

INTRODUCTION.

Taniers, Dasheens, Eddoes, Yams and Cassava all fall into the category "Ground Provisions" and with the exception of Sweet Potato comprise that category in Trinidad. In the enquiry initiated by the Royal Commission this year a rough estimate of the relative values of all important crops was made and it showed that Ground Provisions had the third highest value of £200,000; the two more important ones being Sugar at £1,376,000 and Cacao at £643,000.

In consideration of these and other figures, it is evident that although they hold an important position in the island economy, yet self sufficiency in food production is very far from being achieved. This is largely due to the fact that Trinidad cannot grow wheat and at present has only a limited area capable of bearing rice, but these last two foods when once introduced to a community become indispensable. They have been introduced into Trinidad.

These plants which I have defined as Ground Provisions grow well in Trinidad, but they are not liked by the majority of people. It is a plain fact that to secure anything like self sufficiency there will have to be a large increase in the production of these crops. But so long as the export produce earns sufficient money there will be no increase because flour will be bought. Just now there is a change. Actually at the moment there is an increasing production of Ground Provisions, after about 50 years in which Cacao and Cane monopolized the land there is a turn in the other direction. There are many reasons for this, some men find that Cacao can only be grown at a loss, in the Cuare valley I have seen peasants who are buying or renting land, cutting down the Cacao and planting garden produce. Near Las Lomas there is a new oil derrick, and beside it there are peasants cultivating gardens in anticipation of the local market brought by the employees of

this new project. In the Northern Range on the banks of the Oropuche there are many gardens, one man told me he was increasing his production on account of the international situation which he thought would render the acquisition of wheat a difficulty.

With these three considerations in mind; namely that this island, actually capable of such large production, should not be nearly self sufficient, that just at the moment an increased interest in local food crops is being shown, and that even at this stage they are the third most important type of produce from a monetary point of view; it seems it is the right time for a study of these plants, especially since the general ignorance on the subject is profound. There are further important reasons for this enquiry arising out of the report to the Royal Commission. The land settlement scheme may be more extensively encouraged than heretofore, which means that greater areas than hitherto will be surveyed and recommendations made with regard to the crops to be grown; hence the necessity for knowing all the crops available in the island. Also the report suggests that a staff of men should be permanently employed to help growers with their local crops as these gain importance with respect to other products, this presupposes a detailed knowledge on the part of these men.

I have based my arguments on figures of only an approximate nature. Reports for market returns, imports and exports give no indication of the amounts of Ground Provisions used on the island, so another method of arriving at an estimate had to be applied. The acreage under each crop was calculated carefully and the average yield obtained, this gave a fairly accurate indication of the status of these crops. The difficulty of finding out the importance of the crops arises from their very nature. Ground Provisions are slow growing and of low monetary value. For these reasons they are not grown by any large proportion of the rural community on a commercial scale, yet almost everybody with

a small piece of land at his disposal cultivates a few for household use. Often if there is a local market the grower sends there any excess over his needs. For these very reasons too the problems of collection and study arise. Each man having a few plants in his garden has led to a wide diffusion of types and a huge variety of names. English, French and Spanish titles have their places; and often there are two or three names in each language to account for one plant.

It was suggested to me at the outset that the classification of these plants in Trinidad had not been done and that the issue was clouded by synonymy. To some extent this is true, but it is also true that there is no authority but the peasant grower to refer to. On several occasions I have been given various names for one plant, but I have also been given different plants for the same name. This raises a new problem, which of my informants is right. There is a saving circumstance which helps me, each crop has a special area in which it is cultivated above all others, so it is to these areas that I have gone for authoritative information. The discovery and visiting of these areas has constituted half the work of the year, while the other half has been the establishment and study of a collection of varieties which I have planted on the College farm.

Yams have been investigated and written up by R.O. Williams and by previous students of the College. Cassavas are the least important of the 5 crops in this island. Aroids have been least studied and are of greatest local importance. For these reasons I have devoted most of my time to the aroids which I have found rarely flowering, never setting seed, widely diffused in the island, and about which there is practically no co-ordination of information.