

**THE COLONY OF BRITISH HONDURAS:  
ITS RESOURCES AND PROSPECTS,  
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO ITS  
INDIGENOUS PLANTS AND  
ECONOMIC PRODUCTIONS**

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The Colony of British Honduras: Its Resources and Prospects, with Particular Reference to Its Indigenous Plants and Economic Productions by D. Morris

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**D. MORRIS**

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PLANTS AND ECONOMIC PRODUCTIONS.*

BY

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1883.

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## P R E F A C E.

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At the close of last year, at the invitation of the Government, I paid a short visit to the Colony of British Honduras.

The general results, as regards its flora and economic productions, are contained in the following pages. Owing to the facilities placed at my disposal, and the valuable assistance kindly accorded to me both officially and privately, I was enabled during my stay to travel over nearly one thousand miles of the country, and to see most of its salient features.

The account given of the indigenous plants of the colony is, however, by no means complete; indeed, in my anxiety to deal chiefly with those of economic value, I have omitted many of purely botanical interest, trusting that a systematic and exhaustive examination of the flora of British Honduras will, at no distant date, be undertaken under the auspices of Government. This little work, has, therefore, no pretensions, beyond being an attempt to give some account of the resources of the colony, and to supply a few practical hints to those who are, or about to be, engaged in developing them.

In England, little is known of British Honduras, and that little not of a very flattering character.

Its climate has been maligned, its resources only partially acknowledged, and the somewhat unsavoury reputation of Spanish Honduras has been extended to this little country, "which has afforded one of the most remarkable instances of British enterprise and energy."

Once the home of buccaneers, afterwards, for more than a hundred and fifty years, a mere station for cutting mahogany and logwood, its fortunes have practically been in the hands of a few monopolists. These, holding nearly all the land, have been content to get from it, in a lazy, desultory, and somewhat spasmodic manner, such timber and dyewoods as lay within reach of the principal rivers.

Now, however, such supplies are becoming exhausted, and as the land monopoly has been broken by the enforced sale of extensive tracts of forests, the colony enters practically upon a new phase of existence.

Its ultimate destiny will depend no less upon the wisdom and discretion of its rulers, than upon the character of the settlers likely to be attracted to it.

My object has been to place, in as clear and as impartial a manner as possible, the circumstances which at present obtain in the colony, and, starting from a consideration of its soil, climate, and vegetable productions, to indicate in what directions it is capable of being gradually developed and enriched. I am too deeply sensible of the results which usually follow the extensive and reckless cutting down of tropical forests, to advocate a wholesale denudation of crown lands in British Honduras. I trust, therefore, the question of retaining in permanent forest the chief watersheds of the country, as well as wooded belts in the neighbourhood of streams and springs, will receive the earnest and careful attention of the legislature.

With this important point well kept in view, I believe the Government would do well to offer every reasonable facility for the establishment of permanent plantations in the colony, and for attracting to it an intelligent race of planters, possessing the necessary capital and energy.

At present, several hundred thousand acres of some of the



finest lands to be found in any British dependency, produce an annual export value (in mahogany) of only £50,000. This sum is attained in Jamaica in the export value of such a "minor product" as oranges.

That the export value of oranges from Jamaica is equal to that of mahogany—the great staple industry of British Honduras—is a new and somewhat startling fact. It serves, however, to show what a change is gradually taking place in the development of the West India Islands by means of the fruit trade with America.

No other group of our Colonial possessions is, geographically, so favourably placed as the West Indies for the development of small industries. Within three days of New Orleans, and within seven days of New York, they may be termed the Channel Islands of the United States and Canada, supplying tropical fruits and raw tropical produce to a population numbering over fifty million souls. Within eighteen or twenty days of England and the Continent, they have markets for the larger and more permanent staples, placing them at any time independent of the States, and serving to keep up their connection with the mother country.

Wisely and generously regarded, the development of small industries, and especially the fruit trade in the West Indies, should lead, little by little, to the building up of a more wholesome as well as a more permanent prosperity, than anything which existed during the days of slavery.

The fruit trade has initiated a system of cash payment on the spot, which is fast extending to other industries; the result is, that the cultivator and the planter are placed at once in possession of means for continuing their cultural operations, and for extending them to their fullest extent. As a case in point, I may mention that the development of the fruit trade in

Jamaica is the means of circulating more than £150,000 annually amongst all classes of the community; and this large sum is immediately available, without the vexatious delays formerly experienced in establishing other and more permanent industries. Under the old system, the planter was for the most part in the hands of merchants and agents; he seldom had full control of his produce, and was so restricted in his selection of a market that he often suffered much thereby.

This new departure in the sale of West India produce is only beginning to be felt, but its ultimate effects will no doubt tend to such an emancipation of the planter, that these tropical lands will, in time, become as prosperous as they are beautiful and fair.

British Honduras, in these respects at least, will have a clear start. Its magnificent lands have hitherto been untouched, save to yield their rich store of timber and dyewoods; its planters will from the first have a convenient and abundant market for their produce, and by means of the sale of early maturing crops of fruits and vegetables, they will be able to work with a smaller capital, and maintain themselves free from the encumbrances which have hitherto been the bane of their brethren in the West India Islands.

In speaking so particularly of minor products in connection with British Honduras, I do not by any means wish it to be inferred that the larger industries are not likely to succeed there. Provided sufficient capital is available for the purpose, and the labour supply is guaranteed, there is no country where they could do better.

South of Belize River, and extending for many miles on each side of such rivers as the Rio Grande and others, there are extensive areas of fine land admirably suited for sugar-cane cultivation, where the *usine* system especially might be adopted

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with every prospect of success. Further inland, cacao plantations might cover hundreds of acres of fine, undulating country; while the finest coffee should flourish on the slopes and higher lands of the Cockscomb country, and along the western frontier.

For the general facts connected with British Honduras, I am indebted to official papers and reports published in the colony, as well as information kindly supplied to me by Mr. Fowler, the Colonial Secretary, Captain Marriner, Mr. A. Williamson, and others. To Captain Marriner, who accompanied me in my visit to the Southern Settlements, I was greatly indebted, and it is a source of great regret to me to find that, since I left the colony, this able officer has lost his life on the River Hondu.

To His Excellency, Colonel Sir Robert W. Harley, C.B., K.C.M.G., Lieutenant-Governor of British Honduras, I have to express thanks for much personal kindness and for generous hospitality.

For the drawing of the fruit of *Castilloa elastica*, and the design on the cover of this little work, I am indebted to my friend, Mrs. W. T. Thiselton-Dyer.

*London, October 15th, 1883.*

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