

CHAPTER XIV

THE CASTLE OF TREBONA

“Welcome the sour cup of prosperity!
Affliction may one day smile again: and until then,
Sit down, sorrow.”

— Shakespeare, *Love’s Labour Lost*

Tribau, or Wittingau, the Trebona or our story, is a small village lying in the beautiful undulating scenery of the Ludnitz, a small tributary of the river Moldau. It is a few miles from Neuhaus and Weseli, not many from the town of Budweis, on the Upper Moldau, in Southern Bohemia.

In 1586 it consisted of little beside the castle, a Rathhaus, quarters for a small garrison, and a cluster of dwellings where Dee tells a fire broke out on Whit Sunday, 1585, and destroyed several houses. The castle was one of Rosenberg’s many residences in Bohemia, and apparently a favourite one. The Viceroy was now just over fifty (he was born on March 10, 1535); he married about this time, and his wife constantly accompanied him on his visits to Trebona. They had also another castle at Neuhaus, beside a residence with beautiful gardens bordering the Moldau opposite Prague. They were frequently on the wing, flitting from Krumau to Vienna and from Vienna back to Prague. He welcomed the English travellers himself at Trebona, assigned them their rooms, and promised them all that heart could desire.

The actions, which had long been interrupted, were now resumed in “a goodly chapel next my chamber,” where all the “appurtenances” were set up, with the “angelicall stone” in its frame of gold upon the table. Rosenberg had been already admitted to the sittings, in obedience to directions received on October 14. When the communications were made in English, Dee translated them into Latin for his benefit. But experiments with Kelley’s powder were now all-engrossing, and even the spirits pass for a time into the background. Kelley went off to Prague for three weeks and was followed by Rosenberg. Dee remained with his wife and children; after their hardships, poverty, dangerous and wandering life, poor Jane must have been thankful for so luxurious a shelter. Visitors for Dee constantly arrived. Among them was Dr. Victor Reinhold, the astronomer. Pucci also came for a fortnight.

In December Dee received a very flattering invitation from the Emperor of Russia (Feodor Ivanowich) to go and take up his residence at Moscow in the Court. Dee’s fame as a learned astrologer and mathematician had spread to Russia; still more was his reputation as an alchemist bruited abroad: perhaps he was already credited with having actually made gold by projection or transmutation.

The first intimation of the Emperor’s wish was conveyed by Thomas Simkinson, an Englishman, of Hull, commissioned by Edward Garland to go to Brunswick or Cassel, or wherever Dee might be found, and beg him to remain there until Garland could come from Russia. He might tell Dee that the Emperor, having certain knowledge of his learning and wisdom, is marvellous desirous for him to come to his country, and had given Garland a sealed letter of invitation, promising a sum of 2,000 pounds yearly and free diet from the royal kitchen if he will come.

His charges of removing shall be paid, and he shall travel royally with 500 hours to convey him through the land. If he thinks the salary offered too little, Garland, when he arrives, will assure him that if he asks as much more, he shall have it. The "Lord Protector," too, Prince Boris, took Garland in his arms on his departure and promised 1,000 roubles from his own purse beside the Emperor's allowance.

Simkinson reached Trebona on September 18, and at once declared his flattering errand. "On December 8 at noon, Garland came to me from the Emperor of Moschovia, according to the articles before sent unto me by Thomas Simkinson." On December 17, at Trebona, Edward Garland drew up a paper repeating all the former promises in the Emperor's name, and signed it, with Kelley, his brother Francis Garland, and others, as witnesses.

There is no doubt that the Emperor thought he was inviting to his Court the man who could fill his coffers and bring glory and prestige to his name. Hakluyt hints at it when he says the offer was made partly for his counsel about discoveries to the North-East, partly for some other weighty occasions. Dee was no self-seeker, or Court flatterer, although this was the fifth sovereign he says he might have served. The offer seems never to have tempted him from his loyalty to his own Queen. He bade Garland at once dismiss six out of the eight Russian servants he had brought to attend them on their journey, and turned to matters more important.

"On 19th December, to the great gratification of Master Edward Garland and Francis, his brother, which Edward had been sent to me with a message from the Emperor of Muschovia, that I should come to him, E.K. made projection with his powder in the proportion of one minim (upon an ounce and a quarter of mercury) and produced nearly an ounce of best gold; which gold we afterwards distributed from the crucible, and gave one to Edward."

It is quite significant that Kelley made the gold, Kelley showed it, and Dee is content to give him all the credit. The pangs and heartburnings and jealousies have yet to come. Now he only felt that at last he was victorious in his long quest. He was on the crest of the wave. His hour had come.

How the wonderful trick was done, Kelley could best describe.

Kelley was now constantly riding to Prague, or making longer expeditions to Poland, for he still had hopes of getting more money from Laski. By March his hope seems to have been realised, for Dee notes that Kelley paid him about 500 ducats in two or more sums (about 233 pounds). This plenitude of money of course encouraged the idea abroad that they were actually making it. When he returned from Prague on January 18, Kelley brought a handsome present from Rosenberg to Jane Dee, in the shape of a beautiful jewelled chain, the value of which was "esteemed at 300 duckettes," says Dee, "200 the juell stones and 100 the gold." In three days Kelley had posted off again to Prague, to join Rosenberg at his house in the scity. This time he took with him his brother Thomas, Francis Garland, and a Bohemian servant, Ferdinand Hernyck. No doubt he was pursuing his experiments for the "multiplying" of gold in the city, away from Dee.

Kelley's letter to Dee announcing this arrival of his in Prague is the only communication between this strange pair of partners that seems to have survived. It shows that erratic and wayward creature in a gentle and even affectionate light,

and although its pious protestations are obviously overdone, it pictures for us quite vividly the relations between the two, and partly accounts for the strength of the tie that bound Dee to his intractable pupil, soon to become his master. For while Dee laboured laboriously and scientifically with his alchemical compounds, Kelley at one bound overleaped the chasm and by some process best known to himself professed to have arrived at the goal.

To Dee's single-hearted nature such success was magnificent, wonderful. He began forthwith to treat his quondam skryer with added respect; the expression "Dominus Kelley" creeps once into the diary; and Kelley grew arrogant and overbearing. For the moment, however, he is all for friendship and respect.

"Prage. 1587. 25 Januarii." [This in Dee's hand.] (addressed) "To the Right Worshipful and his assured friend Mr. John Dee Esquire, give these. Magnifico Domino, Domino Dee.

"Sir. My hearty commendations unto you, desiring your health as my own; my Lord was exceeding glad of your Letters, and said, 'Now I see he loveth me,' and truly as far as I perceive he loveth us heartily. This Sunday in the Name of the Blessed Trinity I begin my journey [to Poland], wherein I commend me unto your prayers, desiring the Almighty to send his fortitude with me. I commend me unto Mrs. Dee a thousand times, and unto your little babes: wishing myself rather amongst you than elsewhere. I will by God's grace about twenty days hence return in the mean season all comfort and joy be amongst you.

"Your assured and immoveable friend
"E. KELLEY."

When this letter reached Trebona, Dee had gone riding with two horsemen of the city of Neuhaus, hoping to meet Rosenberg, who he thought would return that way from Vienna to Prague. Mrs. Dee at once despatched the servant Ludovic to meet his master. So Dee received Kelley's affectionate letter "in the highway, without Platz," a village about half-way to Neuhaus. Ludovic carried also a little note from Jane to her husband. It is the only letter of hers we have, but it confirms all that we suspect. We know her to have been a well-educated, well-read woman; the writing is strong and clear; and did not Francis Pucci describe her as a learned woman, "lectissima femina"? She must also have been an extraordinarily capable one to have controlled and managed her large household of children, assistants, apprentices, servants and miscellaneous visitors, often in the absence of her husband, and in a foreign land, constantly moving on from place to place in this nomadic life they led. Dee has a charming name for her. Somewhere in a letter he speaks of "my payneful Jane." Full of pains she must indeed have been, the model wife for an elderly, incomprehensible husband, using her intellectual powers to accommodate her family, while the learned man pursued his angelic visions and his alchemical experiments unhampered. Above all things she must have been a peacemaker, hot and hasty although she sometimes was. Here is the letter to the husband who had only left her that morning: —

"Swethart. I commend me unto you, hoping in God that you ar in good health as I, and my children, with all my household, am here, I prayse God for it. I have non other matter to write unto you at this time."

There is a capable and managing sound about “my” children and “my” household, which leads one to wonder what this practical housewife thought of all the angelic promises which were never kept or performed. At the outset of the mysterious Kelley doings she was, we know, in her impetuous way, annoyed, angry, probably contemptuous, but by this time she perhaps had grown either to believe in them or tolerantly to acquiesce. She was only thirty-two, yet she had lived through many strange experiences and was soon to be put to the strongest test possible to a woman.

By April Kelley was once more settled as part of the household, and on the 4th the crystal gazing was resumed. He professed to hear instructions to Rosenberg, who was present, to build a commonwealth, render tribute to Rudolph, and he shall be Duke of Brandenburg. To himself things are said he is not reluctant to hear. We have seen how almost immediately after his marriage he took a violent dislike to his wife. In the four years, it seems, he had reproached her for giving him no child. To him generation was the root principle of alchemy, and the phase of it in which he centred his attention. It is always the marriage of the red man, copper, and the white woman, mercury, that is to tinge the whole world with gold. Now a voice tells him why he is barren. Not because of his reckless, disordered life, but because she was of his own choosing — the wrong woman! Therefore he is to be seedless and fruitless for ever. Had it not been for the Dees’ kindness to her, and especially Jane’s, poor neglected Joan Kelley would have had but a sorry time. She was only twenty-four; lively and docile, she seemed to please everyone but her husband. Pucci, with perhaps a little flattery, calls her “*rarum exemplum juvenilis sanctitatis, castitatis, atque omnium virtutem.*” If she had not all the virtues, she at least had several. Her brother, Edmund Cooper, and another friend so loved her that they came over from England a year later on purpose to see if she and her husband could not be more reconciled.

Kelley had been more unsettled than ever, discontented with his wife, with his calling, its results, and above all with his position and his poverty. What was a pittance of fifty pounds a year to a man in constant intercourse with princes and nobles, with credulous fools possessed with dreams of gold? The same qualities that attracted Dee were equally magnetic with others. Laski loved him; Edward Dyer deserted his old friend Dee for this newcomer, a nobody. He had made himself invaluable to Rosenberg, who seems to have had implicit faith in his powers. Rosenberg induces the Emperor to employ him. Had he not already found the secret of projection? Was he not the possessor of the magic powder which waited only for the opportunity to be transformed into countless heaps of ducats? Only money was wanting, and that he could certainly get. But he must first be released from this galling position of medium. He told Dee that all through this Lent he had prayed once a day at least that he might “no more have dealing to skry.” At Easter-time he did receive a promise to be set free from the crystal gazing, as he desired, but his wish for freedom was not exactly approved by the angelic ministers.

“Is it a burthen unto thee to be comforted from above? O foolish man! By how much the heavens excel the earth, by so much doth the gift that is given thee excel all earthly treasure. Notwithstanding, thou shalt not at any time hereafter be constrained to see the judgment of the Highest, or to hear the voices of heaven, for

thou art a stumbling block to many....And the power which is given thee of seeing shall be diminished in thee, and shall dwell upon the first begotten son of him that sitteth by thee.”

The selection of a child as Kelley’s successor seems not to have been altogether unexpected. It had been hinted in Prague a year before that a boy would serve for the office; but that the choice would fall upon Dee’s own son must have come as a dreadful surprise, at any rate to his mother. No doubt the old man regarded it as a mark of special heavenly honour.

It is more likely that Jane, with her practical mind, regarded the change of medium with anything but satisfaction. Arthur was now seven and three quarters of a year old, a clever child, already well grounded in Latin, but far too tender in years and disposition to be made the subject of any psychological experiments. Fortunately for him, his skrying was a dismal failure, although it seems to have bent his childish mind towards the occultism he followed in after-life. Distinguished physician as he afterwards become, both at home and in the service of the Emperor of Russia, he was a true son of his father, and maintained to the end of his life a belief in alchemy and transmutation which nothing could shake.

Kelley was desired to initiate the child.

“I thereupon thinking that E.K. would, should or best could, instruct and direct the childe in that exercise, did alwayes await that E.K. would of himself call the boy to that exercise with him; and so much the rather because he said that he was very glad now that he should have a Witness of the things shewed and declared by spiritual creatures: And that he would be more willing to do what should be so enjoyed to him to do, than if only he himself did see. But when E.K. said to me that I should exercise the child and not he, and that he would not, I thereupon appointed with myself to bring the childe to the place, and to offer him, and present him to the service of Seeing and Skrying from God and by God’s assignment.”

Then Dee drew up a petition to put in the child’s mouth that he might be “a true and perfect seer, Hearer, Declarer and Witness of such things as might be revealed to him either immediately or mediately by the angels.” Three times a day for three days he was to offer this prayer thrice over, while seated at the stone. The poor child happily beheld in the magic crystal nothing more than dots and pricks, letters and lines, and “a young man in a white leathern doublet and a grey cloke, like hans of Gloats, his cloak,” of all which even his father could make little. On the fourth day came Kelley, to see how Arthur and his skrying progressed. But still the child saw nothing. Then Kelley applied himself to skry as usual. Looking from the gallery window, he had already without any crystal seen Il and Madimi, also Uriel, who justifies their words. What they command he hesitates to say. Next day he is again the percipient; the result is the same. At length, with feigned reluctance, he tells Dee of a vision of strange and subversive portent. It is so repugnant to him that he can hardly impart it. Madimi, throwing aside all her garments, mysteriously bids them participate in all things one with another. Kelley affects not to understand, but after more hesitation expounds to Dee that the sharing is to be in everything, even of their wives. All things are to be in common between them.

Dee, to whom Madimi is invisible, though he hears her voice, fiercely rebukes her: "Such words are unmeet for any godly creature to use. Are the commandments of God to be broken?" This participation, he insists to Kelley, can be meant only in a Christian and godly sense. Kelley construes the injunction very differently, but he affects a chaste horror and swears for the hundredth time that he will deal no more with the spirits.

Then Madimi, with scathing irony, addresses them both as "fools, and of little understanding." Not content to be hearers, would they be "Lords, Gods, judges of the heavens"? She turns away. "Your own reason riseth up against my wisdom. Behold, you are free. Do that which most pleaseth you."

It is a comfort to learn that the child Arthur had all this time fallen down "in a swoond." He was indeed very ill for some time afterwards, and small wonder.

Dee protested and argued with Kelley and with Madimi. He was consumed with grief and amazement that good angels could propound "so hard and unpure a doctrine." Had he not offered his very soul "as a pawn to discharge E.K. his crediting of them to the good and faithful ministers of Almighty God"? Was it not his life's work to withdraw Kelley from any kind of association with the bad spirits who had frequented him before he came to Mortlake?

Until two in the morning of this April 18, 1587, the pair sat up arguing, talking, praying. Kelley held forth about a little spirit, Ben, who had that day appeared to him in his laboratory alone, and had shown him how to distil oil from spirit of wine "over a retort in two silver dishes whelmed one upon another, with a hole through the middle and a sponge between them, in which the oil would remain." Ben had foretold Elizabeth's death in July (she lived for sixteen years), the death of the King of Spain and the Pope; in fact, a general moribundity of sovereigns. Francis Garland was a spy sent by Burleigh to see what they were doing; Rosenberg would be shortly poisoned; famine and bloodshed would cover the land. Many other dire calamities would happen if they were not conformable to the voice; chief of all, the virtue should be taken from Kelley's precious powder; it would be rendered unprofitable, and he would become a beggar. It was Ben, he says, who had brought him his powder.

Dee replied that he had found so much halting and untruth in Kelley's reports of actions when he was not present, that he would believe nothing save what by better trial he found to be true. But at last his resistance seemed to be overridden, and in the chill of the early morning he went to bed, heavy at heart in spite of his delusion. His poor wife was lying awake, wondering what turn their ill-starred fortunes were next to take.

"Jane," I said, "I can see that there is no other remedy, but as hath been said of our cross-matching, so it must needs be done."

Poor Mrs. Dee, shocked and horrified, fell a-weeping and trembling for a full quarter of an hour, then burst into a fury of anger. At last she implored her husband never to leave her. "I trust," said she, "that though I give myselve thus to be used, that God will turn me into a stone before he would suffer me in my obedience to receive any shame or inconvenience." She would eat neither fish nor flesh, she vowed, until this action, so contrary to the wholesome law of God, and so

different from former actions, which had often comforted her; was confirmed. Both the indignant women demanded a repetition of the action.

In obedience to Raphael's counsel, a solemn pact or covenant was humbly drawn up by Dee on the 21st, and signed by these four strange partners in delusion. It promised blind obedience, with secrecy upon pain of death to any of the four. It deprecated all intention of impurity and guilt. Its subscribers promise to captivate and tread under foot all human timorous doubting that the true original power and authority of sins releasing or discharging is from the Creator. True Christian charity spiritual, perfect friendship and matrimonial liberty between the four is vowed, and they beseech that this "last mystical admonishment" be not imputed to them for rashness, presumption, or wanton lust.

Dee's hand is unmistakable in the document. He regarded the new development apparently only as a symbol of further spiritual union, and a means of obtaining a closer entrance into the secrets of all knowledge. It was no matter to him, he says, if the women were imperfectly obedient. "If it offend not God, it offended not mee, and I pray God it did not offend him."

Kelley drew up a paper the day after Dee's, washing his hands of the whole matter, protesting that he did not believe so damnable a doctrine would be commanded, recounting his warnings to his worshipful Master Dee, and so on. On May 6 Dee spread his covenant, a document of the most truly devout character, before the holy south table in the chapel of the castle, with many prayers for divine guidance. The next day Kelley obtained the paper, cut it in pieces and destroyed it, made away with one of the crystals (which was found again under Mrs. Dee's pillow), and threatened to depart elsewhere with John Carpio. Coldness and jealousy fell between the pair.

So ended the whole extraordinary episode of the Talbot- Kelley spiritualistic revelations. Madimi appeared for the last time on May 23. Then the *Liber Mysteriorum* is closed. For twenty years there are no more records of angels' visits. And the few pages that remain are written in a halting hand in Dee's stricken old age, when he was seldom visited by his unseen friends, badly though he needed their comfort. No other medium like Kelley was ever found. One can only wonder whether, after so rude an awakening, even Dee would have implicitly trusted anyone again. These five years with the skryer had filled him to the brim with a consciousness of some power beyond his wit to control, a power amazing in its ingenuity to torture him. He had asked Madimi piteously if he should suffer any more of these pangs. He knew now that he would. Yet, in spite of all, these marvellous doings had brought him hours of exquisite happiness, moments when he had seemed lost in the unity of the combined wisdom of the ages, which to him meant — God.