

ITEMS IN THE HAITIAN PATTERN OF OCCUPANCE

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ABSTRACT

This is a report of reconnaissance in Haiti, focussing attention on two spots selected as typical items in the rural pattern of occupance.

One of these spots is on the coastal lowland near Léogane. Here on a shore terrace at the foot of low hills is a farm of two and a half acres. The soil is fertile alluvium. The temperature is always high, averaging about 80° F. for every month. An annual average precipitation of 45 inches is concentrated mainly in the half year from April to September. During the other half year rainfall is light and the landscape brown and dusty.

More than half of the farm is occupied by tree cotton. In appearance it is more like a thicket than an agricultural field, growing year after year without replanting. The crop is irregular in quality, but is marketable as a cash product. Another patch of ground is occupied by grain sorghum, providing the main item of food. There is also fodder for a few goats, and chickens.

The only building is a one-room hut occupied by the negro farmer and his family. Here life is reduced to simple terms, with slight provision of shelter and clothing and a semi-wild crop entering world trade.

The other example of rural occupance is in the highlands above Pétionville. It is at an elevation of 2500 feet where temperatures are lower than at Léogane, and rainfall is heavier. Here in a narrow valley is a farm of four and a half acres.

The valley bottom and part of the slope are covered by a dense growth of trees and bushes—giant forest trees, below these a mixed stand of fruit trees, and still lower an undergrowth of coffee bushes. The grove has the semblance of a thicket quite as much as does the cotton field of the lowland, although here it is green and shady even in the drier season. The coffee bushes have been planted but are perennials receiving little care. The crop is treated by the simple dry method, and is sold for export. Part of the slope is occupied by grain sorghum and there is incidental fodder for several pigs and chickens.

A house of two rooms is occupied by the negro farmer and his family. Here also life is simple with slight provision of shelter and clothing and a semi-wild crop entering world trade.

Thus two spots represent present occupance in a country of varied agricultural resources, where a highly organized colony of sugar plantations under slavery has been superseded by a less organized nation of small farms occupied by descendants of the plantation slaves.