

CHAPTER XII

FROM CRACOW TO PRAGUE

“Since all men from their birth employ sense prior to intellect, and are necessarily first conversant with sensible things: some, proceeding no farther, pass through life considering these as first and last; and apprehending what is painful to be evil, what is pleasant good, they deem it sufficient to shun the one and pursue the other. Some pretending to greater reason than the rest, esteem this wisdom; like earth-bound birds, though they have wings they are unable to fly. The secret souls of others would recall them from pleasure to worthier pursuits, but they cannot soar: they choose the lower way, and strive in vain. Thirdly, there are those — divine men — whose eyes pierce through clouds and darkness to the supernal vision, where they abide as in their own lawful country.”

— Plotinus

All this time, Dee is so absolutely absorbed with his spiritual visions that we know very little about his outer existence. For three years after he left England, he neglected to enter anything in his ordinary diary, and the *Liber Mysticus* contains nothing of everyday affairs.

In this July, 1584, however, at Cracow, he does enter an important piece of information about his boy Rowland, the baby then about a year and a half old.

“1584. Remember that on Saturday the fourteenth day of July by the Gregorian Calendar, and the fourth day of July by the old Calendar, Rowlande my childe (who was born Anno 1583, January 28 by the old calendar) was extremely sick about noon or mid-day, and by one of the clock was ready to give up the ghost, or rather lay for dead, and his eyes set and sunck in his head.

“I made a vow if the Lord did foresee him to be his true servant, and so would grant him life, and confirm him his health at this danger, and from this danger, I would during my life on Saturdays eat but one meal.”

Although we never find this vow referred to again, there is no doubt that Dee devoutly kept his bargain. Rowland did grow up and had other remarkable escapades.

Still the journey to Prague to the Emperor Rudolph was postponed, and it was not until the first day of August that the trio set off. Dee and Kelley were ready to go sooner, but Laski had not sufficiently recovered his finances. The party had been augmented by the arrival of Kelley's brother, Thomas, and Edmond Hilton, son of Dee's old friend, Goodman Hilton, who had sometimes lent him money, and who in 1579 had requested leave for his two sons to resort to Dee's house. Thomas Kelley accompanied the Prince and his pair of crystal gazers. The women were left behind under Edmond Hilton's charge.

Five or six days after arriving in Prague, on the day of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, August 15, Dee was settled in the house of Dr. Hageck, by Bethlem in Old Prague (Altstadt), kindly lent him for his use. The house was not far from the old Rathhaus, the great clock tower of which, dated 1474, and the

Council Chamber, still exist. It was also near the Carolinum or University, founded by Charles IV. in 1383, in whose hall John Huss a hundred and fifty years before had held his disputations. When Dee and his party arrived in the city Tycho Brahe was still alive, though not yet a resident in Prague. Prague was the city of alchemists. The sombre, melancholy Emperor himself relieved his more serious studies by experiments in alchemics and physics. A mania for collecting rare and valuable objects provided him with a still lighter pastime. He painted, read much, and worked in iron, was a good linguist, and a regular dilettante. Unmarried, and with all the weaknesses of the Habsburgs, for nearly thirty years out of his long life and far too protracted reign he was quite mad. Not many years after his reception of Dee he ceased to make any pretence of public appearance.

The excellent little study or "stove" (from "stube," German for study) in Dr. Hageck's house had been since 1518 the abode of some student of alchemy, skilful of the holy stone. The name of the alchemist, "Simon," was written up in letters of gold and silver in several places in the room. Dee's eyes also fell daily on many cabalistic hieroglyphs, as well as on drawings or carvings of birds, fishes, flowers, fruits, leaves and six vessels, all the work, he presumed, of Simon baccalaureus Pragensis. Over the door were the lines:

"Immortale Decus par gloriaque illi debentur
Cujus ab ingenio est discolor hic paries,"

and on the south wall of the study was a long quotation from some philosophical work ending with

"Ars nostra est Ludus puero cum labor mulierum. Scitote omnes filii artis hujus, quod nemo potest colligere fructus nostri Elixiris, nisi per introitum nostri lapidis Elementati, et si aliam viam quaerit, viam nunquam intrabit nec attinget. Rubigo est opus, quod sit ex solo auro, dum intraverit in suam humiditatem."

In these congenial surroundings skrying was at once resumed. Madimi (now grown into a woman) was the first visitor, and Dee hastened to inquire for his wife and child at Cracow. He notes that his first letter from her arrived on the 21st. She joined him before long. He was told to write to the Emperor Rudolph. He did so on August 17, and he relates in the epistle the favourable attention he has received from Charles V. and his brother Ferdinand, Rudolph's father, the Emperor Maximilian II., who accepted the dedication of his book *Monas Hieroglyphica*, and others of the imperial house. He signs the letter, "Humillimus et fidelissimus clientulus Joannes Dee."

After waiting a week he sent the letter by Laski's secretary to the Spanish ambassador, Don Guglielmo de Sancto Clemente, who was to present it to Rudolph. With it he also sent a copy of his *Monas*. The same night he heard by Emerich Sontag, the secretary, that the Emperor had graciously accepted the book, and within three or four days would appoint a time for giving him an audience.

He received letters from England on August 27, which were dated April 15 and 16. His brother-in-law, Nicholas Fromond, told him that Mr. Gilbert, Mr. Sled, and his bookseller had used him very ill. Doubtless he was expecting some money from the sale of his books. Mrs. Dee was much upset at her brother's defections, and

poor Dee was worried all round, for, as he writes in the margin of his diary, "Satan is very busy with E.K. about this time." Kelley seems to have been making friends with young Simon Hageck, son of "our host," as Dee calls him. To furnish his own study he has bought a clock of Mrs. Hageck for five ducats, which was so good a bargain that she requested "a quart of wine" (probably a quarter hogshead) thrown in. She herself does not seem to have benefited much by the largess, for Kelley and Laski's man Alexander proceeded to get drunk on it, and fell to fighting and quarrelling. Dee, who had stayed writing in his study instead of going to supper, was warned by the city watchman to keep better peace in his house. Looking from his window to account for the caution, he saw Laski's man sitting on a great stone, and called him to come in. When he had heard the tale he went off to Hageck's to "understand the very truth," and there found Kelley lying in a drunken sleep on a form. This was a relief. He was better pleased to think that angry words had been spoken "when wine, not wit, had rule," and persuaded Laski's man to stay in his lodgings that night instead of raging forth into the street. Already a scandal had been made which he foresaw would do him much harm. Next morning Kelley had a madder fit than ever.

"Much ado. Emerich and his brother (Thomas Kelley) and I had to stop or hold him from going on Alexander with his weapon. At length we let him go, in his doublet and hose without a cap or haton his head, and into the street he hasted with his brother's rapier drawn, and challenged Alexander to fight. But Alexander said 'Nolo, Domine Kelleie, Nolo.' Hereupon E.K. took up a stone and threw after him as after a dog, and so came into the house again in a most furious rage for that he might not fight with Alexander. The rage and fury was so great in words and gestures as might plainly prove that the wicked enemy sought either E.K. his own destroying of himself, or of me, or of his brother. This may suffice to notifie the mighty temptation and vehement workingo f the subtle spiritual enemy, Satan, wherewith God suffered E.K. to be tempted and almost overcome: to my great grief, discomfort, and most great discredit, if it should come to the Emperor's understanding. I was in great doubt how God would take this offence, and devised with myself how I might with honesty be cleared from the shame and danger that might arise if these two should fight. At the least, it would cross all good hope here with the Emperor for a time, till God redressed it."

By this time Dee had become skilled and tactful in dealing with his turbulent skryer, and he soon brought him to quietness by yielding to his humour and saying little. At mid-day came Dee's messenger from Cracow, bringing letters from and tidings by word of mouth of his dear wife Jane, "to my great comfort." Much he was in need of comfort, and when a letter from the Emperor arrived the same day, desiring to see him, Kelley's enormities began to assume less desperate proportions.

Dee started at once to the Castle, the Palace of Prague, and waited in the guard-chamber, sending Emericus to the Lord Chamberlain, Octavius Spinola, to announce his coming.

"Spinola came to me very courteously and led me by the skirt of the gown, through the dining chamber to the Privie chamber, where the Emperor sat at a table,

with a great chest and standish of silver before him, and my Monad and Letters by him.”

Rudolph thanked Dee politely for the book (which was dedicated to his father), adding that it was “too hard for his capacity” to understand; but he encouraged the English philosopher to say on all that was in his mind. Dee recounted his life history at some length, and told how for forty years he had sought, without finding, true wisdom in books and men; how God had sent him His Light, Uriel, who for two years and a half, with other spirits, had taught him, had finished his books for him, and had brought him a stone of more value than any earthly kingdom. This angelic friend had given him a message to deliver to Rudolph. He was to bid him forsake his sins and turn to the Lord. Dee was to show him the Holy Vision.

“This my commission is from God. I feign nothing, neither am I a hypocrite, an ambitious man, or doting or dreaming in this cause. If I speak otherwise than I have just cause, I forsake my salvation,” said he.

Rudolph was probably very much bored by this mystical rhapsody. He excused himself from seeing the vision at this time, and said he would hear more later. He promised friendship and patronage, and Dee, who says he had told him almost more than he intended of his purposes, “to the intent they might get some root or better stick in his minde,” was fain to take his leave. In a few days he was informed, through the Spanish ambassador, that one Doctor Curtius, of the Privy Council, “a wise, learned, and faithful councillor,” was to be sent to listen to him on the Emperor’s behalf. Uriel, whose head had been bound of late in a black silk mourning scarf because of Kelley’s misdoings, now reappeared in a wheel of fire, and announced favour to Rudolph.

“If he live righteously and follow me truly, I will hold up his house with pillars of hiacinth, and his chambers shall be full of modesty and comfort. I will bring the East wind over him as a Lady of Comfort, and she shall sit upon his castles with Triumph, and she shall sleep with joy.”

To Dee, he says, has been given “the spirit of choice.” Dee petitions that his understanding of that dark saying may be opened: “Dwell thou in me, O Lord, for I am frail and without thee very blind.”

The conference between Dee and Curtius on September 15 lasted for six hours. It took place at the Austrian’s house, whither Dee was permitted, it seems, to take the magic stone and the books of the dealings. Dee in all good faith promised that many excellent things should happen to Rudolph, if only he would listen to the voice of Uriel. Dee’s sincerity, credulous though it appears, was as yet unshaken. He lived in a transcendental atmosphere, and trembled, as he believed, on the brink of a great revelation. The very heavens seemed opening to him, and soon, he thought, he would probe knowledge to its heart.

Kelley, on the other hand, was under no delusion. He had worked the spirit mystery for long enough without profit; already he was beginning to more than suspect that the game was played out; that their dreams of Laski as King of Poland,

dispensing wealth and favour to his two helpers, were never to be realised; that the Emperor's favour would be equally chimerical and vain; and that some more profitable occupation had better be sought. At the back of his mind lay always the hope of the golden secret. Somehow and somewhere this last aspiration of the alchemist must be realised.

At the very time when the two learned doctors were holding their confabulation, Kelley, says Dee, was visited at their lodgings with a wicked spirit who told him that Dee's companion would use him like a serpent, "compassing his destruction with both head and taylor; and that our practices would never come to any fruitful end."

This was a true prophecy indeed, but many things were yet to come to pass.

Uriel now instructs Dee to write to the Emperor and tell him that he can make the philosopher's stone: in other words, that he can transmute base metal into gold. In the next breath Uriel foretells that Rudolph shall be succeeded by his brother Ernest, for when he sees and possesses gold (which is the thing he desireth, and those that counsel him do also most desire), he shall perish, and his end shall be terrible. Dee shall be brought safely home to England. Uriel used a curious simile, that Dee "shall ascend the hills as the spiders do." Dee, with his knowledge of many sciences, has never shown himself a naturalist, but he here gives us an interesting scrap of natural history. He writes in the margin: "Perhaps spiders flying in the air, are carried by strings of their own spinning or making, or else I know not how."

Dee's suit with the Emperor did not much progress. His ministers were naturally envious of this foreigner, and many whispers, as well as louder allegations against the two Englishmen, were abroad, although, as San Clemente told him, the Emperor himself was favourable. The Spanish ambassador was friendly enough, and Dee dined several times at his table. He professed to be descended from Raymond Lully, and, of course, like every educated person of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was a believer in the virtues of the philosopher's stone. He bade them not regard the Dutchmen's ill tongues, "who can hardly brook any stranger." Dee wrote again to the Emperor a letter of elaborate compliment and praise of *vestroae sacrae Coesarae Majestatis*, in which he offered to come and show him the philosopher's stone and the magic crystal.

Still nothing came of it, and these needy adventurers in a foreign land began to get into deadly straits. "Now were we all brought to great penury: not able without the Lord Laski's, or some heavenly help, to sustain our state any longer." Dee returned from a dinner at the Spanish ambassador's to find Kelley resolved to throw up the whole business and start for England the next day, going first to Cracow to pick up his wife. If she will not go he must set off without her, but go he will. He will sell his clothes and go to Hamburg, and so to England. It is all very well for the spirits to promise spiritual covenants and blessings; but as Kelley said to Uriel, "When will you give us meat, drink and clothing?"

At this time the women and children did join the party from Cracow, although Dee does not record it in his diary. But on September 27 Dr. Curtius called to see him at his lodging in Dr. Hageck's house by Bethlem, and he says "saluted my wife and little Katherine, my daughter." Dee laid before him some of the slanders that he knew were going about. He had been called at Clemente's table a bankrupt alchemist, a conjuror and necromantist, who had sold his own goods and given the proceeds to Laski, whom he had beguiled, and now he was going to fawn upon the

Emperor. Curtius was at last induced to spread before the Emperor his report of the conference he had held (by command) with Dee. "Rudolph," said Curtius, "thinks the things you have told him almost either incredible or impossible. He wants you to show him the books." Then the talk became the learned gossip of a couple of bookish and erudite scholars. Dee produced some rare editions which the others had never seen. Curtius offered the loan of one of his own works, *De Superficierum Divisionibus*, printed at Pesaro. After this, with mutual courtesies offered on both parts, "after the manner of the world," Curtius took his horse, and returned homeward.

Jane Dee was ailing at this time, and Dee was much distressed. Gabriel, when consulted, told him that the true medicine is trust in the God of Hosts and in His Son Christ. "The Lamb of Life is the true medicine of comfort and consolation." He did, however, condescend to give a remarkable prescription for her use, concocted of a pint of wheat, a live pheasant cock, eleven ounces of white amber, and an ounce of red wine, all distilled together. Dee, though no Christian Scientist, was willing enough to administer the strange decoction, but says he knows not where or how to get a cock pheasant. In the spring of the next year, Jane's fourth child, Michael, was born. He was always rather sickly, and died when nine years old. Theodore, her fifth child, was only thirteen when he too died, but all the six other children grew up.

Curtius and Dee became good friends. The Austrian showed his English acquaintance several of his inventions connected with the quadrant and with astronomical tables, and Dee confided to him the secret of a battering glass he had contrived for taking observations on a dark night. The glass was left at Cracow with his books and other goods, but he would gladly go and fetch it to show the Emperor. This led to Dee's request for a passport to enable him to travel, with servants, wife and children, where he would in the Emperor's dominions at any time within a year. He drew it up himself on October 8, 1584, and the Emperor granted it without demur. Dee soon started for Cracow to bring the rest of his goods to Prague, but the diary for the month of November is missing, and the following book opens on December 10, when he had set out from Cracow to return to Prague. "Master Kelley" was with him, John Crocker, and Rowland and his nurse, who had been left behind when Mrs. Dee and the two elder children joined her husband in Prague. As before, more than a week was occupied with the journey, which was made in a coach, with horses bought of "Master Frizer." In Prague a new lodging was found in a house belonging to two sisters, of whom one was married to Mr. Christopher Christian, the registrar of Old Prague. Dee hired the whole house from him at a rent of 70 "dollars" or thalers a year, to be paid quarterly.

"On Saturday afternoon, January 12, 1585, I removed clean from Doctor Hageck, his house by Bedlem, and came with all my household to the House which I had hired of the two sisters (married) not far from the Market Place in old Prage."

He announced his return to the Spanish ambassador and to Dr. Curtius, and continued his interviews with "the schoolmaster" daily.

Some of the sittings recorded at this time are really of the nature of school lessons, which to a man of Dee's acquirements must have seemed rather elementary, yet he humbled himself as a child to learn. One day geographical and

ethnographical information is imparted about America, or, as Dee calls it, "Atlantis"; Cathay; the Bactrian desert; and Phalagon, a country of which Dee says he never heard. Another day, minerals and their properties form the subject of the lesson.

Much was said about the doubting, incredulous spirit of Kelley, which Dee always feels is the hindrance to further knowledge. At length he is given permission to choose another skryer if he will: "Take whomsoever thou wilt in whose face the Lord shall seem to dwell, and place him withthis Seer, and let him stand seven times by him. I will take the spirit from him and will give it unto the same that standeth by, and he shall fulfill my word that I have begun."

But Dee was strangely reluctant to part with Kelley. He loved him like a son, he yearned over his soul, and he entertained more lively hopes than ever of his real conversion, for Kelley had at last consented to partake of the sacrament with his older friend. Dee uttered aloud a solemn prayer: —

"O God, thouh has coupled us two together in they election, and what the Lord hath joyned, no fleshly fancy of mine shall willingly separate. But if it be thy will, seeing he is so hard to give credit to thy holy messengers, without some proof in work first past, as for example this doctrine of the philosopher's stone, that so he may come to be allowed, though he imitate Thomas Didymus in his hard and slow belief. And because he is to receive the pledge of thy mercies, and mystery of the heavenly food, we would gladly hear of that holy sacrament some discourse for our better instruction, and his better encouragement to the mystery receiving."

Then was delivered a remarkable homily expounding Protestant Christian belief upon several points: the Creation, the fall of Adam (because he wanted the beauty and excellency of God's spirit for which he was created); of the sacrament of Christ's body, "the holy sign of peace between God and man"; and the mystery and wonder of the rite as shown to the disciples, not, as the wicked do, "tying the power and majesty of God and His omnipotence to the tail or end of reason, to be haled as she will....It is a holy miracle, and thou must believe, as the Disciples did, that thou partakest of the true Body of Christ sub forma panis. But receiving ceasing, the Sacrament ceaseth also." This in answer to Dee's interposed question. The Hussite doctrine of the permanence of the sacred element in the common food when blessed was of course much in men's minds in Prague. So with an injunction to "share this doctrine with your wives," this exposition ends.