

## FARMING IN SIERRA LEONE

By Juliana Genda

(4<sup>th</sup> Form student at Queen of the Rosary School in Bo in 1964)

As there is very little animal manure and fertilizer is very expensive, the farmer chooses land which has undergone a long rest or fallow period. He chooses land which he will be able to clear and take care of. If he and his wife are lazy, he chooses a small area, but if he is energetic, then he chooses a large area and they can have a big farm.

When he chooses the portion, he employs workers who go day after day to clear the land. First, the smaller trees are cut to make it easier to cut the larger trees. A few days after the cutting of the small trees, the big trees are cut and that is the end of the first part of the work—brushing.

Now the farm is brushed. The farmer takes his cutlass, goes around his farm which is still crowded with cut trees lying across each other and cuts the branches that overlap. He is preparing his farm for the burning. The second part of the work is reached when the trees are really dry and ready to burn.

After a month or so, he calls his labourers again. All this time they have been resting, now a big day has come. At about midday the workers gather long straws with which they distribute the fire around the farm. First they call from heaven the angel of fire. They call very loudly in the Arabic language. The angel of fire has come, and because a terrible event is going to happen, they imitate crying. They cry in very loud voices as if a person is dead. While crying they scatter the fire over the farm, sometimes it burns very well but sometimes it does not. There had been little creatures hiding under the trees and now none escape. The farmer's children go running the next day to pick them up, animals such as rats, rabbits, tortoises, etc. It is very important that the farm burns well because it saves the farmer from another clearing of the burnt trees.

The farmer and his wife are very happy because they have half the work done. Now rice is going to be planted on this farm. But as well as rice, other crops are planted with it, such as cassava, corn, beans, potatoes, wheat, yams, and vegetables. These are planted in small quantities. They eat the leaves of the cassava and potato, as well as of the corn, while the rice is growing. The corn is

completely finished before the rice harvest, but the rest sometimes remains on the farm after the harvest.

The rice is mixed with seeds of pepper, garden eggs, etc. The farmers scatter this mixture on the farm. To prevent birds from picking the seeds, they take hoes and plough all over the farm. The seeds will germinate and grow very rapidly because of the heavy rain and the sun. Now and then the birds give a lot of trouble and the children are kept busy driving them away.

Finally the harvest is ready and the labourers come again. In our town where farmers get abundant crops each year, the labourers send their wives to farms where they have worked to help harvest the crops. In return they are given a fraction of what got from the field.

After the harvest the farmer and his wife store their crops in small stores built up in the air or pound the rice for sale.