

FATHER OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

He might also be called the Father of Chelsea, for his names still live in Hans Crescent and Sloane Square. He died at the age of 93 after a lifetime of useful work . . . by Frances Collingwood

THE NAME OF SIR HANS SLOANE might have meant nothing to the majority of people if his daughter, ELIZABETH, had not married COLONEL CHARLES CADOGAN. For it was by the union of these two families that much of Sloane's Chelsea property went to swell that of the Cadogan estate with the result that far more people have heard of Sloane Square, Sloane Street, Hans Crescent and the like than ever knew the first thing about the owner of these famous names. Yet there is so much that is memorable about Sir Hans Sloane, not the least being that he lived to the ripe old age of 93 and never wasted a moment of his time in idleness. He was born in 1660 and died on January 11th, 1753, so that this month marks the bi-centenary of his death.

Sloane was a native of Northern Ireland, having been born at Killeleagh in County Down. At the age of sixteen he developed symptoms of consumption and for three years had to be kept very quiet. No alcohol was allowed to him during this time, and in consequence he was all his life an almost total abstainer. Whether or no this affected his constitution it is impossible to say, but the fact remains that the tubercular symptoms gradually ceased and, before long, he was able to take his place in the world of healthy men. Perhaps it was this remarkable change in his physical condition that aroused his interest in disease. Certainly the next we hear of him is in Paris

48 where he went to study medicine. X

X pursuit of knowledge then took him to Montpellier where he met WILLIAM COURTEN, the man who, when he died, left him a collection valued at £50,000, and instilled into the young Irishman some of his own passion for collecting.

Like many another medical student Sloane became fascinated by the science of plants and spent much of his leisure time sitting at the feet of those eminent botanists PIERRE MAGNOL and TOURNEFORT. What he learned from them was to stand him in good stead later in life. When he was 23, Hans Sloane took the degree of doctor of medicine at Orange University, and afterwards returned to England. Two years later he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society, and another two years found him also a fellow of the College of Physicians in London.

His first medical appointment proved exceedingly fruitful for the world of botany. He accompanied the DUKE OF ALBEMARLE, then the Governor of Jamaica, to the West Indies as his physician. Fifteen months were to elapse before England saw him again, but during that time he was anything but idle. The health of the Governor and his family must have been robust, for his medical adviser seems to have concentrated much of his attention upon the flora of Jamaica. By so doing he was able to enrich the botanical knowledge of the world to the tune of 800 species of West Indian plant life.

On his return to London, Sloane set himself



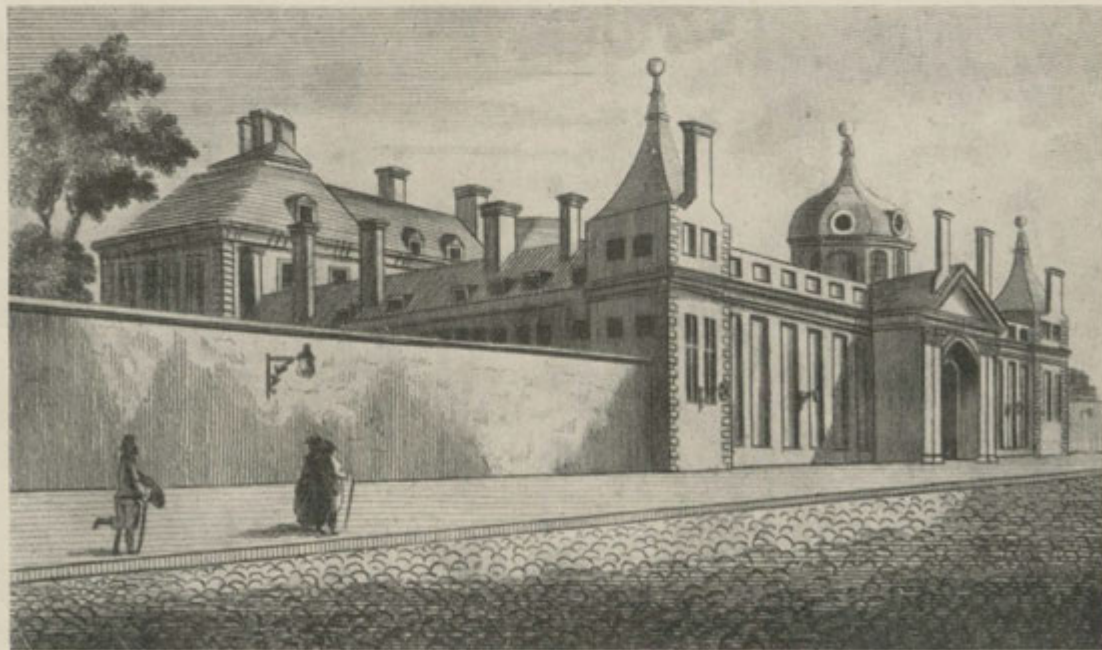
50 up in private practice and chose a house in Bloomsbury Square. Already he had a good reputation, and his consulting room was rarely empty. In November 1693 he became Secretary to the Royal Society, a post he held for 19 years. During this period he published the results of his investigations in Jamaica, a work which is still regarded with respect by botanists.

Sloane's next advancement came from the University of Oxford, where he was granted a medical degree, and with honours thick upon him he settled down to writing his great work on Natural History "A Voyage to the Islands of Madera, Barbadoes, Nieves, St. Christopher's and Jamaica, with the Natural History of the last." The first volume occupied him during

the years 1701-1707, while the remaining volume was written in 1725. Both were dedicated to QUEEN ANNE, and set such a seal upon his reputation that he was made a member of three foreign academies. A further honour was the Presidency of the College of Physicians which he held from 1719—1735. Then, upon the death of SIR ISAAC NEWTON, he was created President of the Royal Society.

Meanwhile, his practice in Bloomsbury Square flourished. He numbered among his patients not only all the notable personages of the day, but many who could ill afford his fees. One day he would be trundled down to Windsor in his coach and four to attend the Queen, and the next might find him dispensing free advice

An 18th Century engraving of Montague House, the original home of the British Museum and Sloane's collection



to a humble member of the community. His was a fine and generous character, ever ready to help the needy and much pre-occupied with works of charity. It was said that no appeal for help was ever made to him in vain. He gave liberally to hospitals, and when he himself was in charge of Christ's Hospital he insisted that his salary be ploughed back into expenses.

Once a week he arranged an open dinner to which were invited his friends from the College of Physicians and the Royal Society. The marvel was that he managed to crowd so much into 24 hours. His duties at Court must have occupied a great part of his time, for Anne was constantly ailing and in need of ceaseless medical attention. In her last illness the responsibility as to whether or not she should be bled fell upon Sloane, who decided in its favour. Yet, he could be extremely modern in his methods. Inoculation as a prevention of disease was then only in its infancy, but Sloane took an immediate interest in it and actually tried it on several members of the royal family. In his political thinking Sloane was an ardent Whig, and when the House of Hanover succeeded to the British throne he was appointed Physician General to the Army in addition to his many other duties. On April 3, 1716 he reached the apex of royal approval by being made a baronet. And when GEORGE II came to the throne he chose as his physician Sir Hans Sloane.

By 1712 Sloane had made so much money that he was able to purchase the Manor of Chelsea. There, in May 1741, he retired with his family to enjoy the fruits of a long and successful career. He had married the daughter of a London alderman in 1695 and had a son and three daughters. The son died in infancy, and so did one of the daughters.

The Manor of Chelsea stood facing the



Hans Sloane designed the botanical garden in Chelsea where Rysbrach's statue of him still stands to-day

spot where the Albert Bridge now spans the Thames. Sloane needed a large house to hold his botanical specimens and other scientific collections. It afforded him pleasure to set them out much as they would be in a museum, and several rooms in his riverside dwelling were entirely given over to this object. There is an account in the "Gentleman's Magazine" for 1748 of a visit paid by the PRINCE AND PRINCESS OF WALES to Chelsea Manor when Sir Hans was 88 years of age. They were both fascinated by the wonderful display of precious stones, coins, crystals, shells, butterflies and animals he had to show them. In all about 200,000 objects of varied kinds went to make up this astonishing collection. And this was not all. The indefatigable Sloane had also amassed a quantity of notes and letters written by the leading physicians of the century preceding his death. These papers have been ever since our main source of information about the medical history of that period and have proved of inestimable value to many generations of students.

On his death, Sloane bequeathed all this treasure to the nation on condition that his family received a sum of £20,000. Five months after the will had been proved the necessary Act of Parliament was passed accepting the gift, and among the trustees appointed to manage the collection was HORACE WALPOLE. In 1754 Montague House was purchased, and four years later proclaimed open under the name of the British Museum, with Sir Hans Sloane's bequest as the basis of its display.

While Sloane was 61 he designed a botanical garden in Chelsea and gave it to the Society of Apothecaries. This garden is not far from the river in the neighbourhood of the Royal Hospital and may still be viewed if permission is obtained
52 beforehand. It contains, among other treasures,

a statue of Sir Hans executed by RYSBRACH, which was erected in the same year as the royal visit to the Manor of Chelsea.

It was typical of Sloane that he should settle down to writing his one and only medical book when he had reached the age of 85. Doubtless, the responsibilities of his professional life had made it impossible before. This learned work rejoices in the title of "An Account of a Medicine for Soreness, Weakness and other Distempers of the Eyes."

Except for the scare about tuberculosis when he was in his teens, Sloane seems to have enjoyed perfect health. Only somebody with a sterling constitution could possibly have accomplished so much. He appears to have lived every one of his 93 years to the full, and he made so little fuss about dying that he was only ill for three days before the end. He was buried, with his wife, in Chelsea Churchyard, where a monument designed by JOSEPH WILTON stands to his memory.

Even after two hundred years it is still possible to build a pretty composite picture of how Sir Hans Sloane must have looked. Apart from the two statues already mentioned, there are several portraits of him in existence. The one in the National Portrait Gallery was painted by STEPHEN SLAUGHTER in 1736 and shows the doctor while still in practice in Bloomsbury. The Royal Society owns a portrait of him by KNELLER; while the one hanging in the dining-room of the College of Physicians is by JOHN MURRAY. All these show Sloane to have been tall and well-proportioned, with a pale face and an expression of grave wisdom.

It is strange to think that every day his name is shouted by bus conductors and yet his service to mankind is only remembered by a few of those who profit by it.