

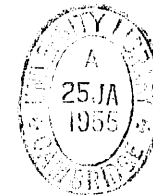
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SIR HANS SLOANE

The Great Collector and his Circle

BY

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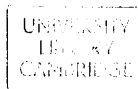
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SIR HANS SLOANE

From the portrait now in the Provost's House, Trinity College, Dublin.



medicine chest or pharmaceutical cabinet, the dramatic discovery of which has already been narrated.

A vivid account of the Sloane collection was given in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of the year 1748 by Dr. Cromwell Mortimer, Secretary of the Royal Society, who introduced the prince and princess of Wales to Sloane's museum, which had by this time been removed by its aged owner to his manor-house in Chelsea:

'I conducted their Royal Highnesses into the room where Sir Hans was seated, being ancient and infirm. The Prince took a chair and sat down by the good old gentleman for some time, when he expressed the great esteem and value he had for him personally and how much the learned world was obliged to him for his having collected such a vast variety of curious books and such immense treasure of the valuable and instructive productions of nature and art. Sir Hans's house formed a square of about one hundred feet on each side, enclosing a court; and three front rooms had tables set along the middle, which were spread over with cases filled with all sorts of precious stones in their natural beds or state as they are found in the earth, except the first, that contained stones formed in animals, which are so many diseases of the creature that bears them; as the most beautiful pearls which are but warts in the shell-fish, the bezoar, concretions in the stomach, and stones generated in the kidney and bladder, of which man wofully knows the effects; but the earth in her bosom generates the verdant emerald, the purple amethyst, the golden topaz, the azure sapphire, the crimson garnet, the scarlet ruby, the brilliant diamond, the glowing opal, and all the painted varieties with which Flora herself might wish to be decked; here the most magnificent vessels of cornelian, onyx, sardonyx and jasper delighted the eye and raised the mind to praise the great Creator of all things.

When their Royal Highnesses had viewed one room and entered another, the scene was shifted; for when they returned, the same tables were covered for a second course, with all sorts

of jewels, polished and set after the modern fashion, or with gems carved or engraved, the stately and instructive remains of antiquity. For the third course, the tables were spread with gold and silver ore, with the precious and remarkable ornaments used in the habits of men from Siberia to the Cape of Good Hope, from Japan to Peru, and with both ancient and modern coins and medals in gold and silver, the lasting monuments of historical facts; as those of a Prusias, king of Bythinia, who betrayed his allies; of an Alexander who, mad with ambition, overran and invaded his neighbours; of a Caesar who enslaved his country to satisfy his own pride; of a Titus, the delight of mankind; of a Pope Gregory the XIII, recording on a silver medal his blind zeal for religion, in perpetuating thereon the massacre of the Protestants in France, as did Charles IX, the then reigning king in that country. Here might be seen the coins of a king of England, crowned at Paris, a medal representing France and Spain striving which should pay their obeisance to Britannia; others shewing the effect of popular rage when overmuch oppressed by their rulers, as in the case of the De Witts in Holland, the deliverance of Britain by the arrival of William, the glorious exploits of a Marlborough, and the happy sway of the present Royal family.

The gallery, one hundred and ten feet in length, presented a most surprising prospect. The most beautiful corals, crystals and figured stones, the most brilliant butterflies and other insects, shells painted with as great variety as the precious stones, and feathers of birds vying with gems. Here the remains of the world before the Deluge excited the awful idea of that catastrophe; and are so many evident testimonials to the truth of Moses's history.

Then a noble vista presented itself through several rooms filled with books and many hundred volumes of dried plants; a room full of choice and valuable manuscripts; the noble present sent by the French king to Sir Hans, being prints of his collection of paintings, medals, statues, palaces &c. in twenty-five large atlas volumes, besides other valuable things too numerous to mention here.

Below stairs, some rooms were filled with curious remains of antiquities, from Egypt, Greece, Etruria, Rome, Britain and even America; others with large animals preserved in the skin; the great saloon lined on every side with bottles filled with spirits, containing various animals. The halls were adorned with the horns of various creatures, as of the double-horned rhinoceros of Africa and deer's horns from Ireland, nine feet wide, and with weapons of different countries; among which it appears that the Mangalese, and not our most Christian neighbours the French, had the honour of inventing that butcherly weapon, the bayonet. Fifty volumes in folio would scarcely suffice to contain a detail of this immense museum, consisting of above two hundred thousand articles.

Their royal highnesses were not wanting in expression of their satisfaction at seeing a collection which surpassed all the notions or ideas they had formed of it, from even the most favourable accounts. On this occasion the Prince showed his great reading and happy memory; for in such a multiplicity and such a variety of the productions of nature and art, upon anything being shown to him that he had not seen before, he was ready in recollecting having read of it; and upon viewing the ancient and modern medals, he made so many judicious remarks, that he appeared to be a perfect master of history and chronology. He expressed the great pleasure it gave him to see so magnificent a collection in England, esteeming it an ornament to the nation; and expressed his fixed sentiment, how much it must conduce to the benefit of learning, and how great an honour will redound to Britain, to have such a grand repository established for public use to the latest posterity.'

Cromwell Mortimer acted as secretary to Sir Hans at this time. He had come to live near Sloane in 1729 at Sloane's request, so as to 'have the pleasure', he explains, 'of being at Sir Hans at all leisure hours of the day'. This was after the death of Dr. Johann Scheuchzer, a young Swiss who had lived with Sloane, and whom Sloane had greatly befriended, paying part of the expenses of his medical training.

Other accounts of Sloane's collections are given by Peter Kalm, a pupil of Linnaeus, who reported on the famous museum in the same year, 1748, and Zacharias von Uffenbach, a much earlier visitor, whose account, translated from the German, Dr. de Beer supplies.