

LIMITED AREA OF THE NORTHERN FOOTHILLS

By

R.A. SANDS

1. INTRODUCTION

The economy of nearly all the colonies in the British Empire depends on their agriculture, and a successful agriculture is in turn dependent on correct land use. One of the greatest problems today in the tropics is to find the most suitable crops for the various soils and, especially on hillsides, those crops which can be grown without undue risk of erosion. Closely tied up with this question is that of the agricultural system; whether it is better for a country to have its agricultural lands divided up into large estates or into many small holdings farmed by a peasantry. Estates have the advantage usually of financial backing, can plan ahead, spend on soil conservation and generally practise a high standard of management; the peasant, on the other hand, has no such advantages, is often illiterate and usually conservative in his practise, but it is commonly the case that a landless labour is dangerous politically whereas a well-established peasantry confers a certain stability of political thought on a country and that the land, so farmed, will support a larger population than it would as estates.

The object of this survey has been to study the existing agricultural systems and general background of an area in the Northern foothills and to try to find which systems and crops are best suited to the slopes. Every peasant holding visited had a varied mixture of all the common crops of Trinidad and it has proved almost impossible to distinguish the effects of any single crop either in promoting erosion or in its prevention, but the differences between types of farming could be indicated although there was insufficient time for their exact assessment.

It is hoped, however, that certain points might be raised which could be studied more deeply and exactly by future surveys. The main problem has been to assess the amount and severity of any soil erosion, to define its causes and to deduce control measures.