British Botanic Gardens and Stations.

IN the article on British botanic gardens and stations in the jubilee number of *NATURE* (p. 263) the statement is made that by the middle of the eighteenth century, when Kew and the Botanic Garden at St. Vincent were founded, "the purpose of botanical collections had become largely limited to the assemblage of plants interesting because of their rarity. Presently a healthy reaction against this rather narrow outlook arose . . ." and the example is quoted of the Calcutta Garden, founded in 1786 for the purpose, not of collecting rare plants as articles of curiosity, etc., "but for establishing a stock for disseminating such articles as may prove beneficial to the inhabitants, as well as to the natives of Great Britain, and which ultimately may tend to the extension of the national commerce and riches." Your contributor appears to have overlooked the fact that a very similar purpose underlay the founding of the St. Vincent Garden, as shown by the advertisement which appeared in the Transactions of the Society of Arts for 1762, offering a reward "to anyone who would cultivate a spot in the West Indies in which plants useful as medicine and profitable as articles of commerce might be propagated, and where nurseries of the valuable productions of Asia and other distant parts might be formed for the benefit of his Majesty's Colonies."

I am glad to add that the Royal Botanic Gardens, Trinidad, attained its centenary this year.

W. E. FREEMAN.

Director of Agriculture.

St. Clair Experiment Station, Port-of-Spain,
December 6.

I AM very grateful to Dr. Freeman for having directed attention to the existence of this interesting documentary evidence that West Indian public opinion in 1762 was a quarter of a century in advance of official opinion in the East Indies. This conclusion is pointed to by the circumstance that there was a demand in the West Indies for such sumptuous works as "The Natural History of Barbados," by Griffith Hughes, published in 1750; "The Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahamas," written by Mark Catesby, revised after Catesby's death by G. Edwards, and published in 1754; and "The Natural History of Jamaica," by Patrick Browne, published in 1756, of which a second edition was called for in 1789. It is important to have this conclusion definitely confirmed.

THE WRITER OF THE ARTICLE.

NATURAL HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA.¹

MR. FITZSIMONS'S volumes are not strictly zoological treatises. They are intended to supply information about the ways and habits of the creatures of veld, forest, mountain, and stream. It sounds somewhat strange to hear mammals referred to as belonging to the "lower animal kingdom." The author speaks sometimes of "animals and birds"; in other places he alludes to "birds and mammals," while the bats are spoken of as "flying mammals." Since this work is addressed to school teachers, senior pupils, and the general public, it would have been better to explain what is meant by "mammals" and retain the term throughout. Mr. Fitzsimons holds the view that the leopards in wild countries unin-

¹ "The Natural History of South Africa." By F. W. Fitzsimons. "Mammals." In four volumes. Vol. i., pp. xix+178; Vol. ii., pp. xi+195. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1919.) Price 9s. each vol.

habited by man "are still fulfilling the mission for which the Creator evolved them" (i., p. 120), and that "it is essential that the old, decrepit, or malformed animals should not be allowed to live and breed, otherwise the great plan of the Creator in perfecting the various forms of life would be marred" (ii., p. 79).

These and other views may not be acceptable to the modern zoologist, but there can be no doubt about the importance and interest of these two volumes to all lovers of natural history, and particularly to those who keep monkeys and other mammals as pets and to the guardians of our Zoological Gardens. A charm of style and a freedom from errors distinguish the volumes. The vivid descriptions of the habits of the blue ape and the Chacma baboon, as well as of those of

FIG. 1.—A baby Vervet monkey, born at the Port Elizabeth Museum. From "The Natural History of South Africa."

many other species, are fascinating to read. The author gives us further particulars of the wonderful story we heard long ago of "Jack," the Chacma which acted as signalman on a South African railway line. When his master, to whom he was devotedly attached, became incapacitated, owing to an injury, "Jack" took over his duties. He worked even the levers on the line by himself (i., pp. 61-67), and finally pushed his master home every night on a little railway truck. This marvellous story is fully substantiated by creditable witnesses.

Mr. Fitzsimons had a serval which was as tame as any domestic cat, and even when full-grown it did not lose any of its playfulness, and