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SPANISH HONDURAS.

(Read at Meeting of British Association, September 1890.)

By WILL. PILCHER, F.R.G.S.

As this country is but little known, no work having been published regarding it since Wells' book in 1854, and no reliable map of the country being obtainable, it is possible that a few notes upon its topography, mineral resources, soil, and people, collected during a twelve weeks' trip through some of its departments, in which I rode over 1000 miles on muleback, may be of interest to the general public.

I landed at La Union, San Salvador, early last December, and sailed to Amapala, the Pacific port of the country, in a native boat called a *bongo*, making the journey of thirty miles in six hours. This port is on an island of the same name, lying in the beautiful Bay of Fonseca. The Pacific Mail Company's steamers call there three times a month, and considerable business is done owing to the fact that from both San Lorenzo and La Brea, on the mainland, there are fairly good waggon roads, available for the transport of heavy machinery and suchlike articles to the capital. This is more than can be said at the present moment of the two ports of Puerto Cortez and Truxillo, on the Atlantic seaboard.

But the want of good waggon roads is being rapidly remedied by General Bogran, the present enterprising and far-sighted President of the Republic. Many thousands of *pesos* have been spent by his administration on road-making, and have passed into the pockets of a few energetic Americans located in the country. Among these may be mentioned the roads from San Lorenzo to the capital, 37 leagues; from the capital to Yuscaran, 17 leagues; from the capital to Comayagua, 23 leagues; and from Comayagua to Santa Barbara, now being continued to San Pedro, where it will form a connection with the 36 miles of railway running to Puerto Cortez, so that in a short time it will be feasible to transport heavy machinery and other cumbersome goods from the Atlantic side into the interior.

La Brea and San Lorenzo, the two depôts on the Pacific shore, lie each about 30 miles from Amapala, and a small steamboat conveys passengers and light luggage between these ports, and also acts as a tug for the *bongos* laden with heavy merchandise.

From New Orleans steamers run weekly to Puerto Cortez, so that Tegucigalpa, the capital, may be reached either from the Atlantic or Pacific sides after a five or six days' ride on muleback.

Tegucigalpa is beautifully situated in a fertile valley, through which the Rio Grande runs, at an altitude of 3200 feet above the sea-level, and with its suburb, Comayaguella, separated from the city by a handsome stone bridge, numbers some 20,000 inhabitants. The mean temperature is 70° to 75° Fahr. The streets and sidewalks are clean and paved; the buildings, with a few exceptions, are one-storied, and have windows of

unglazed lattice-work with wooden shutters. Large *portes cochères* give access to an inner courtyard, into which all the rooms open. In fact, this and the other towns I visited resemble those of Southern Spain, possessing also the ever-present town square and the numerous churches.

The President's Palace, with its two stories, glazed windows, and modern furniture, differs from the general type. There is no difficulty in foreigners obtaining an audience of the President, who is ever willing to facilitate in every way the prosecution of their enterprises and the employment of their capital.

A ride of some 50 leagues, in a direction about NNE. from the capital, takes you to Juticalpa, situated in the heart of the far-famed department of Olancho—far famed, that is, among the Spaniards and their descendants, for its fertility, its mineral wealth, its rivers, its forests, and its scenic beauty. "Olancho," as the old Spanish saying has it, "is easy to enter but hard to leave."

Through this department, with its area of 12,000 miles, larger than the Republic of San Salvador, wind the rivers Guayape and Jalan (rich in alluvial gold deposits) on their way past Juticalpa to swell the waters of the Patook River, the latter emptying itself into the Atlantic north of Cape Gracias.

Olancho, in addition to its mineral wealth, which is great, as I can state from personal experience, is the centre in this country of the cattle industry, which is entirely in the hands of the Honduranians. Its fertile valleys and plateaux, particularly that of Lepaguara, are well watered; its fine mountains and ravines, covered with luxuriant herbage, furnish in bountiful profusion the natural requisites for this industry. Fortunes have been, and are still being, made every year in this country by cattle-raising. The chief market is Guatemala; then follow Belize, Cuba, and the home market. Last year over 30,000 head were sent out of the country, and the demand will increase, for foreigners are flocking every month to the surrounding republics, and particularly to Guatemala, to engage in the occupation of coffee-planting, which has turned out to be so profitable. Honduras itself is being gradually opened up, and its population is increasing; and of all these countries it is, owing to its great natural advantages, the best adapted for the above purpose.

On riding through the country you come, from time to time, upon broad sweeping valleys dotted with clumps of pine-trees, watered with innumerable brooks and broad rivers, and rich in herbage, where herds of cattle and native ponies wander at will as well as over the surrounding hills and ravines.

Yuscaran, the chief city of the El Paraiso Department, is the centre of a mining district rich in silver-bearing quartz, with some gold, where the American and German companies are doing well. The latter are working a peculiar vein, in which the metalliferous streak is soft leaden-coloured mud, rich in silver and bismuth. The town itself is picturesque and clean, and, standing at an altitude of 3000 feet, with but little forest round it, is extremely healthy; it has over 5000 inhabitants, who rely chiefly upon the mines for their support.

A visit to the well-known old silver mines of Opoteca took me through

Comayagua, the ancient capital of the country, which formerly contained some 20,000 inhabitants, but now, probably, only about a fourth of that number; it lies about 23 leagues to the NW. of Tegucigalpa, and stands at the end of the Comayagua Valley at an altitude of 1800 feet, with the Cordilleras running from west to north forming its background. The Humuya River, a fair-sized stream, runs past the town through the valley, in which some few attempts at irrigation have been made. It is certainly the least well-watered of all the valleys I passed through.

The decline of the city, which boasts now of seven churches and one ecclesiastical college, is due in a great measure to the decrease of the power of the Church throughout the country. Even now, the numberless religious functions and festivals decreed by the priests are serious hindrances to steady labour and industry, as the natives invariably keep them as holidays, and whatever work may be in hand is consequently neglected.

Opoteca, built on the side of the mountain, in which are the silver mines of the same name, with a lovely little well-cultivated valley at its foot, through which the Humuya River runs, lies at a distance of 5 leagues NNW. from Comayagua, at an altitude of 2500 feet. The town itself is long and straggling, and numbers about 1000 inhabitants; the climate is remarkably healthy and cool; and the inhabitants lead a pastoral, uneventful existence, subsisting on their own produce of coffee, sugar-cane, maize, and bananas, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot."

But their present condition will be changed if the old mines are ever again worked on a large scale. Here you may actually find the famous Tom Tiddler's ground, paved not with gold but with silver: from the top of the mountain to the river extends one vast deposit of silver ore; the church is built on it and of it, and quartz veins are visible running through the streets. The subterranean chambers and tunnels of the old Spanish workings are vast and numerous, and, after some hours' wandering in the bowels of the earth, stumbling over immense masses of rock and *débris* at considerable risk to neck and limbs, you are thankful to emerge again into the light of day, and feel the breath of heaven upon your cheeks.

I passed through many other towns and villages, mines and ranches, in the course of my journey, each with its distinctive features and different surroundings of scenery and cultivation, but in this paper I have not space sufficient to give more than the preceding cursory glance, with the addition of the following general remarks on the country, its people, productions, industries, and possibilities.

Within 25 miles from the Pacific coast you begin ascending, and from that time forward, until you have left the Cordilleras behind and are fast approaching the Atlantic seaboard on the north, you pass through a highland country; all the principal cities and towns are at high altitudes, where the mean annual temperature is about 70°. Even in the dry season a blanket, or at most two, is wanted at night, which, from my experience of Tropical countries, is a good test of the healthiness of a climate in 13° to 16° latitude.

Zymotic diseases are unknown; ague, brought on by exposure to

damp and wet, and ulcers and sores, produced by insect bites and absence of cleanliness, are practically the only two wide-spread complaints of the country; and with care these can be avoided. The seasons are two only, the wet and the dry; the former commencing early in June, and ending in November, during which period the trails are bad, the rivers swollen, and transit of heavy goods impossible.

It is a mountainous, well-wooded country, with numerous fertile plateaux and valleys, where a close network of rivers, streams, and rivulets renders it quite unnecessary to carry water on a journey, for the supply is always abundant, and, except in some few places where the limestone formation affects it, good. In some instances the mountain range appears to run round in a circle, the centre of which is filled with innumerable cone-shaped hills and protuberances without any method of arrangement, like bubbles that have hardened in a caldron after the fire beneath has gone out. The scenery is grand beyond description. In crossing a mountain pass in Olancho, looking towards Nicaragua, I counted five distinct ranges of pine-clad mountains, the last fading away into the sky line, and between where I stood and that sky line were three large rivers, the Guayape, the Jalan, and the Guayampre, besides smaller ones and numberless streams. Limestone and quartzose rock are the principal formations. Evidences of extinct volcanic action abound, and it would seem that the curious configuration of this country should be assigned to this cause. That Honduras and Central America generally are practically unknown to science is to be deplored, for it is certain that much exists here to interest geologists and others. As a foretaste of such interest I would recommend those who care for such things to read an article in *Petermann's Mittheilungen*, 1859, on "Lake Yojoa," near Santa Barbara, and its subterranean outlets.

The natives are half-breeds—the old Indian mixed with Spanish blood. They are Roman Catholics, speak Spanish, are well-mannered, hospitable, and easy-going. "To-morrow" is the watchword of the country. Why do to-day that which you can do to-morrow? There are numerous Spanish families with no Indian taint in them, such as the Zelaya family, the lords of Olancho, and many others. Travelling through the country on muleback is delightful and perfectly safe. The food is simple, and, of its kind, good. Coffee, beans, eggs, chickens, rice, jerked beef, bananas, and plantains form the bill of fare for those who do not fancy the inevitable *tortilla*. A roof under which to swing your hammock and forage for your mules can always be obtained; and if you will use the *suaviter in modo*, and treat the natives as you would treat your English host, all these things are placed at your service at a moderate price.

As regards mineral resources Honduras ranks first among the Central American States; and this is shown by the old Spanish records of the royalty of one-fifth levied by Spain on all mineral productions in these States. Gold-bearing quartz, in well-paying quantities but small veins, is found all over Olancho, and its rivers, Jalan and Guayape, with their numerous tributaries, afford a comfortable living to the native gold-washers with their *bateas*. The Yuscaran district contains quartz, which

yields silver in profitable quantities, mixed with gold. Here is the celebrated old Guayabillas mine, which, from the last century to within a few years back, has yielded largely; in fact, the whole district is full of metaliferous veins running through quartzose rocks. I may mention also the San Juancito mine, between Tegucigalpa and Cataranas, now paying largely, and many others, both gold and silver, in active operation and remunerative—the Minas de Oro, near Comayagua, the famous Opoteca, now like many other old Spanish mines practically unworked, but containing immense masses of ore still unextracted, and, between the capital and the Atlantic seaboard, many mines worked by American and English Companies. The country abounds in old Spanish mines now abandoned, but the old workings show that much ore has been extracted and reduced. It is a curious anomaly in the history of mining in this country that the Spaniards in the old days made mines pay, opening them up as they did without any intelligent system, working them without machinery for draining, crushing and reducing the ore by the most inconvenient and rudest of methods; whereas, in the present day, with all the advantages of established systems and improved machinery, the mines now worked by foreign companies are, with few exceptions, failures. The reason thereof is not far to seek. The promotion and establishment of a company with a large paper, and a small money, capital, the costly incidentals of its direction, and the extravagance and frequent inefficiency of the mining superintendents, who are ever lavish with funds not their own, all conduce to ruin the enterprise.

Honduras, in the opinion of competent judges, is eminently suitable for coffee production. Though there are a fair number of coffee plantations to supply the foreign market, there are many square miles of excellent land waiting to be laid down, and to be obtained for less than half a dollar per acre. Take only the demand of the United States with their 30,000,000 of people, at present supplied chiefly from Brazil, which, in 1888, furnished them with coffee valued at \$36,000,000, whilst Central America supplied only four-and-a-quarter million dollars worth; yet the coffee of the latter should command a preference owing to its superior quality, whilst the cost of carriage from its centre of production to its market is much less. Indeed, with regard to carriage, Honduras has an advantage over Mexico and the other Central American Republics from its vicinity to the Atlantic seaboard, whence (from Puerto Cortez) the run to New Orleans lasts only three days. This year when I was in the country, coffee, produced at a cost of 9 cents per lb., was fetching 22 cents per lb., delivered on shipboard.

The increasing demand in the States and Europe for all Tropical fruits is well known, and the export from Honduras of bananas, coco-nuts, oranges, and lemons, has increased enormously in the last ten years. Where there was one small steamer there are now eight large ones. The rapid transit to New Orleans, saving losses by decay, gives Honduras an advantage in this trade, and the carrying capacity of the vessels which can command freights both ways is inadequate for this and other purposes. Travelling through the country, you see growing in large quantities bananas, plantains, oranges, lemons, guava, and other fruit, sugar-

cane, rice, corn, coco, coffee, and other crops, besides uncultivated products, such as sarsaparilla, ginger, vanilla, gum-arabic, and others. The country is particularly suitable for the production and manufacture of sugar. Here fields planted years ago are still vigorous and productive, while in Louisiana the cane is replanted every other year. The United States do not produce one-fiftieth of their own consumption; and when the natural advantages of Honduras and its nearness to its market are taken into account, may not a brilliant future be expected for the country in this industry alone?

Cotton is but sparsely cultivated for native use, and the cutting of mahogany, cedar, and other valuable woods is confined to the coast districts, and to the vicinity of navigable streams, where the wood can be floated to the sea; but these and other industries would assume large proportions in the event of a railway opening up the country.

I would also draw your attention to the all-important fact that, here is a country where the American and the European can labour all the year round, and where the continuity of production, uninterrupted by frosts and bad seasons, which so seriously affect crops in other countries, must ensure steady progress.

Honduras proper has so long borne, through ignorance, a bad name for its climate and the opportunities it offers for successful immigration, being so often confounded with British Honduras, a horse of another colour in every respect, that, in my desire to remove this ignorance and to present the country in its true light, I may take too sanguine a view; but, from my personal experience, prepared to rough it as I was, I can only say the "roughing it" was far milder than I expected, and that, beyond the absence of the luxuries of civilisation, the only drawbacks to travelling through the country, which are impressed forcibly on my remembrance, are the want of cleanliness and the discomforts produced by numerous insects of various kinds.

The political crisis existing at the present moment in Guatemala and San Salvador may seem alarming; but, from conversations I have had with prominent German, American, and English settlers in both these and the other Central American Republics, I can state that these revolutions, petty or otherwise, cause at most but a temporary interference with business, and that the lives and property of such settlers are never endangered.

THE RELIEF OF EMIN PACHA.

MR. JEPHSON'S volume on *Emin Pasha and the Rebellion at the Equator* may be regarded as a supplement to Mr. Stanley's official account of the Relief Expedition. It takes up the thread of the narrative at the point where Mr. Stanley deputed Mr. Jephson to act as his representative on

¹ *Emin Pasha and the Rebellion at the Equator*. By A. J. Mounteney-Jephson. With the revision and co-operation Henry M. Stanley. London: Sampson Low and Co. Pp. xxiv, 480.