

## WHERE THE TEAK-WOOD GROWS.



AN ELEPHANT LIFTING TIMBER.

**I**N the heart of untrodden jungles, on thick-wooded hillsides, leaning over the brinks of precipices, where tropical creepers twist like snakes choking the life out of younger growths, where orchids flaunt aloft, and strange vines bloom, there the teak-wood grows. Against its corrugated bark tigers and leopards sharpen their claws, and under its thick shade strange beasts rest by day.

That atom of animate destruction, the white ant, has passed it by. Other growths have reared their heads out of the jungle around it, have grown, have lived their day, died, and rotted back to the roots which supplied them with life. In comparison man has been a midget, a mote in the sun, hunting his fellow animals with flint-headed arrows and stone axes, flitting, passing, gone; but the great oaks have grown, have spread their arms benignantly over the dust of tiny shapes beneath, and, planted in dignity, have stood as emblems of strength and power in meditations lasting one, two, three, five, and six hundred years. They have secreted the units of time in their hearts as a maiden hides the thoughts of her first love. Days have come as thick as the snows that fall on Kunchinjinga, or as the waves crowding one another to the shores of the Bengal Sea. And then, as if to give color to the superstition of the hill-man long since gone with his tribe to the land where shadows fall deeper than those cast by the teak-tree in the jungle, out of these emblems of strength has grown a weakness that has overthrown a nation.

The first oak of Burmah to be felled by a white man was symbolic of the nation's fall, and when the visitor to Mandalay is shown the king's palace, and reads the inscription on one side of a bungalow-like veranda: "King Theebaw sat in this opening with his two Queens and the Queen Mother when he gave himself up to General Prendergast on the 30th day of November, 1885," if he cares to continue the fancy, he will notice that on each side of this opening the oaken carvings are broken and defaced, as if the events which changed a dynasty had leaned upon the teak-wood, and it had fallen beneath the weight.

The gathering of this timber store has been an industry ever since man of any color inhabited the country. Teak grows only in India and Burmah, and in old palaces and temples it has held indestructible place for many generations. From the color of sandal-wood it changes with age to walnut-brown. Big unpainted bungalows standing upon pillars of the wood, sided with it, shingled with it, latticed with it, defy heat and rain, and grow rich upon their poverty of oil and varnish. They stand, as brown as autumn, out of green compounds against summer itself. Vines wrap them, flowers garnish them, years add moss and lichen, but nothing destroys save flame. Railroad car-wheels, spikes for laying track, pegs for bolts, implements of all sorts, are made of teak. No one save a shipwright knows just how many parts of a ship are built from this muscle of nature, but every one who has walked the deck of bark or steamer has a consciousness that no amount of holystoning, or dragging of cargo over, or wear and tear of feet and traffic, can in an ordinary sense affect a teak-wood floor.

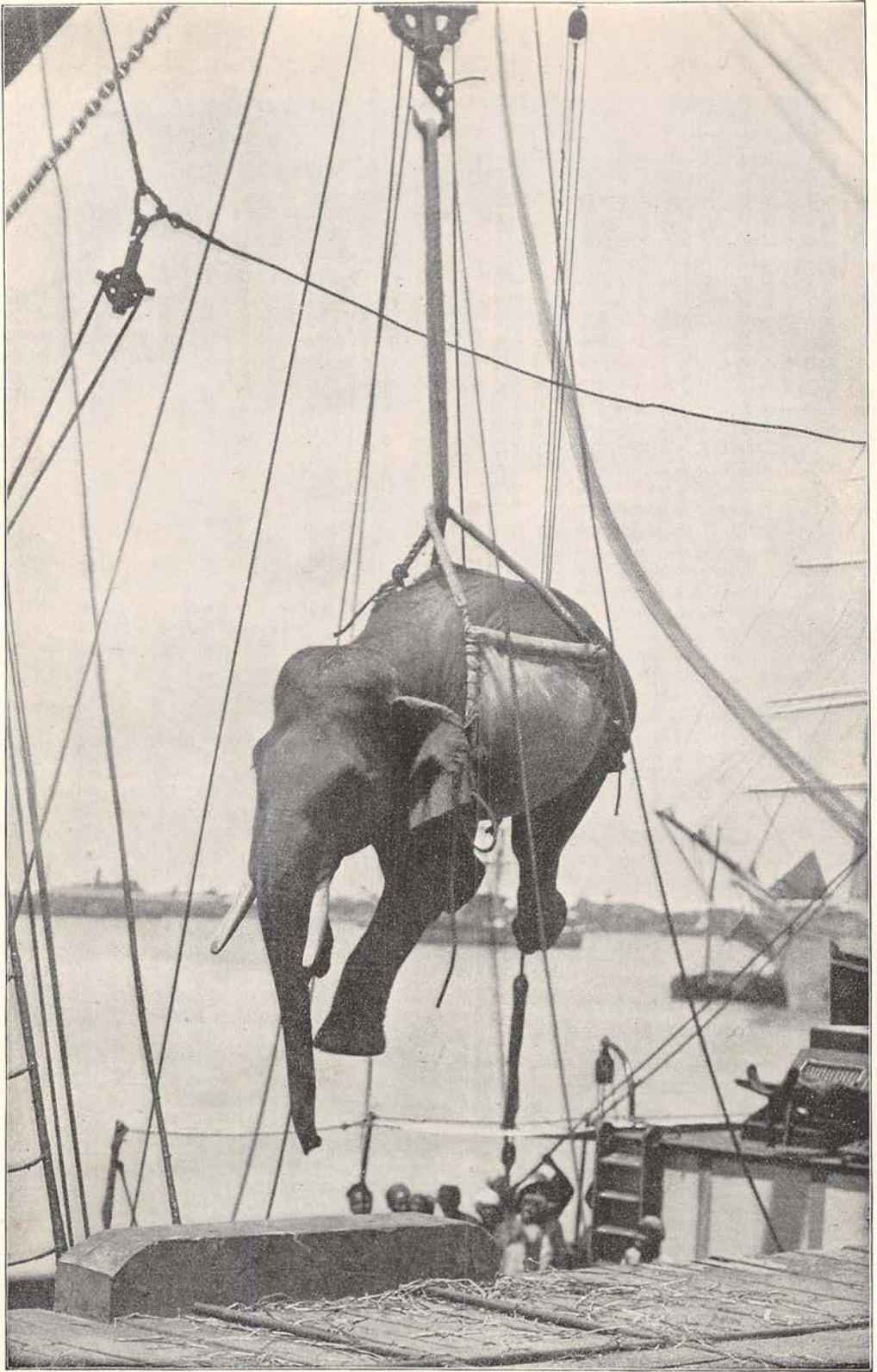
The Burmese wood-carver knows his art is almost hewn in stone when he coaxes leaf and flower, sacred cow and festival-cart, grotesque sprites and elves, gods and Buddhas, out of rugged trunks. The little prow of the sampan shaped like a wishbone, the stern of the paddy-boat as brown with age as the naked figure upon it is with the elements, the strange plinths of stranger pillars, the embellishments of the temples, the playthings of the children — all these are carved from teak.

But it is a strange industry. To those who know how the Norway pine is marketed, and how the big timber of Maine and Wisconsin and the far West is dragged by oxen and horses from the forests, it seems strange to see the teak-



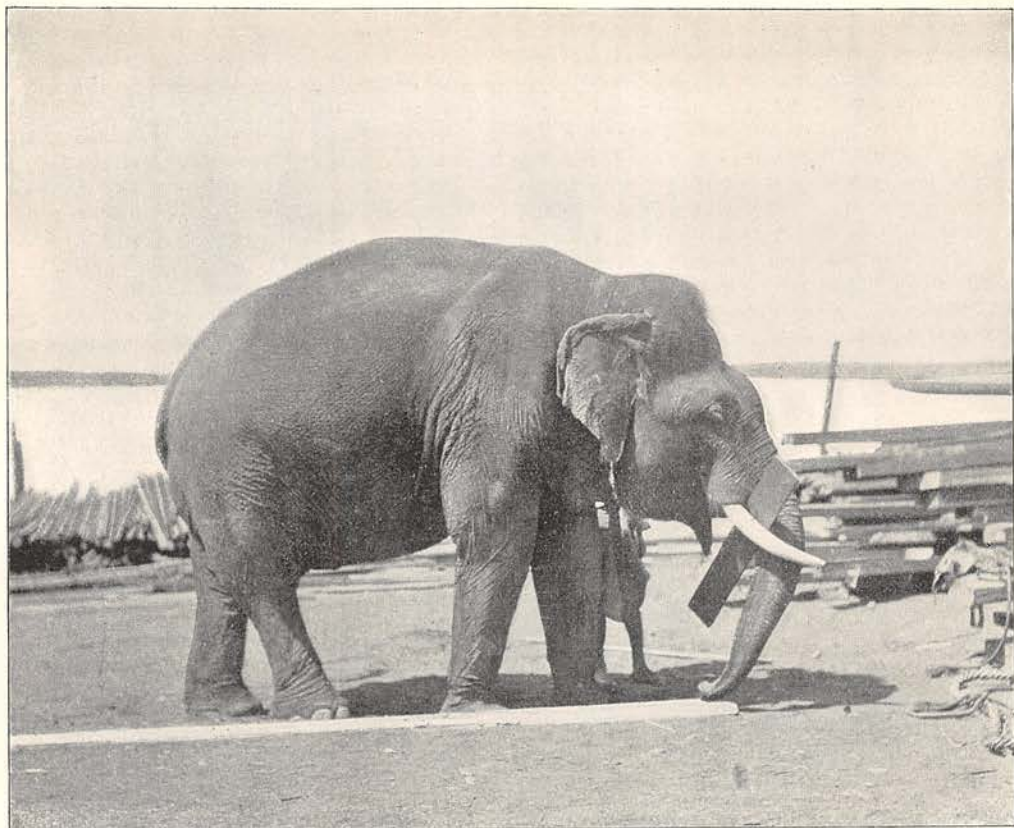


A BURMESE FAMILY IN A FESTIVAL-CART.



SHIPPING AN ELEPHANT.



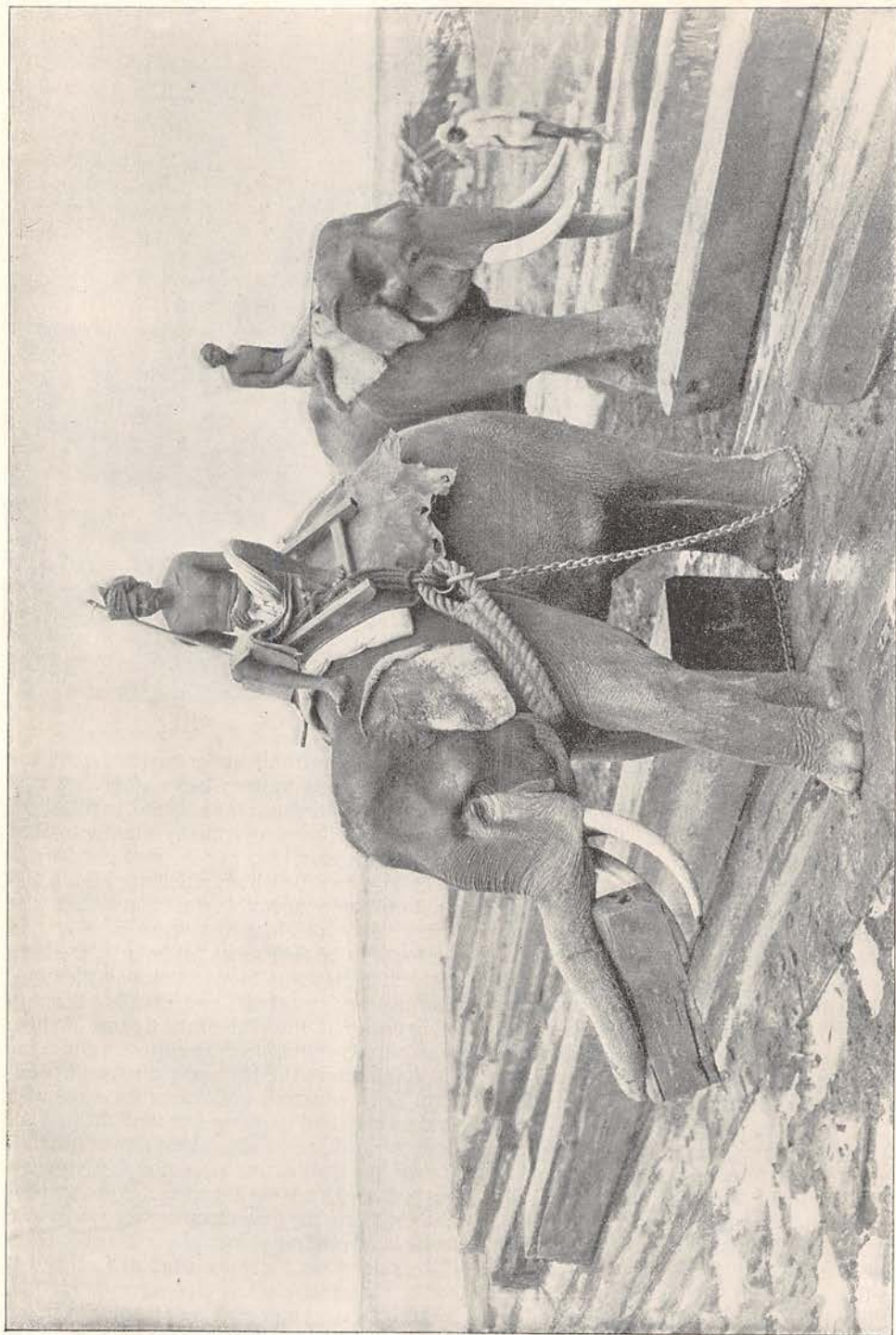


AN ELEPHANT AT WORK IN THE TEAK-YARD.

wood handled by elephants. They are imported from lower to upper Burmah for this industry, and they march hundreds of miles into the jungle to remote teak districts. They push logs with trunk and tusks, and pull them by chains or ropes attached to the huge *shawback*, a sort of harness going round the big body and broad chest, and deposit them in streams to make the long journey by river to the mills along the banks below. Slow journeys these must be. There are no ice gorges, no "jams" under gray skies whose clouds are torn by skirling winds, when waters are chill and huge black logs rush like sheep after one another, helter-skelter, jostling the waters aside into impatient foam, and blocking a riverway. But the teak-logs set adrift by these slow giants float down jungle-skirted streams. Strange creatures come down to drink at night, and wild peacocks shrill at the dull procession dribbling by without so much as a ripple in the wake. The sun beats hot by day, the Southern Cross tilts over to the azure by night, and bats as big as little foxes hang like live fruits from the boughs, or drop into the heavy air on velvet wings, to weave a witches' lace across the star-filled nights. There are quicksands below, and sucking mudbanks,

and strong, swirling under-currents. At the end of the long journey other elephants wait to pull the rudderless crafts ashore, to pile them with their fellows, and finally almost to feed them to the saw.

To any one for whom machinery has a fascination there is nothing stranger than the first glimpse of elephants at work about it. Amidst the hissing swish of belting, the buzz of saws, the multitudinous separate rattles mingled into a universal roar and vibrating through a big saw-mill, the ponderous figures of these slow-paced helpers present a curious sight. One elephant places the log upon a movable platform to be squared, while another waits with restless eyes and flapping ears until the saw has done its work, and then, taking a twist in an attached rope, slips the loop of it deftly over a big tusk, and leads the log away. Another piles timber, lifting the long piece between tusks and trunk, and pushing it into place with the latter if the pile is low, or with a broad forehead if the height demands it. Fetching and carrying, lifting and stacking, pushing and pulling, these docile and patient giants do their work without complaint, week in and week out. Sometimes the *mahout* (*oozee* it is in Burmese) walks



ELEPHANT IN SHAWBACK HARNESS, IN THE TEAK-WOOD YARD, RANGOON, BURMAH.



beside the beast, sometimes he sits on its big neck or broad back. But his indolent figure never seems to be necessary, for one cannot watch an elephant at work very long without acquiring the conviction, however mistaken, that the intelligent direction of his labor is all his own.

The world over—except in America—timber is conserved by government. Nowhere else is nature's great storehouse depleted and swept clean by ignorant minds and misdirected hands. Who that has visited France has failed to observe the artificial forests planted in lines as straight as an army dressing ranks, or to notice with bewilderment those dancing diagonals of timber opening away from car-windows like lanes of dryads, or corn-rows glimpsing in bewitching green? On the other side of the Pyrenees the Spanish peasant carefully cuts the season's growth of twigs from fruit-bearing trees, and transforms them into charcoal for fuel, the sticks of which are the size of lead-pencils. The German forester, before he can secure a position under government in the Schwarzwald, must know what soil nourishes the huge fibers of the forest, what rocks are their companions, what enemies come on foot or wing, or bore silently at the roots. He must know why a tree dies—must learn to read the pallor of a leaf, the signs of drooping life about a stalwart stem. He is a practical geologist and botanist, turning his knowledge to account. But the American is clearing-mad. He must chop to live. He is a mighty man of muscle, equipped for forestry with a strong ax and arm. In northern Wisconsin and Michigan he makes bonfires in the fields out of his abundance of timber, while his prairie-stranded brother in Minnesota and Dakota burns twisted hay through an almost arctic winter. Here and there through the primeval forests the lumberman cuts rude paths. Sometimes he is wise in woodcraft, but his lands are his own, and he owes no duty to future generations. His grandchildren will burn coal, or move south in winter. He leaves the fuel, the waste, from this work for kindlings in the broken solitude behind him, and a chance spark from a locomotive passing in a whirl of dead leaves, or the premeditated deviltry of ignorance, sets the fire which destroys thousands of feet of timber where he has cut hundreds, for the deadfall feeds the flames. In the far West the lines of transcontinental railroads run through incalculable waste. Over the Rockies, over the Selkirks, over the Gold Range, the Canadian Pacific is girdled and guarded by ghosts. Gray as the past, dead as Adam, these phantom forests lift their bones as bleached and

sapless as the skeletons of our once countless herds of buffalo that have passed into tradition.

But age grows wise, and to the comparatively untouched jungle of upper Burmah the Englishman has brought his habit of economy. It took generations to teach him this, no doubt, but he has had Europe for his experienced guide. Therefore, as soon as Burmah became a British possession, government took upon itself the protection of the timber industry. Government "kills" all trees that are destined for the Bombay-Burmah Trading Corporation, whose annual cut is one hundred thousand tons. Girdled trees stand three years before being felled, for a green teak-log sinks like a plummet.

There are two of these great oaks standing to-day that have been dignified by name. They were growing when Columbus discovered America, and were old when the house of the present empress of India reckoned its membership only among the commonalty. They are called The Two Brothers, and keep lonely watch over the priestless temple of Aloung-dah-katapoh. The nearest spot where man dwells is one hundred miles away, and unbroken jungle lies between. According to native tradition, a priest of great holiness died there, and the temple sprang up by magic, with a recumbent Buddha of colossal size lying within. At the idol's head, one of the Brothers measures twenty feet in circumference, and has a clean stem of sixty feet up to its spreading arms. Pilgrims come here as devout as any who ever visited the shrine of Thomas à Becket at Canterbury, or looked at the picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe-Hidalgo so mysteriously printed upon a leathern apron. These expeditions into the jungle are pilgrimages indeed, and according to his means the pilgrim carries treasure to the shrine. The colossal figure is overlaid with gold-leaf, pasted on in squares, as a few faithful Buddhists paste their paper prayers over some stone heart, in the row of a hundred idols sitting in the valley beyond Nikko. For such the drums in the Shinto temple beat in vain, for the gods of their fathers, though deserted, are still strong to faith.

Last year a robbery was committed at Aloung-dah-katapoh. The god had been covered with gold, slowly but surely, to the depth of three or four inches, and some one—a foreigner presumably—hacked and chipped the precious metal off in many places, and carried the treasure away. No one knew the circumstances of this theft, nor when it was committed, but as soon as it was discovered by some one passing, and word taken to civilization, a special pilgrimage was organized, and the losses of the god were made good.