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Author(s): M.G. Smith

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Family Patterns In

WOMEN HAVE STEADILY withdrawn from farm labour in Jamaica during the past 50 years or so. This withdrawal is greatest with regard to manual wage work such as weeding and least with regard to harvesting and light work of that type. But even on their own home cultivation, the pattern of withdrawal is quite clear, and now the men are primarily responsible for the farming of household food supplies. In fact, the only conditions under which women can seek to maintain themselves by manual labour in rural Jamaica, are those which involve good health and lack of any infant or ailing age dependents.

Women, beginning with their domestic wage work experiences and intermittent pregnancies or affairs, tend to move into co-residential liaisons with some man whose economic activities provide for the household needs. If he has sufficient land and crops, his mate may gradually emerge as a higgler in her own right; if he has not and cannot provide entirely for the household his mate will take odd jobs as washer-woman, harvester, and may do a little stone breaking on the side, but will tend to avoid job employment as a floor cleaner unless economic conditions are really severe, by pretending to illness of various types, especially blood pressure.

The real point is that the woman without a house of her own but with children has very little chance of clearly formulating or seeking any goals of her own account, although she is free to imagine all sorts of goals for her children, and the fact that she conceives her children's future in terms which she never was herself able to realise, leads to a harsher discipline and attitude towards these children than might otherwise have developed. It also leads to an earlier rebellion or evasion of discipline on their part, with boys notably sulking and the girls becoming pregnant.

For a woman to have a house of her own in these rural areas she must normally either inherit it as a daughter or as a widow. Those who are able to build houses from their own earnings are better off than the group under immediate discussion.

Celebracy as a preventative against pregnancy and unemployment is sought by women in the dress-maker apprenticeship and in domestic work. But the moment that pregnancy develops the woman becomes correspondingly tied up and increasingly ceases to enjoy freedom to seek after any other goals than those of self maintenance. Where a girl's mother has her own house, the girl may leave her children with the mother and proceed to some area of home employment, such as Kingston, in search of work if the father of the child cannot or does not choose to assist in its maintenance.

— by —

Dr. M. G. Smith

But this search for work in urban areas often results in further pregnancy and complicates and increases the burden of wage earner and her mother alike. The net result is that both these people become committed to the care and maintenance of the younger woman's children as their over-riding goals. Where unemployment faces the younger woman she has little alternative to liaisons with men able to contribute to her children's upkeep.

THE situation which faces men is also highly restrictive of any freedom to formulate and choose between personal goals. The degree to which it is restricted reflects their individual economic condition. Young men, on entering "manhood", that is the condition of independent economic and social action, enjoy at first a relatively high degree of freedom since their economic obligations remain far lower than their opportunities for income, so long as their parents continue to feed and house them. Often enough they are apprenticed to some local tradesmen to learn carpentry, mason work, tailoring or the like.

If not apprenticed they combine a certain amount of farming for themselves and for their parent's family with as much wage work as necessary to supply their immediate cash requirements. These cash requirements are always relatively small since the available employment does not permit any large accumulations nor would there be worthwhile scope for their investment in the local economic system. To buy a bicycle is about the maximum realisable but of course bicycles pre-suppose flat land which may not be near the area. If the young man wants to go to Kingston, he can get

Rural Jamaica

his bus fare by farm work, but if he wishes to go to Britain he will have to persuade his parents to sell or pawn some of the land or a cow if either of them has it.

As he grows older and the initial period of sexual experiment comes to its end, he finds that to maintain his economic and social freedom he has to set up his own house and not to continue living on his parents. To do this he requires a mate and will normally find the mother of his most recent children most suitable. They then seek to rent a room at the back of a shop or some shed and establish the household there.

The problem which the man faces now is that of maintaining and providing for this unit and possibly acquiring a house of his own. Here he comes up against local land distribution conditions; tenancy of farm land or house spots is the only way of achievement open to him, but these tenancies do not permit him easily to rear sufficient livestock to accumulate the capital necessary for house building or the purchase of land on his own. He therefore supplements the growing of provisions in his own garden by wage work on nearby estates during crop, or on trucks, and around shop fronts, as best he can, hoping that the wage income he accumulates will be sufficient to permit the purchase of a cow or some pigs, and that the successful rearing of the young from these will also permit the building of his own house, whether on tenanted or purchased land.

Meanwhile, his mate and himself subsist as best they can, both aware that the relationship may be impermanent and that the new house, if and when it is built, may require another mistress. But there is a strong, little realised avoidance and dislike of marrying a woman without having a house of one's own. Ideally you should have your own house on your own land before you marry, this represents the essential basis of economic security for your family and your children as the rural folk see fit, but if you cannot achieve this and for religious or other reasons marriage is desired, its immediate requirement and condition is to have a house of your own on someone else's rented or leased land. Until one has one's own house, matings remain impermanent.

IT IS important to realise how absolutely necessary it is for a man in the rural parts to have his own mate living with him. The woman not only looks after his house-keeping requirements, but also assists in the garden work, cares his small stock, markets his produce, and also contributes from her own earnings towards the household needs. However unstable common law mating patterns may appear, individually the economic and social pressures towards cohabitation

This article which we call "Family Patterns In Rural Jamaica" is an extract from a paper "Goals and Incentives In Rural Jamaica" by Dr. M. G. Smith, B.A., Ph.D. (London) Research Fellow, Institute of Social and Economic Research.



guarantee that at any time there will be a high incidence of domestic units within these rural communities, since the household is the fundamental unit of the rural social and economic system.

Let us see how the countryman puts it in his own words "the old man have their home to sustain, wife and pickney, so they have to hire out compulsory if they cannot manage. But the young man at first they think they can get something better. Is only when they find their mistake that they settle down to it. If they only have girl friend, no pickney, she have to satisfy with what they give him, a 2/- or so. If she no satisfy they gone. But when he living with a woman steady, she have his children, then he settle down to work compulsory."

Continued on Page 28

No Lullaby

from page 15

has flown under the bridge and things have been getting along swimmingly. Still some didn't trust him since criticism always seems to flow quickly off his back. His arguments, they hold, are strictly for the birds.

At one stage, despite the gravity of the situation, the meeting got out of hand and the Chairman, Woody Woodpecker, had to keep knocking the desk. He is a superstitious fellow who likes to keep knocking on wood, yet his fine feathered friends seem to like him very much. He is a good tactician and was very able in handling the conduct of an unpopular candidate, Robin Red-breast. He, long looked upon with suspicion because of the colour of his shirt front, was frequently heckled and charged with red communist affiliations.

Because the movement is a secret one Pretty Paul was not invited. This seems however to be poor strategy since it was done against the advice of the wise old Owl who later winked off the Parrot clan thereby causing no end of squawking.

The meeting ended when the Stork declared that the only answer to the attack was to increase the population. This, he said, would provide more work for his people and would assist the little birds to beat the big ones by sheer weight of numbers. This was not well taken, but the adjournment was.

So now it seems at the moment that the big job may go to Petchary whose record of victories against John Crow and other big birds is well known. In fact some are confident that he will win wings down when the final balloting comes about.

The picture may appear gloomy. It is correct nevertheless and unless something is done soon it will get worse. They will have to take vigorous action or have a final choir meeting and join together in singing the Swan Song.

—KEN JONES.

Family Patterns

from page 25

Thus the establishment of a domestic union compels a man to economic activity of any type, so long as it can provide for the unit and its ever-increasing population. As a result, the longer the maintenance of the unit and the larger the family, the more a man works and must work, until at some point in this process he finds that the distribution of his work time between wage work and own-account employment requires to be altered if he is to be able to provide for the larger number of dependents from his own subsistence production.

At this stage, he shifts out of the less well-paid employment fields towards government road work or other opportunities such as headman for an abandoned property, regular employment on some estate, or the like, which permit saving sufficient to enable the purchase of the land he needs. The goal is the maintenance of his household. He always works, but stands still as long as he depends primarily on wage work, and therefore must seek land room of his own, whether through government land settlement schemes or otherwise, to catch up with his obligations and if possible to increase his income beyond his immediate obligations.

In this context one can see how important are the pre-conditions for goal formulation and pursuit already mentioned, keeping out of trouble and unnecessary expense, maintenance of health, the growing of one's own food, even the apprenticeship to a carpenter or mason which reduces the house building costs by self help. And when these pre-requisites are lacking, or formulated goals cannot be achieved due to bad farming, or unemployment, or litigation over the damage which one's livestock has done to one's neighbour's farm or the like, the seeker, if a male, falls back on migration or debt which he does not really expect to repay or perhaps on praedial larceny as a means towards making ends meet.

If a woman, she becomes open to other men's advances or engages more actively in stone-breaking, higglering and the like. Should one of the spouses die, the other is thrown back on the limited local employment market and has to take whatever work is available or if ill, to seek enrolment in the parochial pauper roll.

This account may seem fairly gloomy. Unfortunately it is based on a great deal of fact and on as intensive an investigation as was possible with the time at one's disposal.

Adventures of

Mike Harrison

from page 23

It was said that Miss Beeston ruled Green Hill estate with an iron hand; but in truth the iron fist that ruled belonged to Elk Billson. Everybody called him the whip-man because he always carried a huge heavy whip poised as if to strike. He flogged serving people for the most trivial offences, had been known to take his whip to European workers. He was always spoiling for a fight. He had a pew in church, a pew empty nearly always. This Sunday he was in his pew. He had heard a lot about Rev. Mike Harrison. He had come to see and hear if the man was real. He carried his whip. The parish has never quite forgotten the goings on in church that Sunday.

(To be continued)