



The breaking-down bench.

tramways are so well laid that where they cross roads they might well be mistaken for the main railway-line.

At the Mill

After their trip down the tramway the logs are hauled up skids singly by winch to one end of the mill, where the "fidler" is waiting to cut them into manœuvrable lengths. This term applies to both the saw and the man who controls it. The saw is like a large handsaw except that it is power-driven. Its to-and-fro motion chops off the various lengths of the log for sawing into timber of required sizes. These roll down on to skids to await the breaking-down bench. This bench, as its name explains, breaks the logs down into "flitches." In the older mills two circular saws, one above the other, are used. In some modern mills huge bandsaws do the work.

The breaking-down bench in a mill where band saws are used is a fascinating piece of machinery. You marvel at the speed and accuracy with which the huge logs are sliced up. In some ways it's like an outside bacon-slicing machine.

The bench itself, a platform 8 ft. wide and 20 ft. long, is on wheels and runs up and down a short tramway past the stationary saw. Speeding back to the skids where the logs are stacked, the bench slows up and stops. A flick of a couple of levers and the "kickers" holding the logs spin round, sending a log up against the bench. A toothed upright shoots up from the floor and rolls

and pins the log securely against the four uprights on the near edge of the bench, holding it there until the man on the bench spikes it firmly to the bench. Then the "nigger," as it is called, disappears again into the floor. The man on the bench leaps over to his control dial, the sawyer beside the speeding band of steel throws over a lever, and the bench, plus log, moves down on to the saw.

It is now the sawyer's job to decide into what widths he is going to slice the log. He knows what the mill orders are from a list on the wall beside him, but the miracle is that without a moments' hesitation he signals in a special deaf-and-dumb language to the man on the bench, who, by spinning his control dial, moves the log nearer or further away from the saw. Then with a screech the saw bites into the end of the log, screams its way through, and off drops a length to be handed on to the breast bench for more specialized treatment.

Back speeds the breaking-down bench, up shoots the nigger, kicking the log round so that another slice can be taken from it. A finger sign from the sawyer, appropriate adjustment on the bench, and again the band saw bites into the now slimmer log.

You could stand a long time watching this nimble machine and its equally nimble operators as it speeds to and fro over that short 30 ft. of track.

The "flitches," as they are called in the mill, are carried on revolving rollers let into the floor, down to the breast benches. There are four of these benches in the largest mills, and the delivery-line down which the flitches are carried is so arranged as to feed all four. A lever-boy stands in the middle of the mill and with his controls operates "kickers" let into the floor at intervals along the delivery-line. These kickers throw the flitches off on to skids beside the breast benches, where rollers carry them down to the saw.

The breast-saw work is done by two men, one in front of, and one behind, the