LIFE IN THE HESPERIDES.

It is Almost Realized in Portions of Central America.

THE SULA VALLEY OF HONDURAS

A Land of Waving Palms, Pinnated Cocoas, Luscious Fruits and Dark-Eyed Castilians—The Legend of Belize.

An Earthly Paradise.

We who live in the cold climate of the north and witness the animating and radical changes of the season, says a correspondent of the Chicago News, writing from San Pedro Sula, Honduras, have some very vague and spicy ideas of the tropics, and people the imagination with languid and dreamy fancies of veritable lotus-eaters. We are stirred by a fascination for waving palms, pinnated cocoas, luscious fruits, dark-eyed Castilians and an existence as enchanting as that enjoyed in the ancient gardens of the Hesperides. And while our passionate fancies may have thrown too much coloring into the picture and marred its real beauties with the deformities of exaggeration, it must be confessed that even some of our wildest fancies are fully realized in Central America.

One cannot truthfully dissipate these glorious dreams of the tropics who has visited and lived for awhile in the Sula valley of Honduras, where our party is at present stopping. Our voyage across the gulf was comparatively uneventful, and we reached Belize on the evening of our fourth day from New Orleans. This is the capital of British Honduras and is beautifully situated behind a series of reefs and Islands and intersected by a small river of the same name. The harbor is an excellent one, and but for its shallowness near the city would be considered one of the finest on on the coast. The city receives its name from a famous freebooter, Walice or Balice, whose piracies became the scourge of this coast between 1630-70. But he was finally displaced when the valuable mahogany and dye woods of this section attracted English attention.

THE LEGEND OF BELIZE.

The historical and legendary account of this city is just now receiving considerable attention in the colony as one of the sensations of the hour, when we arrived there, was the revival of the excitement regarding fabulous buried treasures of the old buccaneers on Turneffe, an immense island which lies in front of the city. It will be recalled that an expedition was fitted out somewhere in the north last year and furnished with a yacht and supplies, with which they came down to one of the reefs on the coast to search for this treasure. The party was led by A. G. Horne and Thomas Peck, who came here, and, after digging for a considerable time at Calabash Cay, the principals fell out, and the work was abandoned. Peck has since died, and Horne returned last week and has just negotiated with the colonial government for the privilege of making further excavations. The compact has just been signed whereby her majesty's province is to receive 10 per cent of the find and Horne is to pay the expense of a guard, who is to watch the interests of the government. In addition, the owners of the land are to receive 10 per cent additional if the treasure is found. Horne is a very quiet, intelligent gentleman, who does not seem to have any of the elements of a crank about him, though thoroughly imbued with the idea that nearly $2,000,000 of buried treasure lies untouched beneath the tangled morass of Turneffe. The details of the matter were very difficult to obtain, as Horne is very reticent, except in his declaration that he possesses exclusive information, and holds the key to the whereabouts of this fabulous treasure of the old pirates. Many theories and wild statements are naturally afloat concerning how and when Horne came into possession of his secret and there is considerable credence placed in his ultimate success in finding the treasure.

The state of Belize was erected into a colony in 1862, and since that time has been more or less a self-sustaining province. One of the chief industries of the city is its hide and cattle business, carried on within the state and with Spanish Honduras. It also does an extensive trade in medical plants. Sarsaparilla, sasafras, cochineal, gum arabic, quassia, and numerous gum trees abound in this section. Its mahogany cedar and india rubber interests, though not so large as formerly, play no small part in its commerce, while numerous dye woods and fancy woods are exported in large quantities. Brazil wood, sandal and snake wood, rose wood, and many other handsome specimens, so much prized for fancy woodwork, are found here. The city has a population of 7,000 souls, of which only about two hundred and fifty are white, the remainder being composed of not less than eight other nationalities.

WHERE CORTEZ LANDED.

We spent about twelve hours at this port and again sailed for Puerto Cortez. This latter is the chief port of Spanish Honduras on the Caribbean sea. It enjoys the distinction of having been the first landing made by the great and heartless adventurer, whose name it still bears. It was founded about 1519, and was first called Natividad. During the reign of the viceroys it attained considerable commercial importance. In 1874 it was made the northern terminus of the Inter-Oceanic railway, but with the decline of that enterprise fell into decay, until more recent years, when it has once more assumed its ancient prominence, and is now the great fruit depot for the United States market. The population, consisting of about eight hundred, is entirely Spanish. The houses, like most of those encountered in the interior, have thatched-grass roofs on, many of more humble pretensions are made entirely of grass or cahoon leaves. The natives do but little work, contenting themselves with a small supply of plantains and bananas, which they grow around their huts, and pass the greater portion of their time in dreamy inertness. There are, of course, many respectable exceptions to this rule, as attested by some of the magnificent banana and cocoanut plantations near the place, from which many of the New Orleans importers are supplied. It was at this port that our party first appreciated the real luxury of sleeping in a hammock. One lies down peacefully without the annoying consciousness, as some might suppose, of "savage beasts and still more savage men," if not that lesser terror of the night, the tropical mosquito. We had heard much of this latter pest, but he did not materialize. They are common enough in certain places, but concentrated in disproportionate numbers. Around the stagnant pools and lagoons they congregate in vast numbers, but are sparsely scattered elsewhere. The chief annoyance, and the one most to be dreaded here at night (so we are informed), is the vampire bat, whose blood-sucking propensities were related to us in frightful details. This creature has been often known to invade a hammock and take a tribute in the blood of the unconscious sleeper. But we have not yet encountered him, and shall pray for complete exemption from his acquaintance.

A peculiar sort of individual is encountered at Puerto Cortez, whose color, physiognomy, language, and entire demeanor marks him a distinct race from those around him. He is the Carib, whose ebony hue, bushy hair, flat nose, and thick lips, at once strike you as a pure African. But his origin from this latter race is denied. He is rather shy in demeanor, possessing but few if any of the traits of the other people among whom he lives. Rather in contrast to other natives around him, who are more or less inclined to indolence and laziness, he is very thrifty and energetic, and, though ignorant, he would seem to constitute a very substantial element of Spanish-American. We are informed that they are one of the most peaceful elements on the coast, never taking any part in the civil wars which have so often agitated these republics. Their favorite occupation is fishing and manufacturing boats, oars, etc., as most of the little pitpans, dories and other small craft sailing the sea to which they have given their name are the work of their hands. Their strange tongue was for a long time undistinguishable, but of recent years it has been carefully and earnestly studied, and one missionary has undertaken the laborious task of compiling a grammar. It is undoubtedly one of the most difficult languages spoken in this country, and the labor of collecting its difficult phrases, disjointed terms, and strange gibberish is by no means an easy task. The city is very picturesquely located at the head of the Sula valley. Upon either side are located spurs of the Cordilleras, rising abruptly from the sea and running a zigzag course into the interior. From its advantageous position it was selected as the northern terminus of the Inter-Oceanic railway, and the thirty-seven miles of the completed portion of this road traverses the heart of the valley and now terminates at San Pedro.

The history and many vissitudes of this road, the immense sums squandered in its construction, the fruitless efforts to revive its drooping stocks, and its present dilapidated condition would fill a volume of immense proportions and even a succinct resume would fill more space than we can now devote. In a future letter I may have something to say on the suoject, as an effort is now being made by New York railroad magnates to absorb the road.

After a brief stay at Puerto Cortez we took the railroad for San Pedro. Its course through the Sula is bounded by deep, shady verdure. The ground is perfectly level and thickly carpeted with dried leaves beaten flat to the earth by the rains, through which thousands of delicate green sprigs and beautiful blossoms were springing and loading the air with grateful ordors. In many places the road led through long bowers, where the prolific tropical vines looped together overhead the immense cahoon and mangone trees.

Amid this wild and romantic growth fluttered and chattered the parrots and parroquets, while at intervals the harsh scream of the macaw would be heard from the top of some tall coacoanut or guanacaste. There are several small stations along the line of this little narrow-gauge road, where we encountered numerous types of the varied races which constitute the population of Honduras. The custom of intermarriage in voguebetween the whites, Spaniards, Indians, Mestizos, and even the Caribs, while not universal in this section, has been so much practiced that it has left but few distinct races, and perhaps no regular and uniform type of cizilization. There is consequently encountered upon every hand all shades and sizes of people, speaking mostly the common language of the country. Despite these inroads upon the original true Castilian blood, the stranger may meet almost hourly pure Spanish beauties, whose symmetrical forms, black languishing eyes, and expressive faces fully warrant the encomiums which have been lavished upon them.

THE CITY OF SAN PEDRO.

After a monotonous run of seven hours we find ourselves at the small station of San Pedro Sula. It is situated in the heart of the valley, with the tall peaks of the Onoa and Merinden mountains upon either side, and flanked by the majestic streams of the Ulua and Chemebcon. Great forests of cocoa, mahogany and cedar trees spread out in every direction, relieved here and there by coffee and banana estates surrounded by hedges of cacti.

The city of San Pedro was founded in 1536 by Alvarado, one of the intrepid generals of Cortez, who performed the first wonderful march from Mexico into this country. But little is known of its early history, though it came into prominence in 1868, when a large colony of emigrants from Georgia and other southern states located here for the purpose of raising cotton. It was thought that the fleecy staple of the south would find here a prolific growth in a soil of such wonderful richness. But they discovered too late that the soil was unsuited to the cotton plant, which rather inclined to run to stalk and branch out into a tree than to yield the coveted fiber. After two unsuccessful years the colony became demoralized and most of them returned to the states. The only one left here of the original number is Mr. William A. Coleman, who wisely turned his attention to sugar-planting, and has been eminently successful. His estate near the city is one of the largest in the department. Sugar cane grows here without replanting for ten consecutive years. It is of excellent quality, attains a remarkable height, and is capable of being manufactured into the best sugar known. But the fruit business is perhaps the leading industry of San Pedro at the present time, as every train to the coast is now laden with bananas, plantains, coacoanuts, mangors, limes, tamarinds, and other tropical fruits. The fruit industry has increased tenfold in the last decade, and not less than four hundred thusand bunches of bananas alone are shipped from Puerto Cortez every month. Of this fruit industry, as well as many others in Honduras, we shall have more to say in a subsequent letter. Our next few days will be busied with preparations for our departure into the wilds of Olancho and the exploration of the great valley of the Guayape.

The Potato.

A Tyrone (Pa.) correspondent of the Rural New Yorker asserts the potato has always been a sort of Proteus among our crops. He says: It defies all attempts to lay down rules for its culture. As far back as the days of that first agricultural editor, Arthur Young, who had General Washington for a correspondent, we see the same inquiries and the same differences of opinion on points of treatment that are found to-day. A Montreal correspondent speaks of sawdust as tending to induce scab. Now, my accidental experience last season was that the only quite clean and smooth potatoes that I had—in heavy loam mulched, but without the use of any fresh manure—were where sawdust, used as a mulch for raspberries, had rolled into the furrow so that the young potatoes were found bedded in it under the soil covering. They were so so fair and handsome that, although the result seemed quite unaccountable, I resolved to make a special trial of a sawdust bed for the tubers next year.

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