

Elias Ashmole.

By A. L. HUMPHREYS, F.S.A.

AS far as I can discover the Berkshire Archaeological Society has not up to the present printed any details of the life of Elias Ashmole, the first historian of the County of Berkshire, the founder of the Ashmolean Museum, and one of the earliest of that zealous band of earnest students and enquirers into the history of places and people. Perhaps the omission to deal with Ashmole's life or to estimate his place as an historian and a collector of many things has been due to an oversight. If, however, it has been thought not worth while to devote a paper to the life of a man who was not a native of Berkshire, I shall try to point out as well as I am able, that not only were the best years of Ashmole's life lived here close to Reading, but the literary works by which he is best known, the History of the Order of the Garter and the History and Antiquities of Berkshire, were both works identified with the county and with places we all know. Berkshire was emphatically the county of Ashmole's adoption. He took up his residence at Bradfield in the year 1649, and he was just as well acquainted with the streets of Reading in the seventeenth century as we are familiar with them in the twentieth. I think, therefore, that but little or no apology is required in attempting to give Elias Ashmole the right niche he is entitled to as a pioneer in investigating and reconstructing the past of the County of Berkshire.

I said a moment or so ago that our Society had so far taken no notice of Ashmole's career in its Journal, but I must not omit to name an article upon the Ashmolean Museum by Mr. Falconer Madan, for so long one of the most learned and distinguished of Bodley's Librarians. This article appeared in our Journal for October 1897, and deals ably with the formation of the collection which was the basis of the magnificent institution we now visit and know as the Ashmolean Museum. There is no existing systematic Life of Ashmole. The usual sketchy and cut-and-dry information is accessible in biographical dictionaries, but most of the data for a full and detailed life of Ashmole is at

present scattered in hundreds of volumes and manuscripts, all of which would, to make a satisfactory biography, have to be properly pieced together.

My intention is to devote what brief time I have to dealing with Ashmole's association with Berkshire, but it will be necessary to give a moment or two to consider Ashmole's boyhood and the formative influences caused by environment when he resided in another part of the country. Elias Ashmole was born at Lichfield in Staffordshire, at half-past three in the morning of May 23rd, 1617, the year after Shakespeare died. His father was Thomas Ashmole, a saddler, and his mother was Anne Bowyer, the daughter of a draper at Coventry. The entry of his baptism appears in the registers of St. Mary's Church, Lichfield, as follows: 'Elias, sonne of Simon Ashmole was baptised 2nd June, 1617.' A curious and almost certainly a unique circumstance happened with regard to his christening which must be told in his own words as related in his Diary put together in later years. 'Before I was carried to Church it was agreed my name should be Thomas (as was my grandfather) but when the minister bade the name of the child my grandfather answered Elias. On returning home and being asked why he so called me he could render no account, but that it came suddenly into his mind by a more than ordinary impulse of spirit.'

The house at Lichfield where Ashmole was born, or at any rate the site of it, is well known. It is the house in Breadmarket Street, now occupied as offices by Messrs. Winterton and Sons. In Ashmole's boyhood, Lichfield as a Cathedral City was not behind-hand in opportunities for education. There was a famous Grammar School at which, in later years, Addison, David Garrick and Dr. Johnson obtained their early training, and there was a picturesque old house on the north side of the close belonging to the choristers which stood until 1772, and here, as well as at the Grammar School, Ashmole got his first lessons. Lichfield, let it be known, has produced more great and famous men than almost any other place of its size in the kingdom, and in an adequate study of the distribution of the genius producing areas of England, Lichfield would rank very high. Besides the names of Addison, Garrick and Dr. Johnson, whom I have already named, there have been many others, Erasmus Darwin, Anne

Seward, and last but by no means least, Sampson Camden, the father of William Camden, who in turn was one of the fathers of English Topography. When Johnson returned to visit the scenes of his boyhood at Lichfield, in 1776, and was accompanied by Boswell, the latter looked out of the window of the Three Crowns Inn where they stayed and remarked that he thought Lichfield possessed an idle set of people. Dr. Johnson, fired at once with pride in his birthplace, exclaimed with regard to Lichfield: 'Sir, we are a city of philosophers, we work with our heads, and make the boobies of Birmingham work for us with their hands.'

Ashmole, during his childhood, was not without the usual adventurous happenings, incident to early years, but which children have so remarkable a way of getting over. When only a year old, he fell into the fire and burned the right side of his forehead so that the scar remained for the rest of his life. When eight years old he fell from the top of a barn and damaged his knee. He survived both these calamities, as well as the small-pox and the measles which assailed him in his early years.

When he was sixteen years of age, Ashmole left his native place and on the 2nd of July, 1633, his father and mother accompanying him a few miles, as far as Drayton Bassett, near Tamworth, he set off alone with his parents' benediction to reach London. He must have travelled by wagon for it took him three days to get to town, where he arrived at eleven o'clock in the morning of July 5th. Where he lodged when he first reached London is not known, but two years later he was at Mount Pleasant, near Barnet, and he was also being taught the harpsichord in London by a Mr. Farmelow in St. Michael's Church Yard, Cornhill. In 1638, when only twenty-one, he married, on March 27th at St. Benet's, Paul's Wharf, Eleanor Mainwaring, a daughter of Peter Mainwaring of Smallwood, Cheshire, a member of a well known family still deeply rooted in those parts. In this matter of his first marriage, as well as in various ways, Ashmole proved himself in his youth to be an ambitious fellow. A relationship between his mother, whose sister had married as his second wife James Pagitt,* a baron of the Exchequer (and whose third wife was a daughter of Robert Harris of Reading) made it easy for Ashmole, with no little worldly wisdom, to take the line of least resistance in choosing an occupa-

tion and to select the law for a first stepping-stone. It was through the Pagitt influence, as well as his own zeal, that he at once made headway. In 1640 we find him living in lodgings in St. Clements Lane, and in October of the same year he has moved to Elm Court, Middle Temple. In February, 1641, he was admitted to Clements Inn and almost at once sworn an attorney of Common Pleas. In December, 1641, after only three years of married life, his wife died to his great and lasting grief, made all the more poignant in that she died suddenly while he was absent, and news only reached him ten days after the event when she had already been buried several days. Ashmole, who as far as we know him, was not given to sentiment, speaks enthusiastically in her praise. She was his first love and his best, though not his last. From December, 1641, till November, 1649, Ashmole remained a widower. These eight years were ones of great activity, and we have details of how he travelled about the country in pursuit of his many interests.

His mother died of the plague about the 8th of July, 1646. She was what Ashmole calls a decent, sober, provident woman, and with great patience endured many afflictions. She had need of much fortitude because Ashmole's father was a waster and a wanderer. It was the mother who kept the home together and instilled into her son all the good qualities he had. His finances at this time are as mysterious as those of many men in that age and in all ages, but he appears to have made his employments profitable. He was a good business man. For a time he retired to Cheshire, to the home of his late wife, and the Civil War presenting a very ominous outlook he remained there, following his studies, until 1644, when he went to Oxford and that year matriculated to Brasenose and studied natural philosophy, astronomy and astrology. But the Civil War upset him and he was forced to do his share. Soldiering was not to his taste, and he abandoned his job as soon as he was able and devoted himself to his studies, forming at this time many new friendships about which I will speak before I conclude.

I propose now to trace the association between Ashmole and Berkshire, which was in the first place brought about by a friendship between himself and Sir Thomas Mainwaring, who was Recorder of Reading during the time of the Civil War. Sir

Thomas Mainwaring belonged to the same family as did Ashmole's first wife, and from the date when as a young man of twenty-one he married Eleanor Mainwaring that family played a very conspicuous part in his career. After the death of his first wife, he maintained a close association with her family, visiting them and making fresh ties with all of them, and among these was Thomas Mainwaring who became Recorder, or, as it was then called, Steward of Reading. This Thomas Mainwaring first appears in the Records of Reading Corporation as Recorder on January 11th, 1638. He is there spoken of in a way which implies that he was not a Reading man, but that he had come (as no doubt was the case) from some other district to take office of Steward or Recorder, but in the Reading Corporation Records there is a blank space left where the clerk no doubt intended to fill in the name of the Parish from which Thomas Mainwaring came, but it never was filled in. Mainwaring became attached to the Corporation as what was termed 'Assistant' in March 1639. He was knighted November 29th, 1642. Up to this time he had attended the Reading Corporation Councils with regularity, but after 1642 his absences were noticeable and in 1644 he got expelled, a majority of the Corporation voting that he was notoriously disaffected to the State, having no doubt attached himself to the Parliamentary cause. The Council appear to have had some uneasiness as to whether the reason for his expulsion would hold good, and at their next meeting it was decided to clear him out for 'long absence and neglect' in attending to deliberations of the Reading body. Sir Thomas Mainwaring died in 1646 and left behind him a wealthy widow, and to her, a few months after the death of her husband Mainwaring, Ashmole at once made advances with a view to making her his wife. I have dwelt for some minutes upon these circumstances because much in Ashmole's life hangs upon them, as I shall show. But for this rich widow Ashmole's name would not figure as largely as it does in history and there is great likelihood that he never would have come to live at Bradfield, or indeed in Berkshire at all, nor would he have been able to amass the wonderful collections of manuscripts, books, coins and other things which now stand to his credit as achievements. It is therefore just as well to give a few more paragraphs to this

interesting lady. Lady Mainwaring was the only daughter and heiress of Sir William Forster, of Aldermaston, and before she died in 1668 she had married four husbands, and although Ashmole was her fourth and last there appears to have still been left an abundant fortune, which he was not slow in using to his own ends. Mary Forster of Aldermaston was a considerable heiress and married as her first husband Sir Edward Stafford, a member of an old family which had been for some generations associated with Bradfield. This first husband died in 1623 and was buried at Bradfield on November 30th in that year. About four months after the death of her first husband, she married her second. This was John or Thomas Hamelin (his Christian name has always been uncertain), to whom she was married on 10th March, 1624, at St. Bride's Church, Fleet Street. The Hamelin family had been represented in Reading and this second husband belonged in all probability to the Reading family. Hamelin lived for nine years after his marriage when he, in turn, was laid under the earth at Bradfield, 16th October, 1633. Ten months afterwards, on 3rd July, 1634, she married Thomas Mainwaring in London at the same Church where Ashmole had married his first wife, *viz.*: St. Benets, Pauls Wharf. Sir Thomas Mainwaring died late in the year 1646 and early in 1647 Ashmole went warily to work to win the rich widow's heart. It was but a few months after being left a widow, Ashmole quaintly remarks, 'I first moved Lady Mainwaring in the way of marriage, and received a fair answer, though no condescension.' For the next few months we find Ashmole is continuously at Bradfield or Englefield making friends with the parson and other folk of the neighbourhood, in other words, paving the way towards complete acceptance by the lady. There is sufficient evidence that Lady Mainwaring in no way resented Ashmole's hand and heart for we find her making him a present of a posy ring—the most sentimental gift of the period. 'Lady Mainwaring gave me a ring enamelled with black, whereon was this posy, "A true friend's gift."' During the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was a very common practice to have mottoes inscribed on wedding or betrothal rings and the composition of these posies exercised the talents of the poets and wits of the day. Such mottoes and couplets as :

Death never parts
Such loving hearts.

or

Let us love
Like turtle dove.

As true to thee
As thou to me.

But the one which seemed to have been specially composed for Mrs. Ashmole, was a well known one which is often found on rings :

If I survive
I'll make them five.

All did not go smoothly for Ashmole's ends. Lady Mainwaring had two sons by her first husband, and one of these sons, Humphrey Stafford, was, and probably with some reason, opposed to his mother marrying again. He one day broke into Ashmole's room at Bradfield and attempted to kill him, and would have done so had not help been quickly forthcoming. Ashmole, however, was not to be deterred by violence even, and eighteen months after he had first proposed to the lady he makes a note, 6th November, 1648: ' Having several times made application to the Lady Mainwaring in the way of marriage, this day she promised not to marry any one unless myself.' This was a step in the right direction, and at last, a year after this pompous note was made, Ashmole, then aged thirty-two, was secretly married to her in London on November 16th, 1649. It was not a happy marriage. The Forsters and Humphrey Stafford started law suits against Ashmole, but he had already feathered his nest and made himself secure, and he came through successfully as far as the law went. This tough, but no doubt charming lady who had weathered a good many matrimonial storms died April 1st, 1668, and on the 3rd of November in the same year Ashmole married for the third time Elizabeth Dugdale, a daughter of Sir William Dugdale the famous antiquary, a man much after his own heart.

Ashmole now, in the year 1649, was well off, and able to maintain not only a country estate in Berkshire, but also he kept his rooms in London near the Temple. He moved to and fro

between the two places, frequently riding his horse, and on one occasion being attacked by highwaymen on Maidenhead Thicket. What pleased him most was that he found himself in the happy condition which all scholars desire, that of being free from the burden of earning their own living. We may here take into consideration the respective purchasing value of money at the time with which we are dealing, and what it is to-day. Then an income of three to four hundred a year was considered ample for a country gentleman. A cook's wages were deemed high at four pounds a year, and a coach such as Ashmole used cost only a trifle over fifty pounds. Other things, however, were dearer, and a beaver hat, for instance, which the squire of Bradfield would wear in London, cost four pounds five shillings. Cherries were sold at two shillings a pound, and oranges six shillings a dozen.

When Ashmole woke each morning at Bradfield he looked out upon his estate, and he gazed with fondness upon his books, and except for occasional illnesses and threats of law suits he lived a free and easy life. He was lord of the manor of Bradfield, but he was no ordinary squire. For one thing he was full of energy and interests of all kinds. The average squire of that day had his hall strewn with fox skins, polecats, hawks' perches, old green hats and sporting garments. If he had any books at all it was a copy of Fox's Book of Martyrs. His interests were limited, his tastes low, his language foul. Ashmole was none of these. Although he took no part in civil affairs, he was not above going into Reading or journeying to Windsor to act godfather at the christening of a child, or he listened to local affairs as retailed by the overseers, the churchwardens, or the Petty Constable of Bradfield Parish. The local justices and squires were much looked up to in those days. Pepys noticed that when he and his cousin entered a country church in 1662 there were more salaams than are noticed to-day. 'At our coming into Church,' Pepys says, 'the country people all rose with so much reverence and when the parson begins, he begins "Right worshipful and dearly beloved."'

From 1650 onwards, Ashmole was closely identified with Reading and the surrounding district. Reading in the seventeenth century, from its position on the high-road between London and Bath or Bristol, was a highly-important town. Camden

had early in the seventeenth century directed attention to its fine buildings, and Pepys, when he slept here on 16th June, 1668, strolled out into the streets in the evenings, and came back to his inn and remarked that the town was a very great one, and he added: 'I think bigger than Salisbury.' He noticed the river Kennet and was amused at the name of the inn, 'The Broad Face,' still standing in the market place. He afterwards read a portion of a play to his wife and then went to bed, only to quarrel badly with the good lady next day.

But we may as well get a better and fuller idea of what Reading was like in the seventeenth century—the period when Ashmole lived in the neighbourhood and so frequently visited the town. The Civil War was not long over, and the place had ceased to be a garrison alternately for the contending parties. But the townspeople remained sharply divided over many contentious subjects. Everyone was thoroughly weary (and no one more so than Ashmole) of the military occupation of the town and the excessive taxation which followed. Henry Marten, M.P. for Berkshire, and Daniel Blagrove were both among the regicides. Local feeling ran strongly in favour of the Parliamentarians. Both Sir Francis Knollys senior and junior were against the King. Tanfield Vachell, member of a most notable family long associated with Coley, and who was High Sheriff when the war broke out, came down flat on the Parliament side. To hold office in the town when party spirit ran so high involved serious penalties if the opposite side gained the ascendant. The shock of the Civil War to the town was great, and it took almost one hundred and fifty years for it to recover, which it certainly did with the advent of men of great business genius.

During the whole of the seventeenth century Reading was attacked periodically by plague. In 1665, when this awful disease devastated London, Reading did not escape. In the following year, when the Great Fire of London worked such destruction, very many families took refuge here. Then, too, as a leading town between London and Bristol, Reading netted all the western road traffic, besides having the additional advantage of being upon a fine and navigable river. Each day and all day long there was a constant procession of road wagons, pack horses and foot passengers, while the richer folk travelled

through in chariots with four horses and outriders. Pepys, it will be recalled, got stuck and lost his way between Newbury and Reading. The town was ill paved and ill lit. Lanthorn and candlelight were the only means of lighting the streets. Reading at that time had not spread itself out or expanded. The town developed north and south instead of all four points of the compass. The centre of the town was, as to-day, the market place, while Broad Street, the Butts, West Street and Southampton Street were the chief avenues of access and departure. The inns were principally "The George," which occupied the best site in the town, at once visible to all who came by road. Other inns were, however, 'The Catherine Wheel' and 'The Cardinal's Hat.' Minster Street was chained across to regulate heavy traffic along it. Sun Lane and Back Lane occupied what is now King Street, forming a part of a most congested area immediately east of where the Palmer statue now stands. King Street, which now occupies this site, was re-named at King George III's Accession, in which year Alderman Richards purchased the old houses and pulled them down. Pigs wandered through the streets, and there were abuses far worse. The scavenger (there was only one) was paid four and sixpence a week; the Town Clerk ten shillings a week; and the bellman nothing at all, for he was told to be dependent upon gratuities. A man was appointed to kill stray dogs, and to warn the inhabitants 'to keep in their hoggies.' When the Justices came on circuit, it was considered an occasion for revelry. A most incredible amount of beer was then drunk, when dog fights and other cruel and base sports took place in the centre of the town.

On market days and fair days people flocked into the town, and during the Civil War sentinels were posted at all approaches to protect 'market goers.' The pillory and the tumbril stood in the Market Place, and also a ducking-stool, for tiresome women to receive punishment. The stocks were near St. Lawrence Church. Travelling players and dancing companies were frequent visitors. Church festivals were kept often in a noisy way, and there was a strange confusion between things secular and sacred. 'Great Harry,' the big bell of St. Lawrence, tolled at 5 a.m. and at 9 p.m., possibly to regulate the hours of sleep and work for the whole town. The families of Knollys, Vachell

Blagrave and Watlington were all powerful. John Blagrave, John Kendrick and Archbishop Laud had been dead some years, but the generosity of all three was a constant and perennial subject for discussion. In the years of great confusion and strife, it was something that the Reading of that day attracted men like John Hampden. The great patriot had several ties with Reading. His daughter had married Colonel Robert Hammond, the military governor of Reading, and he himself had married, as his second wife, Letitia Vachell of Coley, who was the widow of Francis Knollys. In an age when small talents and huge vices prevailed, one gladly welcomes the association of the town with Hampden, the first of the great Commoners, who united the morals of the puritan with the manners of an accomplished courtier. Another link too important to be omitted is the fact that Christopher Milton, the brother of the poet, resided in Reading (probably near St. Lawrence's Church). Here he must often have been visited by his poet brother, who was then contemplating his great poetical work, 'Paradise Lost.' Bunyan, with genius as great as his fervour, came here in 1688. Trained as a tinker, he seemed intuitively to know all that there was to be known of religious ecstasy and despair. He melted his hearers in Reading with his picture of terror, pity and love.

The foregoing facts give a slight picture of what Reading was like when Ashmole knew it. Many of those whose names I have just mentioned must have been his friends or acquaintances. We know, for instance, that he was a friend of some of the Blagrave family, as well as of John Watlington, the chemist and botanist. Let us consider for a moment or two who were Ashmole's real friends. When Ashmole was at Oxford in 1644 he became very friendly with George Wharton, a young man who infected Ashmole's mind with the love of alchemy and astrology. Wharton became a leading light among a body of men who were full of astounding credulity as to nativities and such subjects as the philosopher's stone. Wharton, as I have said, had a great effect upon Ashmole's mind. In 1647 Wharton was sent to Newgate for satirising Parliament. He escaped from prison, but was recaptured, and John Bradshaw, the President of the Council, decided with summary justice to have him hanged. Ashmole at once moved heaven and earth

to secure his release, and he succeeded. When Wharton regained his liberty, Ashmole invited him and his family to live at Bradfield, and for a time Wharton acted as Ashmole's estate agent. Ashmole and he remained the closest friends, their bond in common being an intense love of the study of astrology. This great friendship led to others of a similar kind, and William Lilly, the most famous of all seventeenth century astrologers, soon was gathered into Ashmole's net. Both Lilly and Wharton were famous for their astrological almanacs. Ashmole left behind him a large collection of them. Almanac making was then a profession, and was practised by numerous prognosticators, of whom Lilly, Wharton, and one Partridge were the chief. The sale of these almanacs was often combined with the sale of patent medicines. Almanac making of the same kind is still going on, and is one of the hardest things to kill. Almost any day you may see old women standing by the pavement in Broad Street hawking almost precisely the same almanacs which obtained credence and great popularity in the seventeenth century and much earlier. The earliest of these almanacs is dated 1500, and it is a most remarkable fact in continuity that these same publications, so beloved by Ashmole, have been issued with perfect regularity since that date. Francis Moore, who called himself astrologer, physician and schoolmaster, was the founder of 'Old Moore's Almanac,' and its successors are still beloved by the domestic servants of Reading in this year, 1924. During Ashmole's life here he tapped everyone who was in any way astrologically disposed, and there were many. John Blagrave of Bulmersh, who died as far back as 1611, had infected this district with a love of dials, horoscopes and much else. He was followed in these studies by his nephew, Joseph Blagrave, who lived at Swallowfield, and Swallowfield became a nest of astrologers. Those who are acquainted with Swallowfield Church and mansion must be aware that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the family of Backhouse was in possession of the estate. First came Samuel Backhouse, who had bought the property in 1582, and, dying in 1626, he was succeeded by his son, Sir John Backhouse, who in turn was followed in 1649 by his brother, William Backhouse, who is spoken of by Antony Wood as a most renowned chemist and Rosicrucian and a great encourager

of those who studied chemistry and astrology. To the influence of the Blagraves of Southcote, and of Swallowfield, may be attributed the taste which William Backhouse had for the study of astrology. Ashmole, who was already a friend of the Backhouse family, found his studies in astrology much encouraged by William Backhouse, who was twenty-four years Ashmole's senior. Ashmole notes in 1651, 'Mr. Backhouse of Swallowfield in County Berks, caused me to call him father henceforward.' A few days later he notes, 'Mr Backhouse told me that I must now needs be his son because he had communicated so many secrets to me.' A month or so later he writes, 'This morning my father, Backhouse, opened himself very freely touching the great secret.' This great secret, which when Backhouse was dying he is alleged by Ashmole to have bequeathed to him, was the secret of the philosopher's stone. This philosopher's stone exercised the minds of a great many men during the seventeenth century. Addison, in the *Spectator*, says: 'I was once engaged in discourse with a Rosicrucian about the great secret. He talked of the secret as that of a spirit which lived within an emerald and converted everything that was near it to the highest perfection. "It gives," he said, "a lustre to the sun and water to the diamond. It irradiates every metal and enriches it with all the properties of gold. It heightens smoke into flame, flame into light, and light into glory. A single ray of it dissipates pain and care and melancholy, "its presence naturally changes every place into a kind of heaven."'

Well, that is how alchemists talked, but neither Ashmole nor any other one of them has ever bequeathed to us one scrap of information of the slightest value regarding this great delusion of the philosopher's stone.

While Ashmole was living at Bradfield, there was also there a person named John Pordage. He had been Vicar of St. Lawrence in Reading and had moved to Bradfield, but his mysticism and his belief in 'spooks' turned many of his congregation from him. A pretty quarrel sprang up between Christopher Fowler, Vicar of St. Mary's Reading, and John Pordage. Each wanted to have the other ejected. Not only was all the neighbourhood deeply stirred, but the whole country was also. There was fanaticism on both sides, and abundance

of literature sprang up, which now makes interesting reading. Ashmole was greatly interested, but is guarded in what he says, knowing that much local feeling was against him in supporting John Pordage as a suitable person to hold the Bradfield living. Pordage was an idealist and a visionary, and apparently without any of those practical qualities required in a country parson, but apart from this nothing could be urged against him. He had outwitted his simple bucolic neighbours and was about a hundred years ahead of them in his thoughts and spiritual aspirations.

After the Plague had done its worst in 1665 and the Great Fire of 1666 had purged the town, an impetus was given at once to the study of science, and the reign of Charles II became the seed time of great things. Astrology and alchemy became jests, and an old witch who a few years before would have been had up at the Assizes now merely provoked laughter. If Ashmole had anything to do with the great men of science and the arts of that day, he does not tell us about them. Robert Boyle, John Ray, Edmund Halley, Isaac Newton, Christopher Wren, and Sir Peter Lely were all his contemporaries, but we get no glimpse of any of them in his correspondence. Perchance he clung too long to his alchemy and astrology, and as a man of science Ashmole might well have been regarded as a charlatan.

Ashmole lived in an age of superstition. Throughout the seventeenth century many strange and violent phenomena happened. Comets appeared and in April 1652, when Ashmole was a young man of thirty-five, an eclipse of the sun took place which so alarmed the whole nation that no one would stir from his house. Furthermore, terrific storms of hail and rain and great tempests as well as floods, frosts and earthquakes, occurred. The Thames was several times frozen over. There were extremes of heat and cold such as we do not appear to have had in our time. All these things fostered superstition and assisted the astrologers and almanac makers who confidently made out that they had predicted what had happened.

A notable turning point in Ashmole's career came a little late in life.

On June 16th, 1660, very soon after the Restoration, he was introduced into the presence of the King at Windsor, by

Thomas Chiffinch, Keeper of the Jewels. The King made him Windsor Herald and gave him an apartment in the Castle. Ashmole had already made some progress in research with reference to his work upon the 'History of the Order of the Garter.' His zeal now was redoubled by reason of his royal patron's encouragement. At this moment in his life, Ashmole tried his best to secure for himself an official post apart from his appointment as Windsor Herald, but owing to the irregular way by which he tried to secure this for himself, he failed. Back stairs influences were set to work, and Ashmole was foiled. Five years before this incident, which was damaging to his pride, Ashmole had started in earnest upon the study of English Antiquities, and he had already made some progress with the 'History of the Order of the Garter,' searching the records in the Tower and elsewhere. The book was issued in 1672, and a finely bound copy was presented to the king on May 8th in the same year. The king realised that the book had cost a great deal to produce, both in labour and in money, and he made a gift to the author of four hundred pounds to assist in paying the cost. Ashmole had spent lavishly on the book, and had employed Hollar to do the plates, and much of that gifted artist's work is represented in the volume, a fact which alone will secure that the book will always be sought after by collectors. The original edition is in folio size, a majestic volume of eight hundred pages. It opens with a very fulsome dedication to the king, and a full-length portrait of Charles II. Several chapters in the book show that Ashmole was deeply interested not only in the Garter Knights, their ceremonial and their story, but the book reveals clearly that Ashmole had a very great knowledge of Windsor Town—in fact one of his contemplated books was a History of Windsor. The 'Order of the Garter' was issued twenty years before Ashmole died, and it therefore had the advantage of being seen through the press by the author. The success of the book was great, and gave Ashmole almost a European reputation. Christian V, King of Denmark, gave him a gold chain, and various ambassadors made him presents or wrote him flattering letters as soon as the book appeared.

It is now time that I said something of the historical work in connection with Berkshire by which Ashmole is best known.

I do not think that the story of his book, the 'History and Antiquities of Berkshire,' and the circumstances of its publication, have ever been told, and the result of this omission is that much injustice has been done to Ashmole's reputation as historian and topographer. On May 11th, 1663, Ashmole, in the capacity of Herald, had started out to make a Visitation of Berkshire. He began at Reading, and went right through the county. Not being content with recording pedigrees and arms, he made copious notes of antiquities in each parish he visited. He had the summer before him when days were long, and he made the best of his opportunities. The results of this perambulation of the county in search of the old have been well preserved. Among the valuable collection of Ashmole's manuscripts, now in the Bodleian at Oxford, there are three volumes which are numbered 850, 851 and 852. They are large folio volumes, uniformly bound in mottled calf, with clasps, and stamped with Ashmole's arms on each cover. They are well written, and in his own hand, and all three relate to the topography and family history of Berkshire. The volume numbered 850, and which is the first of the three great Berkshire volumes, contains Ashmole's fair copy of his notes taken from Berkshire churches and villages in the years 1664-1666. The inscriptions are carefully copied, and the arms are very well tricked. This volume of Ashmole's manuscripts furnished nearly all the matter contained in the three small octavo volumes entitled 'The History and Antiquities of Berkshire,' which were first issued in London in 1719. The book was reprinted again in 1723, in the same three volume form. It was again reprinted at Reading in 1736 by the printer Carnan at the instance of Alderman Watts, who had established the *Reading Mercury* in 1723. Watts gave away a page or two of Ashmole's book each week with the newspaper. In this edition, extracts from Cox's *Magna Britannia* are prefixed to some of the parishes. Translations into English of the Latin epitaphs are added in this edition. It was carelessly produced, and the pagination is erroneous in several sections. In the three volume edition there is a portrait of Ashmole by Van de Gucht, a map of Berkshire, and a plate by Hollar. The folio edition issued at Reading has no portrait, but it has Moll's map and a memoir of John Blagrove, the mathematician. There were a few large paper copies of the

three volume edition. The book is now scarce in any form. Those who will examine the title page of the earlier editions of 1719 and 1723 will notice that the name of the publisher is given as Edmund Curll, a most careless and disreputable person. When Robert South, the great divine, died at Caversham in July, 1716, Curll printed an oration which the Westminster scholars had delivered in his memory, but in printing it he attributed to them all sorts of errors in Latin. They had their revenge. They enticed him into Dean's Yard and tossed him in a blanket.

On another occasion Curll stood in the pillory at Charing Cross. Some of the most unsavoury lines in Pope's 'Dunciad' were levelled at Curll. I mention these items, and add that in the case of Ashmole, Curll's behaviour was all of a piece. When Ashmole had been dead for nearly twenty-five years, Curll thought money might be made by seizing upon Ashmole's Berkshire manuscript notes and printing them. This he did with great carelessness, and in a way that has made many think that the book is as Ashmole would have made it. Had Ashmole lived, he would no doubt have prepared his MS. for the printer, and he would have reproduced the arms which adorn the MS. But as it is the book has no coats of arms, and it is printed with a great number of errors, which Ashmole would have set right if he had had the chance.

Thomas Hearne, who was a Berkshire man, hits the nail on the head when he says :—

'A present hath been made me of a book called The Antiquities of Berkshire by Elias Ashmole, Esq., London. Printed by E. Curll in Fleet Street, 1719, Fo. in 3 volumes. It was given me by my good friend Thomas Rawlinson Esq. As soon as I open'd it and look'd into it, I was amazed at the abominable Impudence, Ignorance and Carelessness of the Publisher, and I can hardly ascribe all this to anyone else than to that villain Curll. Mr. Ashmole is made to have written abundance of things since his death. All is ascribed to him, and yet a very great part of what is mentioned happen'd since he died. For, as many of the persons died after him, so the Inscriptions mentioned in this book were made and fix'd since his death also. Besides, what is taken from Mr. Ashmole is most fraudu-

lently done. The Epitaphs are falsely printed and his words and sense most horribly perverted. What Mr. Ashmole did was done very carefully, as appears from the original in the Museum, where also are his exact draughts of the most considerable monuments, of which there is no notice in this strange Rhapsody. I call it a Rhapsody, because there is no method nor judgment observed in it, nor one dram of true learning. Some things are taken from my Ed. of Leland, but falsely printed, and I cannot but complain of the injury done me?'

But even as it stands, with all its errors, it provides proof at any rate of Ashmole's' great industry and zeal. Furthermore, it is a pioneer work as far as Berkshire is concerned. Dugdale, Ashmole's relative, had produced in the year 1656 his great history of Warwickshire, and had set the fashion for the investigation of the history of places, making a great advance upon anything Leland or Camden had done earlier. Ashmole did his best to follow Dugdale and others.

The two other manuscripts in the Bodleian specially classed as relating to Berkshire are the pedigrees done by Ashmole at his Visitation. They have been adequately edited by Mr. Metcalfe, F.S.A., and Mr. Harry Rylands, F.S.A., and are valuable as shewing who were the old families in the county at the time. But as pedigrees they do not come up to present-day standards. The great collection of manuscripts known as the Ashmolean MSS. was in the Ashmolean Museum until 1860. They are now in the Bodleian. In 1845 Mr. W. H. Black, one of the assistant keepers of the Public Records, made a most valuable catalogue of the whole collection, and this was followed in 1866 by an excellent index. I fear that these two volumes rarely find a place on the shelves of the collectors of Berkshire books. They should be in every collection. An examination of the Ashmolean manuscripts will always be essential to a complete knowledge of the county's history. The collection, for one thing, reveals the many facets to Ashmole's mind; his numerous friendships are shewn in the correspondence preserved. There is among this great collection the whole of the manuscript he got together to write the History of the Order of the Garter. This is bound up in thirty-nine volumes,

and includes much of great value that has never been printed relating to the history of the town of Windsor. Elsewhere in the collection there are, as we might expect, manuscripts relating to Bradfield and to the neighbouring parish of Yattendon; Horoscopes of various Berkshire people; Notes upon the Hyde family of Kingston Lisle; and much relating to Swallowfield, which was a kind of second home to Ashmole. A miscellaneous collection of papers includes, further a number of items of local interest. Ashmole would, in moments of high spirits, burst into song. He touches a wistful note upon 'the marriage of my honoured Kinsman Anthony Blagrave of Bulmarsh in Co. Berks, Esq.' Another ballad is to 'my worthily honoured William Backhouse Esq. upon his adopting me to be his son.' Again another ballad, written upon a spring morning, 15th May, 1648, 'upon my riding post from London to Bradfield.'

Ashmole's great and crowning act was the founding of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. This made him more famous than anything else he ever accomplished. Briefly, the story of the founding of the Museum is that early in the seventeenth century there were living in England two men called Tradescant, father and son. Details of their lives are meagre, but we know that they were keen botanists and naturalists. To them may be given the credit for introducing into England both the lilac and the acacia trees. One of them became gardener to King Charles I. Both Tradescants eventually lived in London at Lambeth and formed a museum of curiosities, which became generally known as Tradescant's Ark.

The elder Tradescant had visited Russia, Algeria and the Isles of the Aegean in search of botanical specimens, and had gathered together much in the way of oddities. These were exhibited in the Ark, to which the public were admitted freely. It was a kind of anthropological museum, since added to by the younger Tradescant, who had travelled as far as Virginia. The younger Tradescant compiled an inventory of the collection, which was printed and turns up now and then. Most of the noted exhibits are not Ashmole's, but were subsequently added, such as the Alfred Jewel and Guy Fawkes' Lantern. The site of the Tradescant Ark is now the Nine Elms Brewery.

Ashmole made the acquaintance of the younger Tradescant, and in 1659 prevailed upon him to leave the contents of the

Ark to him, Ashmole. Three years after this, in 1662, Tradescant died, and his widow for a time refused to give up to Ashmole what had quite properly been left to him. Ashmole had an action at law over the matter, with the result that he secured the contents of the Ark, but poor Mrs. Tradescant drowned herself in a pond.

The following remarkable epitaph (preserved at Oxford and printed in Aubrey's 'Antiquities of Surrey' (was intended for, but never placed upon, the monument to Tradescant :

'Know, stranger, ere thou pass, beneath this stone,
Lie John Tradescant, grandsire, father, son.
The last dy'd in his spring; the other two
Liv'd till they had travelled art and nature thro'
As by their choice collections may appear,
Of what is rare in land, in seas, in air :
Wihlst they (as Homer's *Iliad* in a nut)
A world of wonders in one closet shut.
These famous antiquarians, that had been
Both gardeners to the Rose and Lilly Queen,
Transplanted now themselves, sleep here; and when
Angels shall with trumpets awaken men,
And fire shall purge the world, these hence shall rise,
And change their garden for a paradise.'

Of the Tradescant family there are some group portraits and others in the Ashmolean, and in the book which catalogues the Ark there are portraits of the two Tradescants by Hollar.

In 1677 Ashmole, finding he was getting an old man, offered the whole of his collections, his own and Tradescant's, to Oxford, provided a building should be erected to house them. In the following year, on January 26th, 1678, a fire broke out next door to his lodgings in London and destroyed many of his books and his coins. The manuscript and the curiosities were, however, safe at Lambeth. In May, 1679, the foundation-stone of the building was laid in Broad Street, Oxford. The building was completed in 1683, and the Museum was opened on May 21st, 1683, by the Duke of York, afterwards King James II. Dr. Plot was appointed the first keeper. In July, 1690, two years before he died, Ashmole visited Oxford with his third wife. He was then in a very weak state and had to be supported. The great men of Oxford fêted him, and all

dined in the Museum, the contents of which he had so largely collected. Ashmole was carried into the room in a sedan chair, when speeches were made in his honour. Although twelve wagon-loads of curiosities and rarities had come down from London, there is no denying that there was much that was not worth preserving. Ashmole's great desire to possess blinded him to a sense of values, and he appears to have had no idea of the relative importance of the items he collected. At the present time there is some little space set apart in the Ashmolean for such articles of the original collection as the authorities have thought worth preserving. They are not numerous, and are contained in a section of the Museum which is still called after the original collector, 'The Tradescant Lobby.'

About 1858 the manuscripts and books which Ashmole had given still remained at the Museum, but in that year an offer was made by the Trustees of the Museum to hand them over to the Bodleian. In 1860 they were transferred, and they now fill one whole room. It may readily be admitted that Ashmole secured by founding the Museum a fame he never could have gained by his writings. He was, as I have said, a good business man, and arranged his affairs with success. His studies were many and varied. He was passionately fond of alchemy and astrology, and he dabbled as well in the art of the goldsmith, in seal engraving, print collecting, coin collecting, and he was one of the earliest of Freemasons.

Ashmole's astrological and alchemical studies resulted in three volumes being issued with his name. The first was 'Fasciculus Chemicus,' issued under an anagram in 1650, and was well known to be by Ashmole. The second was the 'Theatrum Chemicum,' issued in 1662, the first part only of which ever appeared; and the third was a treatise on the Philosopher's Stone called 'The Way to Bliss,' published in 1658, with Faithorne's portrait of the author. In all these Ashmole reveals himself as better acquainted with the history of the sciences of which he wrote than with the sciences themselves.

He was strangely superstitious. Pepys met him, and sat next him at dinner at the Lord Mayor's on 23rd May, 1661, and remarks, 'I had very good discourse with Mr. Ashmole, wherein he did assure me that frogs and many insects do often fall from the sky ready formed.' Pepys did not believe a word of

this nonsense. One day Ashmole felt ill, and upon applying to one of his astrological friends, he was told to hold a piece of briony root in his hand. He remarks that he was thereby cured. When he suffered, as he frequently did, from ague, he hung three spiders round his neck, and he says these insects drove away the complaint. His toe hurts, and he applies black snails, by which he may mean leeches.

His illnesses were frequent. He mentions being seized with illness at Theale, and also at Pangbourne. He attended witchcraft trials, and took deep interest in that odd belief and the persecutions and punishments inflicted. He told Aubrey that William Backhouse had been cured of an ugly disfigurement on his forehead by touching it with a drop of May dew. The Rosicrucians collected large quantities of morning dew, from which they were said to extract an ingredient in the composition of the 'Elixir Vitae,' or 'the water of life.' As to the philosopher's stone, if Ashmole ever knew anything of a personal nature of this obvious fraud, he never communicated it. In this he masquerades as but yet another of those believers in the transmutation of metals whose credence was founded upon some deception which had been imposed upon them, and who tried to keep up the popular expectation of great future advantages.

Ashmole died 18th May, 1692, and he is buried in South Lambeth Church. His Latin epitaph may be rendered into English: 'Here lies the famous and learned Elias Ashmole, Esqre., of Lichfield. Amongst other offices in the Government he was Comtroller of the Excise for several years honoured with the title Windsor Herald. His third wife Elizabeth the daughter of William Dugdale, Knight. He died May 18th, 1682. But his memory shall never die as long as the Ashmolean Museum lasts.'

His life was contemplated by George Smalridge, Bishop of Bristol, who was yet another of Lichfield's famous sons. When Ashmole was past middle age he paid the expenses of George Smalridge being sent to Westminster School, and Smalridge fully justified this confidence in his youthful ability, and no doubt fully intended writing a biographical tribute glorifying his helper. Ashmole's library was sold two years after his death, 22nd February, 1694.

His will is at Somerset House.

WILL OF ELIAS ASHMOLE

of the Middle Temple, London, ESQRE.,

dated : 6 September, 1686.

P.C.C. Fane, 97.

'I bequeath to the Chancellor, Masters and Scholars of the University of Oxford all my manuscript books and other manuscript papers not yet sorted nor bound up books of copper cuts and books "lynned in colours" and all my printed books in the two uppermost turrets at my house in South Lambeth to be preserved in the Museum Ashmoleanum in presses, with locks and keys to be provided for them. Also I give to the said Chancellor, Masters and Scholars the gold chain and medal thereat depending bestowed on me by the now King of Denmark and the medal sent me by his Electoral Highness of Brandenburg, the gold medal of Charles Prince Elector sent me from his son Charles late Prince Elector and the George of gold which Thomas, late Earl of Arundell and Surrey wore in his journey to Vienna in 1636 and given me by Henry, late Duke of Norfolk, his grandson; also the following pictures :—James I in his youth, Charles I, Dr. John Dee, Mr. Richard Napier, Dr. Nicholas Fiske, Mr. William Lilly the Astrologian, Mr. John Lowen the Comedian, Capt. Burgh and the old painted draught of Henry VIII's monument to be placed in the said Museum; also the pamphlets, newsbooks, poems, books of controversy relating to religion, the late wars and these later times bound up stitched or loose which are in the Inward Closet within my lower study over the milkhouse in my said house at South Lambeth to be likewise placed in the Museum. Also the picture of Sir Francis Crane, Knt., sometime Chancellor of the Order of the Garter to the Alms Knights of his foundation within the Castle of Windsor to be placed in the building of his erection there.

Whereas I am possessed of a messuage in South Lambeth, Co. Surrey, wherein I now dwell, for the residue of a term of 500 years, the inheritance whereof conveyed to John Dugdale of Coventry, Esqre., and his heirs in trust

for me and my heirs or such persons as I shall name in my will, I bequeath the said message to my wife Elizabeth and her heirs and I give her also my burgage house in Bird Street, Lichfield.

Whereas I lately purchased a message and lands in South Lambeth of John Plummer, gent., I give the same to my wife and her heirs for ever.

To my cousin Thomas Ashmole son of my uncle John Ashmole, £10.

To the children of my cousin, John Ashmole, eldest son of my said uncle, 5s. each.

To my cousin Sarah [left blank] and her son, my godson, William Tompson, £5 each.

To the children of my uncle, Ralph Ashmole, 5s. each.

To my cousin Samuel Storey, £10.

To my cousin George Smalridge, student at Christchurch, Oxford, all the works of Albertus Magnus containing 17 volumes, printed at Lyons in France, 1651.

Residuary legatee and executrix : my wife Elizabeth.

Signed :—E. ASHMOLE.

Witnesses :—Sa. Story, Tho. Smith, Willm.

Clarke, Jo. Streets.

Codicil dated 11 December, 1689.

I desire my wife to give to my sister, Mrs. Dorothy Manwaring, £100.

Signed :—E. ASHMOLE.

Proved :—11 June, 1692, by Elizabeth Ashmole, the relict and executrix.'

No one has left us a verbal description of Ashmole's personal appearance, but there are some existing portraits taken from life. The two authentic portraits are by John Riley and are both referred to in Ashmole's brief and scanty diary, February 2nd, 1683, where he remarks, 'my picture came home' (afterwards sent to Oxford), and Sept. 14th, 1687, 'I sat for a second picture to Mr. Riley.' Both these pictures are now in the Ashmolean Museum. He is represented wearing a long flaxen curled wig, flowing over the shoulders, clean shaven face, lace cravat and

ruffles, red velvet coat and wearing some medals. In one hand he holds a book upon which he printed, 'Ashmole of the Garter' and beside it is a box inscribed 'C.R.' filled with gold coins, this is emblematic of the fact that he catalogued the coins of Charles II. In the second picture he is wearing the gold medal and chain presented to him by Christian V, King of Denmark. 1677, David Loggan began a portrait, but I am not aware that it exists to-day. A picture by Faithorne forms as I have said a frontispiece to 'The Way to Bliss,' Ashmole's book on The Philosopher's Stone, and there is a third portrait by Van der Gucht.

Ashmole's general character may be summed up as one of ambition and restless energy. The pleasures of acquisition and possession were great with him. He therefore considered always that the end justified whatever means he used.

He had lived through the Civil War and its specially tragic days. After the Commonwealth he had seen, and probably taken part in, the uproarious scenes of reaction at the Restoration of King Charles II. Antony Wood calls him 'the greatest virtuoso that ever lived.' He loved old things, and was passionately anxious to save everything he could from destruction in a destroying century. To this end, he used his wife's money to purchase all that came within his reach. Like many another literary man, Ashmole was probably not easy to live with. He had no domestic habits. He was far ahead of his age, and the marvel is that amid scenes of turmoil he accomplished as much as he did. His character contained many traits rarely found in one and the same person. The result is that in studying him and estimating his position, we have to judge of a curious mentality composed of elements usually found to be incongruous. We have seen how great a part ambition played in his career, and it was coupled with vanity and some signs of swelled head. From his youth he was not content to be merely a village boy, and to follow his father's footsteps as a saddler. He succeeded in most of his ambitions, and if not a great man he was a man of resolution with big aims and no little imagination.