

# The things they say...

**I**N 1687 Sir Hans Sloane came out to Jamaica as private physician to the newly-appointed governor, the Duke of Albemarle.

Man of letters, naturalist, collector, Sloane was also a physician of international fame who was to become known to history as 'the Jamaica doctor.' In the fifteen months spent in the island he collected more than 800 new natural history specimens, as well as numerous drawings of the items he could not preserve, and these, together with his voluminous notes, formed the basis of his Latin "Catalogue of Jamaica Plants" (1696), and of his famous "Voyage to the Islands Madeira, Barbados, Nevis, S. Christopher's and Jamaica," dealing with Jamaica's natural history, published in two volumes, the first in 1707, the second 18 months later.

## Healthy

**AIR**— Sloane was a keen observer and almost everything he noticed found a place in his great book, from the behaviour of a lark in his ship's riggings, to the quality of the island's atmosphere. This latter, he says, "notwithstanding the heat, is very healthy, I have known Blacks one hundred and twenty years of age, and one hundred years old is very common amongst temperate livers." (I have modernised his spelling).

## Veal 1/-

**A POUND.** He has much to say about the food of the country and eating habits of the people. "Veal is very common," he writes, "but none thought good but what comes from Luidas, where the calves are very white fleshed; whether this comes from this place's being mountainous or bleeding and giving them chalk, as in Essex, I cannot tell, but the price of it was so extravagant, that in the Assembly they passed an Act that it should not be sold dearer than twelve pence per pound".

## Regimented

**HOGS**— He noticed that all the best people ate swine's

Collected by C.V.B.

flesh. The swine were of two sorts, those which ran wild in the woods and were caught by hunters with the aid of dogs, and those bred in houses and sties built for feeding and breeding hogs, are kept by some Whites, Indians or Blacks," Sloane tells us. "The swine come home every night in several hundreds from feeding on the wild fruits in the neighbouring woods on the third sound of a conch-shell... It was not a small diversion to me, to see these swine in the woods, on the first sound of the shell, which is like that of a trumpet, to lift up their heads from the ground where they were feeding, and prick up their ears to harken for the second, which so soon as ever they heard they would begin to make some movements homewards, and on the third sound they would run with all their speed to the place where the overseer used to throw them corn. (They) seem to be as much, if not more, under command and discipline than any troops I ever saw".

## Snake

**STORIES**— Sloane was told that at the head of the Rio Minho was a lake where could be seen great heaps of snakes rolled together, who leap into the water. Another curious snake story which he got from an 'eyewitness' concerned a Dr. Foster of Sixteen-Mile Walk. This ingenious physician "had tamed a great snake or serpent, and

kept it about him within his shirt; it would wind itself fast about his arm, and drink out of his mouth, and leap at a call on the table, to eat crumbs of Cassada Bread. It was killed by one Coffin, after sixteen months being tame: it was about the bigness of one's wrist."

**WILD DOGS**— Sloane was told that when the Spaniards retreated into their fortifications, on the coming of the English, their dogs ran wild, and, in time, used to hunt the cattle in the woods and on the savannas. "One day Colonel Ballard assured me he saw a little reddish one, called a **Buse**, howl, and was answered by the others in the woods, who came from all quarters to him, and then went orderly about to take their supper."

## Shark

**FIGHTS.** Sloane noted that there were sharks to be found in the sea hereabouts: "a seaman related that he washing his blue jacket on the fore-castle, coming hither, the ship having fresh way he lost it, but two days after' having been becalmed, they took a shark, and found in his belly the blue jacket, not otherwise altered than by the holes of his teeth in chawing"

"A man bathing in the sea by Port Royal had part of the flesh of his arm and breast at one mouthful torn off by a shark, of which he immediately died, I was told that one Rockey, a privateer, used to go and fight with them in the water, and so do some divers, killing them with bodkins run into their bellies, while they turn themselves to prey".