

# 'A man in love with Jamaica'

First of a two-part series.  
by F. J. du Quesnay

No promoter of Tourism could have exceeded Philip Henry Gosse in his enthusiasm for Jamaica. His book, "A Naturalist's Sojourn in Jamaica" is one long paean to the glorious beauty of the island.

His romantic, artistic imagination was full of high expectations as to what he should encounter on an exotic tropical island. These almost fantastic pictures which he had conjured were never doomed to disappointment, for he tells us that the wondrous beauty of Jamaica exceeded his wildest expectations.

Certainly it was a naturalist's happy hunting ground, and the lush almost prodigal beauty of the countryside never failed to thrill him. From the very start he was a man in love with Jamaica.

The family of Gosse was supposed to be of French origin, the first of that name arriving in England at the time of the Restoration. Philip was the second child of Thomas and Hannah Gosse. He was born in lodgings above a shoemaker's shop in High Street Worcester, on April 6, 1810. His father, amongst other things was an artist, and specialised in portrait

work, but the new vogue of having miniatures painted on ivory did much to restrict his endeavours.

Philip's parents were far from comfortably off, and consequently they found it difficult to bring up the family of several children. From his very early youth Philip became engrossed in nature study, and in 1826 his first small article appeared in "Youth's Magazine" entitled "The Mouse, a Lover of Music." In 1827 he was offered employment by the firm of Messrs. Harrison, Slade & Co., as a clerk in their counting house in Newfoundland. Philip hated the idea of leaving England and his family, but his mother persuaded him to accept, which he reluctantly did, signing on for six years. He finally spent eight years there, studying Natural History avidly during every spare moment.

Having managed to save something, he went to Canada and bought a small farm. In 1838 he sold the farm, and went to Philadelphia. From there he moved to Dallas, then Alabama, working as a schoolmaster. In 1839 he decided to return home to England, where he remained for about five years until he was recommended by the British Museum to collect birds and insects in the tropics for dealers in England. He sailed for Jamaica in 1844, spending nearly two months at sea be-

fore he finally had his first glimpse of the Island as they passed Morant Point by night, with the lights flickering on shore.

He spent 18 months in Jamaica, mostly at Bluefields in Westmoreland, where he collected specimens which he sent home regularly. When he arrived, the ornithology of Jamaica was in a somewhat chaotic state, but before his departure he had listed about 200 bird species as belonging to the island's fauna. Of the mammals, reptiles and fishes, he added 24 new species.

Quoting from an article in the Journal of the Institute of Jamaica in 1899, the writer had this to say: "There is no writer who has thrown such a charm around the Natural History of Jamaica, or who has contributed in the same degree to make known the various representatives of its tropical fauna, as Philip Henry Gosse."

In 1847, Gosse published "Birds of Jamaica," and two years later a volume of plates to illustrate the work. In 1851 "A Naturalist's Sojourn" appeared, one of his loveliest works, and one in which he was assisted by his dear friend Richard Hill of Spanish Town. Hill was a planter, magistrate, and an ardent naturalist. Amongst his other Jamaican acquaintances who assisted in his investigations were Andrew G. Johnston, Esq. of Portland, and George Wilkie of Spanish

Town.

While living at Bluefields, Philip received the news of his father's death; he had actually died while his son was on the sea bound for Jamaica.

In 1848 Philip married; he had an only son Edmund who was born the following year, and who many years later was to write his father's biography.

Philip published many works in his lifetime, and was elected a member of many notable societies including his election as a Fellow of the Royal Society. His wife's death of tuberculosis in 1856 plunged him into great sadness, but being an intensely religious man all his life, he bore the separation with great bravery. He died in 1888 in Devonshire, having spent much of his last years in comparative seclusion.