

56 Elias Ashmole

Elias Ashmole, like his contemporary Robert Boyle, bridges alchemy and chemistry. He loved old things and collected them, giving them all to Oxford University as the foundation of the Ashmolean Museum. His manuscript collection went to the Bodleian Library. His collection was immense, as he collected all he could find to produce the greatest assembly of alchemical texts ever, the *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum, Containing Severall Poeticall Pieces of our Famous English Philosophers, who have written the Hermetique Mysteries in their owne Ancient Language* to preserve all English-language alchemical works. He also wrote *The Institution, Laws and Ceremonies of the Order of the Garter* (1672) as the rulebook for bestowing the highest Royal favors. He was an astrologer and student of the Rosicrucians.



This is the "Prolegomena" to his *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*.

“ The subject of this ensuing worke is a philosophicall account of that eminent secret treasur'd up in the bosome of nature; which hath been sought for of many, but found by a few, notwithstanding experience'd antiquity hath afforded faithfull (though not frequent) discoveries thereof. Past ages have like rivers conveyed downe to us, (upon the floate) the more light and sophisticall pieces of learning; but what were profound and misterious, the weight and solidity thereof, sunke to the bottome; whence every one who attempts to dive, cannot easily fetch them up: so, that what our Saviour said to his disciples, may (I hope without offence) be spoken to the Elected Sons of Art; unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdome of God; but to others in parables, that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

Our English philosophers generally (like prophets) have received little honour (unlesse what hath beene privately paid them) in their owne countrey; nor have they done any mighty workes amongst us, except in covertly administring their medicine to a few sick, and healing them. (For greater experiments then what it performes in physick, they never publikely made shew of.) This did I. O. (one of the first foure Fellowes of the Fratres R. C.) in curing the young Earle of Norfolke, of the leprosie; and Doctor B. in carrying off the virulency of the small-pox, twice, from Queen Elizabeth; insomuch that they never appeared. But in parts abroad they have found more noble reception, and the world greedy of obteyning their workes; nay, (rather then want the sight thereof) contented to view them through a translation, though never so imperfect. Witnessse what Maierus, Hermannus, Combachius, Faber,³ and many others have done; the first

of which came out of Germanie, to live in England; purposely that he might so understand our English tongue, as to translate Norton's *Ordinall* into Latin verse, which most judiciously and learnedly he did; Yet (to our shame be it spoken) his entertainment was too too coarse for so deserving a scholler.

How great a blemish is it then to us, that refuse to reade so famous authors in our naturall language, whilst strangers are necessitated to read them in ours, to understand them in their own, yet think the dignity of the subject, much more deserving, then their paines.

If this we do but ingeniously consider, we shall judge it more of reason that we looke back upon, then neglect such pieces of learning as are native of our owne countrey, and by this inquisition, finde no nation hath written more, or better, although at present (as well through our owne supinenesse, as the decrees of fate,) few of their workes can be found. John Leland tooke very much paines, even at the yeilding up of the ghost, of our English learning, to preserve its latest (but weakest, 'cause almost spent) breath; and from him John Bale, with John Pitts (who indeed is but Bale's plagiary) hath left us a Catalogue of the Writers of this Nation, and that's neere all. Yet posterity for this is deeply obliged. What punishment then did their pestilent malice deserve, who rob'd us of their whole workes?

A juditious author speaking of the Dissolution of our Monasteries, saith thus: Many manuscripts, guilty of no other superstition then red letters in the front, were condemned to the fire; and here a principall key of antiquity was lost to the great prejudice of posterity. Indeed (such was Learnings misfortune, at that great devastation of our English libraries, that) where a red letter or a mathematicall diagram appeared, they were sufficient to intitle the booke to be popish or diabolicall.

Our English nation hath ever beene happy for learning and learned men, and to illustrate this, I hope it will not prove distastfull.

As first, the Druydæ (the famous and mysterious Druydæ) that were priests, diviners, and wise men: and took their originall and name from Druys Sarronyus the fourth king of the Celts, (styled Sapientum & Augurum Doctor) who dyed Anno Mundi, 2069.

Next the Bardi, who celebrated the illustrious deeds of famous men, which they ingeniously dispos'd in heroique verse, and sung them to the sweete melody of the harpe: amongst other testimonies hereof receive Chaucer's:

The old gentle Brittons in her dayes
Of divers adventures maden Layes,
Rymed erst in her Mother Tongue,
Whych Layes, with her Instruments they songe.

These philosophers had their name from Bardus Druydus (the 5th King of the Celts) who was the first inventor of verses, as Berosius tells us; and dyed An. Mundi 2138. Neither of these sects of philosophers used any writing (indeed it was not lawfull) for such was the policy and curiosity of elder ages (to defend their learning and mysteries from the injury of ignorant interpretations) that they delivered them to posterity by tradition only.

Cæsar testifies (and tis a noble testimony) that the learning of the Druydi was first invented in Britaine and thence transferr'd into France; and that, in all his time, those of France came over hither to be instructed. Agricola (in Tacitus) prefers the Britaines before the Students of France (nothwithstanding that they were of a docible wit, and apt to learne) in that they were curious in attaining the eloquence of the Latin tongue.

As for magick, Pliny tells us, it flourished in Britaine, and that the people there were so devoted to it (yea, with all complements of ceremony) a man would think that even the Persian learned his magick thence. A German poet sayes that when the World was troubled with Pannonick invasions, England flourished in the knowledge of all good arts; and was able to send of her learned men into other countries to propagate learning; and instances Winifrid (alias Boniface the Devonshire man) and Willebrood (the Northerne man) that were sent into Germany.

Nay more, England was twice schoole-mistress to France (for so saith Peter Ramus) viz. First by the Druydæ (who taught them their discipline) and afterwards by Alcinus, in Charles the Great's time, through whose perswasions the Emperour founded the University of Paris.

For the Saxons, it is not to be denied but that many of them, after their conversion to Christianity, were exceedingly learned, and before that, much addicted to soothsaying, augury, divination by the neighing of horses, &c. And tis worth the enquiry (there being more in it then we ordinarily apprehend) why they in generall worshipped Herthus [i.e. Dame Earth] for a goddess, and honoured Mercury above all the gods of the Germanes, whom they called Wooden, (hence Wodensday now our Wednesday). For, they believed that this Dame Herthus intermediated in humane affaires and relieved the poore; whose image was made armed, standing among flowers, having in its right hand a staffe, and in it a banner wherein was painted a rose; in the other hand a ballance, and upon the head thereof a cock; on the brest a carved beare, and before the midle, a fixed scutchion; in chiefe whereof was also a ballance; in face, a lion; and in point, a rose. And for their god Wooden they esteemed him as their god of battaile, representing him by an armed man. Insomuch that wee to this very day retaine the word "wood" [i.e., "wode"] among us, to signifie fierce, furious, raging, [as when one is in a great rage, we usually say he is wode:] So the Mercury of the philosophers is shaddowed under the fierce and terrible names of lion, dragon, poyson, &c. But this is not all, although it be

something.

And now to come yet neerer to our selves; we must needs say that of later times (since the Conquest) our nation hath produced such famous and eminently learned men, as have equall'd (if not surpast) the greatest schollers of other nations, and happy were we if now we could but partake of those legacies they left, and which envy and ignorance has defrauded us of: Howsoever the small remainder which is left, we have good reason to prize,

For out of olde Fields as Men saythe,
Cometh alle this new Corne from yeare to yeare;
And out of olde Bokes in good faythe
Cometh all this Scyence, that Men leare.

That England hath been successively enrich'd with such men our country man John Leland (and I never heard he was partiall) abundantly testifies; who avers, that generally we have had a great number of excellent wits and writers, learned with the best as times served, who besides their knowledge in the four tongues, in which part of them excelled, there was no liberall science or any feate concerning learning, in which they have not shewed certaine arguments of great felicity and wit. And thus much for the generality of learning.

Now for a particular account of the hermetique science, vouchsafe (Ingenious Reader) to accept the ensuing collections, yet not so, as if therein were contained all the workes of our English hermetique philosophers, (for more are design'd in a second part to follow and compleate this a full Theatrum; the which God allowing me further time and tranquility to run through it, as I have already this, I intend shortly to make ready for the presse). Whereby yet more to manifest what men we have had, no lesse famous for this kinde of philosophy, then for all other commendable arts and sciences.

To adde any thing to the praise thereof, were but to hold a candle before the sunne; or should I here deliver a full account of the marvellous operations and effects thereof, it would be as far beyond the limits of a preface, as remote from the beliefe of the generality of the world. Nor doe I expect that all my readers should come with an engagement, to believe what I here write, or that there was ever any such thing in rerum natura as what we call a Philosophers Stone, nor will I perswade them to it, (though I must tell them I have not the vanity to publish these sacred and serious mysteries and arcana, as Romances) tis enough that I know incredulity is given to the world as a punishment. Yet Ile tell them what one of our ancient poetickall philosophers sayes,

If yow wyl lysten to my Lay,
Something thereby yow maie finde,
That may content your minde:
I will not sweare to make yow give credence,

For a Philosopher will finde, here in Evidence
Of the Truth; and to Men that be Lay,
I skill not greatly what they say.

I must professe I know enough to hold my tongue, but not enough to speake; and the no lesse reall then miraculous fruits I have found in my diligent enquiry into these arcana, lead me on to such degrees of admiration, they command silence, and force me to lose my tongue. Yet, as one greatly affecting my native countrey, and the satisfaction of all ingenious artists, I have published (for their use) these ensuing collected antiquities; and shall here say something more then they speak of.

He who shall have the happiness to meet with S. Dunstons worke *De Occulta Philosophia*, (a booke which E. G. A. I. made much use of, and which shall chiefly back what here I am about to say) may therein reade such stories as will make him amaz'd to think what stupendious and immense things are to be performed by vertue of the Philosophers Mercury, of which a taste onely and no more.

And first, of the Minerall Stone, the which is wrought up to the degree onely that hath the power of transmuting any imperfect earthy matter into its utmost degree of perfection; that is, to convert the basest of metalls into perfect gold and silver; flints into all manner of precious stones; [as rubies, saphirs, emeralds, and diamonds, &c.] and many more experiments of the like nature. But as this is but a part, so it is the least share of that blessing which may be acquired by the philosophers materia, if the full vertue thereof were knowne. Gold I confesse is a delicious object, a goodly light, which we admire and gaze upon *ut Pueri in Junonis avem*, but, as to make gold (saith an incomparable authour) is the cheifest intent of the alchemists, so was it scarce any intent of the ancient philosophers, and the lowest use the adepti made of this materia.

For they being lovers of wisdom more then worldly wealth, drove at higher and more excellent operations: and certainly he to whom the whole course of nature lyes open, rejoyceth not so much that he can make gold and silver, or the divells to become subject to him, as that he sees the heavens open, the angells of God ascending and descending, and that his own name is fairely written in the book of life.

Next, to come to the Vegitable, Magicall, and Angelicall Stones; the which have in them no part of the Minerall Stone (Quatenus a stone, fermented with metalline and earthy nature) for they are marvelously subtile, and each of them differing in operation and nature, because fitted and fermented for severall effects and purposes. Doubtlesse Adam (with the Fathers before the Flood, and since) Abraham, Moses, and Solomon, wrought many wonders by them, yet the utmost of their vertues they never fully understood, nor indeed any but God the Maker of all things in Heaven and Earth, blessed for evermore.

For, by the Vegitable [stone] may be perfectly known the nature of man, beasts, fowles, fishes, together with all kinds of trees, plants, flowers, &c. and how to produce and make them grow, flourish & beare fruit; how to encrease them in colour and smell, and when and where we please, and all this not onely at an instant, *Experimenti gratia*, but daily, monethly, yearly, at any time, at any season; yea, in the depth of winter. And therefore not unlike, but the Wall-nut Tree which anciently grew in Glastenbury church-yard, and never put forth leaves before S. Barnabies Day, yet then was fully loaded with them, as also the Hawthorne there, so greatly fam'd for shooting forth leaves and flowers at Christmas, together with the oake in New-Forrest in Hampshire that bore greene leaves at the same season; may be some experiments made of the Vegitable Stone.

Besides the masculine part of it which is wrought up to a solar quality, and through its exceeding heat will burne up and destroy any creature, plant, &c. That which is lunar & feminine (if immediately applyed) will mitigate it with its extreme cold: and in like manner the lunar quality benums and congeals any animall, &c. unlesse it be presently helped and resolved by that of the Sun; for though they both are made out of one natural substance; yet in working they have contrary qualities: neverthelesse there is such a naturall assistance between them, that what the one cannot doe, the other both can, and will perform.

Nor are their inward vertues more then their outward beauties; for the solar part is of so resplendent, transparent lustre, that the eye of man is scarce able to indure it; and if the lunar part be expos'd abroad in a dark night, birds will repaire to (and circulate about) it, as a fly round a candle, and submit themselves to the captivity of the hand: And this invites mee to believe, that the stone which the ancient Hermet (being then 140 years old) tooke out of the wall in his cell, and shewed Cornelius Gallus, Ann. 1602 was of the nature of this Vegitable Stone: For, (upon the opening his Golden Box wherein it was inclosed) it dilated its beames all over the roome, and that with so great splendor, that it overcame the light that was kindled therein; besides the Hermet refused to project it upon metall (as being unworthy of it) but made his experiment upon Veronica and Rue.

By the Magicall or Prospective Stone it is possible to discover any person in what part of the world soever, although never so secretly concealed or hid; in chambers, closets, or cavernes of the Earth: for there it makes a strict inquisition. In a word, it fairely presents to your view even the whole world, wherein to behold, heare, or see your desire. Nay more, it enables man to understand the language of the creatures, as the chirping of birds, lowing of beasts, &c., to convey a spirit into an image, which by observing the influence of heavenly bodies, shall become a true oracle; And yet this as E. A. assures you, is not any wayes necromanticall or devilish; but easy, wonderous easy, naturall

and honest.

Lastly, as touching the Angelicall Stone, it is so subtile, saith the aforesaid author, that it can neither be seene, felt, or weighed; but tasted only. The voyce of man (which bears some proportion to these subtile properties) comes short in comparison; nay the air itself is not so penetrable, and yet (Oh mysterious wonder!) a stone, that will lodge in the fire to eternity without being prejudiced. It hath a Divine power, celestiall, and invisible, above the rest; and endowes the possessor with Divine gifts. It affords the apparition of angells, and gives a power of conversing with them, by dreames and revelations: nor dare any evill spirit approach the place where it lodgeth. Because it is a quintessence wherein there is no corruptible thing; and where the elements are not corrupt, no devill can stay or abide.

S. Dunston calls it the Food of Angels, and by others it is tearmed The Heavenly Viaticum; The Tree of Life; and is undoubtedly (next under God) the true Alchochodon, or Giver of Years; for by it mans body is preserved from corruption, being thereby inabled to live a long time without foode: nay 'tis made a question whether any man can dye that uses it. Which I doe not so much admire, as to think why the possessors of it should desire to live, that have those manifestations of glory and eternity, presented unto their fleshly eyes; but rather desire to be dissolved, and to enjoy the full fruition, then live where they must be content with the bare speculation.

After Hermes had once obtained the knowledge of this stone, he gave over the use of all other stones, and therein only delighted: Moses and Solomon (together with Hermes) were the only three that excelled in the Knowledge thereof, and who therewith wrought wonders.

That there is a gift of prophesie hid in the Red-stone, Racis [Rhazes] will tell you; for thereby (saith he) philosophers have foretold things to come: And Petrus Bonus avers, that they did prophesie, not only generally but specially; having a fore-knowledge of the Resurrection, Incarnation of Christ, Day of Judgement, and that the world should be consumed with fire: and this not otherwise, then from the insight of their operations.

In briefe, by the true and various use of the philosophers prima materia (for there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit) the perfection of liberall sciences are made known, the whole wisdom of nature may be grasped: and (notwithstanding what has been said, I must further adde) there are yet hid greater things then these, for we have seen but few of his workes.

Howbeit, there are but a few Stocks that are fitted to inoculate the grafts of this science on: they are mysteries incommunicable to any but the adepts, and those that have beene devoted even from their cradles to serve and waite at this altar: and how rarely such have been heard of, may appear by Norton:

For few (saith he) or scarsely
One In fiftene kingdomes had our Red Stone.

And they perhaps were (with S. Paul) caught up into Paradice, and as he, heard unspeakeable words, so they wrought unoperable workes such as it is not lawfull to utter.

Of such as these therefore will I glory, yet of my selfe I will not glory, but of mine infirmities. And truly whether such were in the body or out of the body I cannot tell, God knoweth, doubtlesse they were not far from the kingdom of God.

But I feare I have waded too farre; and therefore now to give some particular account, as well touching the publication of this worke, as also the disposition thereof, and the nature of the obsolete language wherein tis written: I shall in the first place acquaint the reader, that the kinde acceptance my former endeavours received at the hands of candid artists, in publishing some chemicall collections, very earnestly invited me to finde out a seconde piece wherewith to present those gratefull persons. Whereupon I intended to rally up some of my own conceptions in this science, and expose them also to the test: but (to this end, reviewing the philosophers) I found that many (assuming that name) wrote what their fancies, not their hands had wrought, and further then in apprehension had not seene Projection; (amongst whom our Ripley was sometimes one, as appears by his ingenious Retraction, hereafter mentioned:) and being truly sensible of the great injury such workes have done young students (at the first not able to distinguish, who have written upon their undeceveable experience, who not; and consequently, not which to follow, or which to avoyde) I withdrew my thoughts (having never as yet set my selfe effectually upon the manuall practise) lest I should adde to the many injuries the world has already suffered, by delivering the bare medley of my dubious apprehensions, without the confident attestation of practise: and be justly esteemed as indiscreete as those whom Ripley mentions, that prate

Of Robin Hode and of his Bow,
Which never shot therein I trow.

Yet still casting about what to make choyce of, at length (by the encouragement of some that are industrious after publique benefit) centred my thoughts, and fix'd them on this designe of collecting all (or as many as I could meet with) of our own English hermetique philosophers, and to make them publique.

Nor did I change this resolution with my clothes, notwithstanding the difficulties I saw, ready to encounter and obstruct the undertaking: for besides the paines and care that was thereunto requisite, the feare of not meeting with, or obtaining the originall manuscripts, or authentique copies of this nature (which I knew to be in some mens hands, yet wanting them my selfe) shrewdly beset, though nothing discourag'd me: yet was I therewith freely and plentifully

supplied by some worthy and intimate friends, whom I would gladly here mention, but that I well know they delight not to see their names in print. These had, my care was next to dispose them in such a series as might be answerable to the respective times, wherein each author flourished; and withall to the best advantage of the laborious student: the which I have manag'd with so just an adequation, as (I hope) will neither detract from the due honour of the one, nor yet disturbe or darken the direct path of the other.

But whilst I was doing this, I made a question (in regard some philosophers had writ in verse, others in prose) which of these should take precedency; and after some consideration adjudged it to the poetique part: and that, not only because its originall may probably anticipate the time of Orpheus, (although he be noted by Maierus, Primus Antistes, Sacerdos, Theologus, VATES, & Doctor totius Græcorum nationis) because that Linus is said to be the most perite of any lyrick poet, and so ancient that some suppose him master to Orpheus, who writ that admirable allegory of the Golden Fleece, and was the first of all the Grecians that brought the chemick learning (with other sciences) out of Ægypt, as the other the first that brought the Phœnician learning to the Grecians: I say not only for that it is the ancientest, and prose but of latter use with other nations: but because poetry hath bin most anciently used with us, and (as if from a grant of Nature) held unquestionable.

Again, the excellent melody thereof is so naturall and universall, as that it seemes to be borne with all the nations of the world, as an hereditary eloquence proper to all mankind: nor was this all, for I considered that it claimes a generall succession, and reception, in all nations, all ages, who were never without a Homer, a Virgil, or an Ovid: No not this small segment of the world [England] without a Rasis Cestrensis and an Hortulanus; for the first of these, his *Liber Luminum*, and his *Lumen de Luminum* are the ancientest now extant in Latine verse: in the latter of which, I cannot omit this title of his, [*Responsio Rasis Cestrensis Filio suo Merlino*;] whereby it appeares he was Merlin's contemporary (at least) if not his master, in this abstruse mystery. These workes of his are both published by Hermannus, but very imperfectly, as I found by comparing them with a manuscript, as ancient as King John's time. And for the second [i.e. Hortulanus], he was the first Christian philosopher after Morienus, who (travelling abroad, and returning hither in the raigne of William the Conqueror) because he was the first that transplanted the Chemicall Muses from remotest parts into his own country; is called Garland, *ab Coronam Hermeticam & Poeticam*. But to return to our matter.

If neither its antiquity, nor the naturall ratification, generall succession, and reception thereof, were enough to allow it the right hand of fellowship, yet I suppose the effects thereof, (which so affect and delight the eare, rejoyce the heart, satisfie the judgement and indulge the hearers) justly may: in regard poesy has a life, a pulse, and such a secret energy, as leaves in the minde, a far

deeper impression, then what runs in the flow and evenlesse numbers of prose: whereby it won so much upon the world, that in rude times, and even amongst barbarous nations, when other sorts of learning stood excluded, there was nothing more in estimation. And for that we call Rythme, the custome of divers of our Saxon and Norman poets, shewes the opinion they had thereof; whilst the Latine (notwithstanding its excellency) could not sufficiently delight their eares, unlesse their verses (in that language) were form'd with an harmonically cadence, and brought into rythme: nor did the Ancients wrap up their chiefest mysteries, any where else, then in the parabolical & allusive part of poetry, as the most sacred, and venerable in their esteeme, and the securest from prophane and vulgar wits. For such was the goodnesse of our fathers, that they would not willingly hazard (much lesse throw) their childrens bread among dogs; and therefore their wisdom and policy was, first, to finde out a way to teach, and then an art (which was this) to conceale. In a word, to prefer prose before poetry, is no other, or better, then to let a rough-hewen-clowne, take the wall of a rich-clad Lady-of-Honour: or to hang a presence chamber with tarpalin, instead of tapestry.

And for these reasons, and out of these respects, the poetical (as I conceiv'd) deserved the precedency.

Howbeit probably some of these pieces (now brought to publique light) had welnigh perish'd in a silent ruine; and destruction got a compleate victory over them, but that my diligence and laborious inquisition rescued them from the jawes thereof; being almost quite shrouded in the dust of antiquity, and involv'd in the obscurity of forgotten things, with their leaves halfe worm-eaten. And a wonder it is, that (like the creatures in Noahs Arke) they were hitherto so safely preserved from that universall deluge, which (at the Dissolution of abbies) overflowed our greatest libraries.

And in doing this, I presume it no arrogance to challenge the reputation of performing a worke, next that of a mans own: and something more, in that (as if having the Elixir it selfe) I have made old age become young and lively, by restoring each of the ancient writers not only to the Spring of their severall beauties, but to the Summer of their strength and perfection.

As for the whole worke it selfe, it is sheav'd up from a few gleanings in part of our English fields; where though I have bestowed my industry to pick up here and there, what I could finde in my way, yet I believe there are many other pieces of this nature in private hands, which if any are pleas'd (out of the same ingenious score that I have published these) to communicate to me: I shall set thereon a value sutable to the worth of their favours, and let the world know its obligation to them besides.

The style and language thereof, may, I confesse (to some) seeme irksome and uncouth, and so it is indeed to those that are strangers thereunto; but withall

very significant: old words have strong emphasis; others may look upon them as rubbish or trifles, but they are grossly mistaken: for what some light braines may esteem as foolish toys; deeper judgements can and will value as sound and serious matter.

We English have often varied our fashions (such is the levity of our fancies) and therefore if you meet with spellings different from those in use; or uncouth words as strangely ridiculous, as a maunch, hood, cod-piece, or trunke hose, know; as they were the fashionable attyres, so these the usuall dialects of those times: and posterity will pay us in our own coyne, should we deride the behaviour and dresse of our ancestors. For we must consider that languages which are daily used in our discourse, are in as continuall mutation; what custome brings into habit, is best lik'd for the present, whether it be to revive what is lost, or introduce something new; or to piece up the present, with the retained shreds of what preceded; but learned tongues (which are contain'd in books) enjoy a more immutable fate, because not subject to be washt away with the daily tyde and current of times. They are like the fashion and drapery wrought on marble statues which must ever be retained without alteration.

And therefore that the truth and worth of their workes might receive no diminution by my transcription, I purposely retain'd the old words and manner of their spelling, as I found them in the originalls (except only some palpable mistakes and blemishes of former transcribers, which I took upon me to correct and purge as little more then litterall imperfections:) yet not to leave the reader unsatisfied, have added a compendious table, for the interpretation of old, unusuall, and obsolete words, and thereby smooth'd (as I suppose) the passage for such as have not hitherto bin conversant in these ancient rough-hew'd expressions.

Wherefore you that love to converse with the dead, or consult with their monuments, draw near: perhaps you may find more benefit in them, then the living; there you may meet with the genii of our hermetique philosophers, learne the language in which they woo'd and courted Dame Nature, and enjoy them more freely, and at greater command, (to satisfie your doubts) then when they were in the flesh; for, they have written more then they would speake; and left their lines so rich, as if they had dissolved gold in their inke, and clad their words with the soveraign moysture.

My annotations are limited within the bounds of what is historicall, or what occasionally must needs intrench on the confines of other arts, and all glosses upon the philosophicall worke purposely omitted, for the same reasons that I chose to send forth other mens children into the world, rather then my own. And what presumptuous mistakes, or errors, the candid reader shall meet with, will (I hope) be censured with no lesse favour and charity, then that whereby they are wont to judge the faults of those they esteem their friends and well-wishers.

And now to conclude: May the God of Nature be graciously pleased (out of the immense treasury of his goodness) to vouchsafe all such (whose good angells direct them to, or have already religiously engaged them in this mysterious knowledge) the full and entire accomplishments of a true and pious philosopher, [To wit, learning, humility, judgement, courage, hope, patience, discretion, charity & secrecie:] That so they may enjoy the fruits of their labours, which otherwise will be but vain, and unpleasant: and causelessly render the Divine Science and secret it selfe, contemptible.

Farewell (Industrious Students) and let your goodnesse still invite me to accomplish the end I have proposed: in doing which, (I presume) you may one day esteeme me, better deserving your patronage; at least-wise, your charitable censure: which is all the recompence expected or merited, by him, who is.

Yours Really Devoted,
E. Ashmole
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