

GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

Of all the annual crops, maize is one of the most efficient in transforming sun energy, soil fertility, and man labour into food suitable for animals and human beings. This, together with the consideration that it is one of the easiest crops to grow (5), probably accounts for its extensive cultivation in tropical and semi-tropical countries.

Maize is only known in its cultivated forms. Apparently of Central American origin, the maize plant had long been cultivated in these islands prior to their discovery. Columbus, writing to Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain on returning from one of his voyages, mentions maize fields eighteen miles in length (5). Seed was taken back to Europe by him, and within eighty years of the discovery of the New World, maize had reached China (26).

The yellow dent maize grown in Trinidad today is probably very similar to that grown many centuries ago. These indigenous stocks are well acclimatized and hardy, and appear to be fairly resistant to insect and fungal diseases. The local physical conditions allow the growth of good crops. The crop, however, as grown by the peasant shows a large number of genetical types, differing in ear and plant characters, yielding capacity and vigour. As these regions of the earth's surface together with Central America (5) are accredited with the origin of the maize plant, this heterogeneous nature of the native crop is only to be expected. Simple mass selection, together with other methods of breeding, would do much to effect a great improvement in the general standard of maize grown on the island.

The improvement of the local corn has become a matter of some importance in view of the recent recommendations put forward by the Chamber of Commerce of Trinidad to double the import duty on maize. Local peasant production would thus be encouraged.