

John Woodward's

BRIEF INSTRUCTIONS FOR MAKING
OBSERVATIONS IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD

1696

Facsimile

With an introduction by

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AN INTRODUCTION TO JOHN WOODWARD'S *BRIEF INSTRUCTIONS*

By V. A. EYLES

John Woodward's pamphlet *Brief Instructions for making observations in all parts of the world*, published in 1696, was symptomatic of the age in which he lived, the age of the Scientific Revolution, as it has sometimes been called. Whether this is an appropriate name for it need not be argued here, but certainly during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the quest for scientific knowledge expanded steadily, and the quest was not confined to the mathematical and physical sciences. It extended to natural history, the study of the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms.

In the seventeenth century knowledge of natural history was elementary. To enlarge this knowledge, British naturalists were anxious to obtain new material for study, particularly from overseas, where, according to the reports of travellers, new and strange plants and animals were to be seen. Various methods were employed to meet this need. Occasionally, collectors, or their agents, travelled abroad to acquire new material, but the principal method was that of correspondence. Sometimes, in place of, or in addition to letters, collectors sent out printed broadsheets or pamphlets setting out their requirements. Some of these pamphlets contained, as well as details of the specimens needed, requests for information about the mode of occurrence, habits, habitat, and so forth of the specimens collected; and instructions as to the best method of making observations, preserving specimens, and forwarding them. Woodward's pamphlet reproduced here, is a good example of this type of publication.

The activity of the early collectors is of more than passing interest. Although some of the early collections may have been formed originally to satisfy personal vanity or curiosity, their formation led ultimately to the establishment of institutional and public museums. The following notes illustrate how this came about in Great Britain.

Museums have a long history in Europe, but in Great Britain they date only from about the beginning of the seventeenth century. The first of any importance is believed to have been that formed by John Tradescant (?1587-1638) and his son John (1608-1662). About 1629, they established a museum known as Tradescant's Ark in South Lambeth Road, London. Among the miscellaneous material in the museum, according to its catalogue *Museum Tradescantium; or a collection of rarities* (London, 1656), were specimens illustrating all three branches of natural history. The historical importance of the Tradescants' museum is that many of its "rarities" passed into the hands of another collector, Elias Ashmole, and thence, by gift, to Oxford University. Eventually they found a home in the newly built Ashmolean Museum (now the Old Ashmolean), which was opened by the Duke of York in 1683, and became a centre for teaching natural history.

By this time the Royal Society had formed its own museum. One of the Society's original members, Daniel Colwall, contributed £100 towards its establishment, and as