clearing, but they will be taken by train to Port Barrios and thence shipped.

Central American Mahogany.

The mahogany of this part of the world is the real article. We have a so-called mahogany in the Philippines, and there are falsemahoganies in Nigeria, Ceylon, Maderia and California. The true mahogany, the wood which makes the finest furniture on earth, comes from this region. It is found in the lowlands along the east coast from Mexico to Panama and also in Colombia and Venezuela and in the islands of the Caribbean Sea. The trees are magnificent. I have seen some 100 feet high and 36 feet in circumference. Not a few rise 60 feet above the ground before the branches begin and some are so large that five men, joining hands, cannot encircle them.

There is no such thing as a mahogany forest. The trees do not grow close together, but at wide distances apart, and the mahogany hunters climb the highest trees of the forest and pick out the mahoganies by their bright colored leaves. The leaves change from season to season and at times they are as gorgeous as our leaves in autumn. The hunter marks the mahogany by the color and then leads the cutters through the jungle, hacking a road to where the doomed tree stands. Often only two or three trees are found on an acre, but two trees per acre are enough to pay dividends. There is a record of one corporation which had a mahogany concession of about 25,000 acres, the total yield of which was only 60 trees, or less than two per square mile. I doubt if it paid.

How the Logging Is Done.

The ordinary tree ought to be at least a yard in diameter, and the average tree is usually 100 or 200 years old before it is ready for lumber. The most of the wood is cut in the rainy season, but as the trees grow in the lowlands the hauling can only be done in the dry season when the ground is hard. As soon as the trees are felled their limbs are cut off and the logs are then taken to the nearest stream. They are rafted down to the market, or they may go to the railroad and be taken to the ports on the cars. They are put upon shipboard as soon as they reach port to prevent their being attacked by the teredo and other boring insects. The wood is so valuable that it is handled like fruit, and a close record is kept of it from the forest to the hands of the consumer. One of the chief market is London, and others are New York and New Orleans.

A great deal of our best mahogany now comes from British Honduras, and we get much also from the Honduras republic. The British Honduras timber is exported from Belize, which is not very far from Port Barrios, and I am told that the wealth of that town has largely come from this trade. The forests are exploited by lumbermen, who hire gangs of natives for the season, and have the exporting houses to advance the provisions and cash to carry on the cutting. The labor contracts are usually made during the Christmas holidays, the men being hired by the year. Six months' wages are usually paid in advance, one-half of which is in goods and the other half cash. The lumbermen are as dissipated as are those of our own and other countries, and they usually have a carouse before they leave Belize, during which time the cash disappears.

Cutting Down the Trees.

They now leave and go into the woods, where they build camps of huts thatched with palm leaves, including a larger building for the store and dwelling of the overseer. The labor is divided into gangs, each of which has a captain. The work is done by the task. The best laborers are out at daybreak, and a good man can finish his task by 11 o'clock. He can then spend the rest of his day in hunting or fishing, or he can cut out of mahogany paddles and other things for which there is a ready market. The lumber camps are not pious places. Many of the laborers are roughs, and there are frequent fights and considerable drunkenness. There are also bad women who follow the camps, and the crowd is not a Sunday school one. The overseers live well. Each has his own boat, with from 12 to 20 Indian rowers, and his own cook and Indian valet.

The green mahogany is not easy to fell, and the bringing of a large tree to the ground is a day's task for two men. The cutting is done about 10 feet from the base on account of the wide spurs which project from the trunk and a platform or scaffold has to be erected where the sawmen and axmen can stand.

After the trees are felled roads have to be made to the rivers and the streams on the way must be bridged. Much of the wood is hauled upon rude trucks which have wheels of solid wood sawed from the end of a log and having iron boxes fitted into the center. Much of the work is done in the night by torchlights of pitchpine. All this is in the dry season. The rafting is done in the late summer or middle of December. After that the laborers return to Belize and they then receive the balance due them, which results in another great spree.

In Spanish Honduras.

I understand there is a great deal of mahogany yet uncut in Spanish Honduras or the Honduras Republic. Mahogany grows in the valleys all over that country, and especially in the lowlands along the northern coast of the Caribbean Sea.

It is near this coast, running inland 50 or more miles, that the chief banana plantations are, and not far from the sea in the same region are immense cocoanut groves with tens of thousands of bearing trees.

The most of the banana industry belongs to the United Fruit Company, and that company has a line of steamers which plies regularly between Port Cortez and New Orleans, calling at Port Barrios and Belize on the way. The shipments of bananas amount to 2,000,000 bunches and upward per year, which means an aggregate of more than 300,000,000 bananas per annum. The business is carried on about the same as it is in Guatemala, Costa Rica and Panama. The plantations have many little railroads for carrying the fruit. They are divided into farms and each farm is a settlement of its own. The overseers are Americans, and the labor is largely done by negroes from Jamaica and the other islands of the West Indies, who come there for the purpose.

Making a Banana Plantation.

The process of making the plantation is about the same everywhere. The jungle has to be cut down, and this means the felling of trees from three to 10 feet in diameter and the cutting out of underbrush and llanas through which it is impossible to go without a machete or ax. As soon as the land has been cleared it is burned over and then the markers go through and stake out the holes where the plants are to be set. The banana plants come from sprouts of the older trees and they are set out about as far apart each way as the trees of the average peach orchard. They are planted among the half-burned logs and grow without cultivation. The only thing is to keep down the weeds, when the logs will soon rot away. I have seen plants growing among trees as big around as a flour barrel, and in going over the plantations have had to keep to the paths in order to make my way through upon horseback.

About a year after setting out the bananas they are 20 or 30 feet high and are ready to fruit. Each tree bears but one bunch of bananas, and when this is taken off the tree is cut down and the sprouts which have grown up about its roots are left to produce the next crop.

The cutting of the bananas is with a sharp knife on the end of a pole, the cutters catching the bunch as it falls. The bananas are carefully handled. The piles, which wait for the train, are laid on soft beds of leaves, and the cars are padded with leaves in order to keep the fruit from being bruised.

Banana Settlements.

It is a big task to start a banana plantation, and the plans must be carefully made. The estate is first surveyed and paths and roads are laid out, the same being connected by tramways and railroads. And then the farm settlements have to be built and in each there must be a store, a carpenter shop and a blacksmith shop and also the stables and the homes of the workmen. Some of the managers and overseers bring their wives with them from the United States and they must have comfortable homes screened with wire netting.

Some of these houses here are beautifully finished and well furnished. They have the latest magazines and papers, and in some of them you will find many novels, histories and scientific books. Many of the white employes have hobbies. One may be an ornithologist, another a bug-hunter and there are no end of collectors of orchids and other strange flowers. At the Virginia banana plantation, near here, they have quite an aviary, containing many of the quaint birds of Guatemala. These include the wild turkey, which has a brilliant yellow color, the tuma with its gorgeous plumage, and the policeman-bird, which makes a terrible screeching if strangers come near the house.

I do not know just how many thousand acres are planted to bananas in Spanish Honduras, but the Guatemala estates belonging to the United Fruit Company cover tens of thousands of acres, and 20,000 acres are already in bearing. This is divided up into banana farms of 1,000 acres each, each farm having sections of 20 acres each. Every farm has its own manager, the account sheets being kept separately so that it is known just what each section costs and what it is yielding from year to year. Indeed, a cost sheet is kept of this business just as in our factories and machine shops at home. The general manager of the plantation is Mr. Victor M. Cutter, a young New Englander, who came here a few years ago, just after graduating with high honor at Dartmouth.

Loading Fruit by Machinery.

I have been much interested during my stay in Central America in the handling of the banana crop, and especially in watching how the negroes transfer the fruit from the cars to the ships. At Port Limon, Costa Rica, this is done by machinery. The fruit is carried from the plantation over the railroad in leaf-lined cars to the side of the ship as it lies at the wharf. The tracks are so laid that the train load of bananas is parallel with the steamer, and the fruit from a half dozen different cars can be transferred to the ship at the same time.

The loading is by movable carriers which run upon wheels. Each carrier is a long belt about two feet in width, so arranged that one end of it rests over the opening into the hold, and the other out on the wharf. This belt moves by machinery, and the bananas thrown upon it by laborers, are carried into the hold. I have seen four rivers of bananas thus moving for hours, carrying fruit into a ship.

The men are so trained that the stream of fruit is continuous, the management knowing just how many bunches one man can carry in an hour, and how long it takes to unload each car.

The ship upon which I came here had in its hold 55,000 bunches of bananas bound for New Orleans. Each of those bunches had at least 150 individual bananas, and altogether they were enough to have given every man, woman and child in New York, Boston, Chicago and Philadelphia one banana and still left some to spare.

At New Orleans the fruit is landed in the same way, being there transferred to cold-storage cars, which take it to all parts of the Mississippi basin. The bananas for the eastern part of the United States usually go to the seaports of the Atlantic.

This work of the Americans on the banana plantations is a series of object lessons in sanitation, agriculture and business management for the people of Central America. Most of the estates have large hospitals and the employes are taught to take care of their health. The workmen's houses are raised upon poles, the vegetation being cut away and the lands drained to get rid of the mosquitoes. The laborers are made to keep clean, and they are shown how to treat themselves for tropical diseases. The United Fruit Company has been fighting the hookworm, and it has its doctors, giving medicines and treating the numerous natives among its employes who are so afflicted. Every patiet who comes to the hospital on account of malaria or other fevers or on account of wounds received is treated also for hookworm. I am told that this is doing great good and that an increase in the working efficiency of the men has come from such treatment.

Farming in Central America.

The Americans are introducing our farm machinery. They have American wagons and carts and also American plows and other farm tools. As to the native methods, everything is crude. I see the farmers still using the one-handled plow of the Scripture, shod with a strip of pointed iron about as big as your hand. This turns the soil both ways and only scratches the surface. The most common cart here has wooden wheels with holes in the center for the axles, and it is drawn by oxen yoked by their horns. The loads are pulled by the head instead of the shoulders and necks, and the treatment of the animals seems cruel to an extreme.

American axes are gradually coming into use, but the most of the cutting of the lighter sort is done with the machete, much like a corncutter. Every native Central American carries a machete. It is a good weapon of defense against man or beast, and it enables him to make his way through the jungle. It cuts his grass for hay and the green corn for his cattle. After the cattle are dead, the machete chops them up to make beef and is also employed in hog killing. It serves to cut out the weeds from the corn patch and with it the native punches holes in the ground where he drops the grains of corn at planting time. He then covers the corn with his heel and sitting down, lets nature do the rest.

Teaching Stock Raising.

The Americans here are teaching the natives something of stock farming, and the day may come when meat from Central America will reduce our big butcher bills. In Costa Rica there are large ranches belonging to the banana planters where working cattle for the plantations are reared. The United Fruit Company has some dairy cows, and its men tell me that the grass there makes excellent beef. Indeed, there is money to be made in raising stock all the way from Panama to Mexico. These highlands have fine pastures and the stock brings good prices. In upper Panama they are now raising beef for Colon and Panama City, and the future meat supply of the canal may come from there.

Costa Rica has live stock numbering more than half a million, besides mules, sheep and goats, and Honduras has almost a half million head of cattle alone, and a large number of mules, pigs and sheep. It has 150,000 acres devoted to pasture.

Here in Guatemala the cattle are fewer, but the grazing grounds on the high plateaus are great extent, and well fitted for sheep, cattle and hogs. Nicaragua has more than a million of cattle and Salvador in proportion to its size has more live stock than any other Central American republic.

[Copyright, 1912, by Frank G. Carpenter.]

Women Will Compel Universal Peace

By Ella Wheeler Wilcox

EIGHT hundred thousand women have signed the following appeal. And the signatures are still being added. They will doubtless reach a million or more before the appeal goes into Congress.

AN APPEAL TO THE WOMEN OF THE UNITED STATES

The time is ripe for the women of America to take some concerted action for peace. The terrible results of war fall heavily upon women. They are the great sufferers. No true mother desires to bear and rear sons for the horrors of the battlefield.

Recently two great apostles of peace—Count Apponyi of Hungary, and Baron de Constant of France—have come across the Atlantic, bearing the same message, to urge the United States government to take the initiative in securing permanent international concord and peace.

What we need to do, what we, the women of this country, must do, is to crystallize the deep and strong peace sentiment so universal in our land into a positive, active, enthusiastic force that will make it triumphant and forever put an end to militarism and war.

How can this be done? We have the example of the two South American republics—Chili and Argentine—which settled their boundary dispute of 70 years' standing by arbitration. Led by their motherly women, they erected the statue of Christ, molded from their cannon, on their Andean boundary. Thus their swords were literally beaten into the plow shares of peace. The hatred and animosity which existed so long between these two nations have entirely disappeared, and in their place the most friendly relations exist.

Let us, the women of this country, join hands to secure a colossal statue of peace at the entrance of the Panama Canal. Forts at the entrance of this canal would place our country in the rear of our twentieth century civilization, a humiliating denial of our Christian profession as followers of the Prince of Peace, and a disgraceful contrast to our Liberty Enlightening the World, which greets all who reach our Eastern shore. Such a statue would be a fitting memorial of the worldwide treaty inaugurated by the United States, which we are assured will soon be ratified by England, Japan and the Continental European powers.

Dear sisters, rise bravely as one to the height of your superb opportunities and duty and justify our incomparable faith that all things are possible to organized womanhood united in aim and purpose.

THE LEADER

WHAT shall the leader be in that great day
When we who sleep and dream that we are slaves
Shall wake and know that Liberty is ours?
Mark well that word—not yours, not mine, but ours.
For through the mingling of the separate streams
Of individual protest and desire,
In one united sea of purpose, lies
The course to Freedom.

When Progression takes
Her undisputed right of way, and sinks
The old traditions and conventions where
They may not rise, what shall the leader be?
No mighty warrior skilled in crafts of war,
Sowing earth's fertile furrows with dead men
And staining crimson God's cerulean sea
To prove his prowess to a shuddering world.
Nor yet a monarch with a silly crown
Perched on an empty head—an inbred heir
To senseless titles and anemic blood.

No ruler, purchased by the perjured votes
Of striving demagogues whose god is gold,
Not one of these shall lead to Liberty,
The weakness of the world cries out for strength.
The sorrow of the world cries out for hope,
Its suffering cries for kindness.

HE WHO LEADS
Must then be strong and hopeful as the dawn
That rises unafraid and full of joy
Above the blackness of the darkest night,
He must be kind to every living thing;
Kind as the Krishna, Buddha and the Christ
And full of love for all created life.
Oh, not in war shall his great prowess lie,
Nor shall he find his pleasure in the chase,
To great for slaughter, friend of man and beast,
Touching the borders of the Unseen Realms
And bringing down to earth their mystic fires
To light our troubled pathways, wise and kind
And human to the core, so shall he be,
The coming leader of the coming time.

It is less than a hundred years ago that women took pride in thinking their sons were born to be warriors.

When Mme. de Stael asked Napoleon who was the greatest woman living according to his idea, he replied:

"The woman who is the mother of the greatest number of soldiers."

His reply was much applauded by many women, who thought Mme. de Stael was "masculine" because she used her brains; while they only used their bodies in providing sons to be killed for the glory of a man who wanted to be an emperor.

All that is changed now, and women know that war is unnecessary, and that men who meet and kill one another to settle disputes are crude and undeveloped types, and that men of real power, men who are keeping in step with the march of progress, will make arbitration, not murder, the solution of national misunderstandings and disputes.

Women are thinking peace, where of old they thought only of war. This thought of a great peace statue at the entrance of the Panama Canal is beautiful, and should be materialized into a fact. It should be, it can be, and it will be, if women are determined to carry the vision into realization.

Nothing can stand before the united resolve of all the good, peace-loving women of the world, or of America alone, if they will work in harmony.

[Copyright, 1912, by the Star Company, Great Britain. Rights Reserved.]

©Maryland State Archives, msa_sc4150_1_156-0278