

INTRODUCTION.

The export of Cacao from the colony of Trinidad and Tobago reached its peak in 1921 with 75 million lbs., and since then there has been a continuous and alarming decline in cacao production in the island. At present an attempt is being made to revive the industry, and at this stage one can perhaps look to the future with some optimism. However the large capital outlay, and the wide range of scientists now required to assist in its rehabilitation, are a striking reflection of the extent of the depression which the industry has gone through in the past.

Soil deterioration, disease infestation, inherently low yielding capacity, lack of standardisation in the methods of preparation of the 'beans', low prices, and the effects of war, are among the various causes for the decline in production. However, now that the price of cacao is at a very high level, and appears likely to remain satisfactory for some time, conditions seem to be more favourable for the rehabilitation of the industry by the application of scientific knowledge. This has been reflected in the establishment of the Cacao Board as the agency for improving the industry, and the introduction of the Cacao Subsidy Scheme as an incentive to growers to effect improvements in their systems of cultivation.

As a result of this, cacao cultivation in the colony is now going through a period of transition. The old traditional methods are being gradually abandoned, and replaced by more scientific and productive techniques. However this is a long term process, one of the main reasons being that cacao cultivation was a largely unplanned development, the industry arising without any scientific or administrative guidance, a factor which considerably magnifies the difficulties of modernising it now that it has grown to its

present stage of development.

However, cacao is a permanent plantation type of crop and changes in its cultivation become effective over a considerable period of time. The cacao industry in the island is a very old one, and there has been a fair amount of tradition bound up with its cultivation, and handed down from generation to generation. Accordingly most cacao growers are very conservative, and do not readily adopt any changes that may be recommended for improvement in the production of the crop. In addition, as stated above, the unplanned development of the industry has made modernisation difficult at this stage.

This makes the application of any new techniques in cultivation a very slow process. Thus although it may be claimed that there are certain modern trends in most aspects of cacao cultivation, it must be emphasised that their application is still limited in extent throughout the island, and is now only beginning to show effects on the industry.

Following the end of the war in 1945, followed by a rise in prices and improved conditions, together with the incentives of the Cacao Subsidy Scheme, there has been an increasing interest in cacao formerly abandoned and neglected properties, and in rehabilitating declining fields (25). Previously the system of rehabilitation on estates amounted to the annual supply of missing trees within the fields, and the occasional conversion of some trees from the seedling stock to a growing crop (26). Within recent times however, rehabilitation has been done entirely with rooted cuttings from selected clones, distributed by the Cacao Board under the Cacao Subsidy Scheme (19). This, together with the high price for Cacao on the world market, has acted as a tonic to the Cacao industry, and today for the first time in about 25 years the industry can be viewed with a ray of optimism.