

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE END OF KELLEY

“All you that faine philosophers would be,  
And day and night in Geber’s kitchen broyle,  
Wasting the chips of ancient Hermes’ tree,  
Weening to turn them to a precious oyle,  
The more you worke the more you loose and spoile.  
To you, I say, how learned soe’er you be,  
Go burn your Bookes and come and learne of me.”  
— Sir Edward Kelley, *Metrical Treatise on Alchemy*.

Before continuing the story of Dee’s life in Bremen and his return to England, the end of Kelley’s extraordinary meteoric career, which six more years extinguished, must be briefly traced.

Dee expected Kelley to join him at Stade. He confidently thought they would return to England together, obedient to the Queen’s summons. But Kelley was now a great man with Rudolph, who had given him an estate and a title, and established him at his Court in Prague as a citizen and councillor of state. Apparently he succeeded in keeping up the deception of making gold. The news of his promotion was conveyed by Dee to Walsingham, at Barn Elms, in a letter dated August 22, 1589, to which we shall again return. He speaks of Kelley as “my great friend, yet in Boemia,” and surmises that Walsingham may have heard direct from him, who is “now in most favourable manner created a Baron of the Kingdom of Boemia.”

The actual title conferred was *eques auratus*, a synonym for “miles” which took its origin in the fact that a knight’s armour was gilded. In English it was of course “Sir.” The title must have been conferred on Kelley very soon after Dee left Trebona in March; for by the end of June he is called Sir Edward by a couple of Englishmen, Robert Tatton and George Leycester, who with Edmond Hilton were at Trebona then, and came on to Dee at Bremen. Kelley commissioned them to take down particulars of the treachery of one Parkins, a Jesuit in Prague, who was plotting with the King of Spain and the Pope against England. He wished of course to score “his faithful discoverie of this treason.” He also desired Burleigh and others in England to know what great honour had been done him, and he obtained in February, 1590, a confirmation of the grant of his title to send him over, lest there should be any doubt in English minds. The document, curiously enough, is countersigned by Dr. Jacob Curtius, the acquaintance of three years before.

Constant letters passed between the two former fellow-workers through the year 1590, the messenger being either Thomas Kelley or Francis Garland. All manner of wild stories were current in England, and have been gathered up and repeated by every writer upon Dee and Kelley. The sober Anthony Wood relates that gold was so plentiful in Trebona before Dee left that the young Arthur played with gold quoits made by projection, while a youthful Count Rosenberg (he seems a quite fictitious person) was throwing about silver playthings procured by the like means. Burleigh had written for a specimen of their wonderful art, and it said that the Queen was actually the recipient of a warming-pan, from the copper or brass lid of which a piece had been cut, transmuted into gold, and replaced. Elias Ashmole

goes further in the story to say that “without Sir Edward’s touching or handling it, or melting the metal, onely warming it in the Fire, the Elixir being put thereon, it was transmuted into pure gold.” He adds that he has heard from a credible person (who has seen them) that Kelley made rings of gold wire twisted twice round the finger, which he gave away, to the value of 4,000 pounds: at the marriage of Rosenberg’s servant before alluded to. Ashmole adds: “This was highly generous, but to say the truth, openly Profuse beyond the modest limits of a sober philosopher.” Sir Thomas Browne says he heard from Arthur Dee, his friend, conclusive evidence of the manufacture of gold. The reader may smile at these fairy tales, but what is to be said of a staid and sober minister like Burleigh being ready to credit the truth of Kelley’s exploits, whether convinced by the warming-pan, or by other means? In a long letter to Edward Dyer, in 1591, who was then acting as the Queen’s agent in Germany, he urges him to use every means in his power to induce “Sir Edward Kelley to come over to his native country and honour her Majesty with the fruits of such knowledge as God has given him.” Dyer had been Dee’s friend for a great many years, as we know, and was Arthur’s godfather, but he transferred all his attentions to Kelley as soon as that clever trickster began making gold. Dee only says he “did injure me unkindlie.” Kelley and Dyer became inseparable, and Dyer wrote home to Burleigh wonderful reports of Kelley’s miracles. Ignoring all that had passed, Burleigh is ready to welcome the quondam coiner, forger, or what not, with open arms back to the service of his Queen. “If his knowledge is as certain as you make it, what would you have me think could stay him from flying to the service of his own sovereign?” If he is afraid of old reports, actions, disgrace, being brought up against him (and we know Kelley’s record was none of the cleanest), let him be assured that he shall have his Queen’s protection “against all impediments that shall arise.” Burleigh becomes almost poetical as he speaks of the patronage of “such a Princess, who never yet was stained with any breach of Promise to them that deserved her favour. If I did not know to whom I write, who has had long experience of her rare vertues,...I could use many arguments to move any man never to mistrust her.” He implores Dyer to induce Kelley to come. If he does not come, it can only be because by cunning or legerdemain he has deceived them and cannot do what he promises, or else he is an unnatural disloyal man and subject. In case Kelley will not come, he asks if Dyer cannot send a very small portion of his powder to make a demonstration to the Queen’s own sight. What the Treasurer would like most of all is that Kelley should “send her Majesty as a token a good round sum of money, say enough to defray the charges of the navy for this summer,” for the ships of Spain were gathering courage after their defeat. “But wishers and woulders were never good householders,” he ends. The Queen is at his house at Theobalds, and will be some time longer. He would not be content the time were tripled, so he “had but one corn of Sir Edward Kelley’s powder.” Burleigh and Kelley were also in direct correspondence. Beside urging his return, the Lord Treasurer, who seemed to consider Kelley as the storehouse of the elixir of life as well as of the philosopher’s stone, begs for a prescription with the proof of manufactured gold. In a brief note of February 18, 1591, Kelley says he will shortly send the good thing desired for your health.” He has received the salutations sent through Mr. Dyer, and “at his return you shall know how I thank you.” This, the only original letter of Kelley’s to be traced, characteristically promises what he never meant to do. Burleigh replied in May, again begging him to send “something of

your operation to strengthen me afore next winter against my old enemy the gout." He once more strongly urges Kelley's return. How can he hesitate to bestow the gifts that God has given him rather upon his own Prince and Countrie than upon strangers?

Kelley of course did not return, but apparently wrote again, urging powerful reasons of excuse. Burleigh's faith in him began to shake. He sent a last imperative recall, some of which may be quoted from the rough draft written in his own hand. It shows once more what sort of men the great Queen had to serve her, and what a Queen she was to serve.

Beginning "Good Sir Edward Kelley," Burleigh acknowledges Kelley's letters by Dyer. "Without particular knowledge of your impediments, I may not give any such censures as others soe unconsiderately, yea uncharitably, may doe. You confess a desire to return to your native countrie; your minde draws to your sovereign. This is commendable, yet many say if you come not, it is because you cannot perform what has been reported of you. Malicious persons say you are an imposter, like some in other countries have been proved. You fear severe punishment. Now, good knight, though I write thus plainly to you, yet such is my credit in Mr. Dyer, such my allowance of your loyal profession, such opinion do I firmly conceave of your wisdom and love expressed in your letters, such my perswasion of your habillitie to performe what Mr. Dyer has reported (by reason of the estimation, honor and credit I see that you have gotton by yr behaviour), that I rest only unsatisfied in your delaye of coming; and I am expressly commanded by Her Majestie to require you to have regard to her honour, and according to the tenor of her former letters, to assure yrself singularly favoured in respect of the benefit you may bring to Her Majestie....

"Be assured of worldly reward. You can make yr Queen so happie for her, surely as no subject she hath can do the like. Good Knight, let me end my letter conjuring you, in God's holy name not to keep God's gift from yr natural countrie, but rather help make Her Majestie a glorious and victorious power against the mallyce of hers and God's enemies. Let honor and glory move yr naturall hart to become honorable in yr own countrie rather than in a strange one, and leave a monument of yr name with posterity. Let no other country bereave us of this felicitie: that only, yea only by you, I say, is to be expected. Let no time be lost; we are all mortall: you that should be author, this noble Queen yt should be receiver thereof."

Then he politely acknowledges some gift Kelley has sent. Instead of an ingot of gold, it seems more like a geological specimen for a museum, and certainly does not excite the Lord Treasurer's immense gratitude.

"All this in answer to your by Dyer. I thank you for the montayn or rock sent safely from Staden. I will place it in my house, where I bestow other things of workmanship, and it shall be memoryall of yr kindness, wishing I might receive some small receipt from you yt might comfor my spyritts in myn age, rather than my coffers with any welth, for I esteeme helth above welth."

But Kelley knew better than to face the astute Englishmen at home. In Prague he felt secure, and all too bitterly he learned his mistake. A couple of independent letters from two English merchants to Burleigh and to Edward Wootton give the exciting story of his fall from favour.

He had been established in a house of his own close to the Palace; his wife and brother had rejoined him; Edward Dyer made it his headquarters. One day, the last of April, perhaps even before Burleigh's letter was dispatched, he was suddenly arrested by the fitful Rudolph's command, and thrown into prison. A large force of the imperial guard, accompanied by the City Provost and one of the Secretaries of State, burst uninvited into his house to take him whilst at dinner. But a friend at Court had whispered a word, and the evening before he had ridden off with one attendant towards Rosenberg. The intruders had to be content with haling off brother Thomas to prison, "pinacled like a thief." They searched the house thoroughly, broke open doors, and thrust their halberds into the beds or any place where "Sir Edward" might possibly lie hid. Satisfied he was not there, they sealed up certain of the rooms, laid some of the servants in chains — one was afterwards "racked" — and departed, leaving a guard over "Lady Kelley" and Mr. Dyer, forbidding them to stir from the house. Returning with their news to the Emperor, Rudolph "cursed in the Dutch manner," and gave orders to search the town and the highways.

Kelley had ridden off many miles towards his patron, the all-powerful Rosenberg, but being weary and fasting, halted at the inn at Sobislaus, fed, and threw himself on a couch to sleep. By three days after, May 2, the soldiers had tracked him down; and roughly seizing him, they cut open his doublet with a knife to search for concealed valuables or papers, vowing they cared not whether they took him dead or alive to the Emperor. Kelley appealed to his all-powerful friend, Rosenberg. "In Bohemia," says the merchant in his letter, "it is a rule that his Majesty dares do nothing without the Earl's consent, he being Burgrave of Prague, the immediate person and officer under the Crown." Rudolph was already sinking into the melancholy and madness in which he ended his days. However, Rosenberg's protection did not avail. Kelley was taken to the Castle of Purglitz, three miles from Prague, and there he was closely confined for more than two years.

And now for the cause of Rudolph's displeasure, and the reason of the arrest.

First, it is surmised to be debt, but the merchant adds that although Kelley is known to owe a large sum to two Cologne merchants who trade in jewels, he owes nothing to the Emperor, nor ever had put him to any charge, save for coals and house room.

Next it is thought he was in league with a professed gold-maker from Venice, executed by the Duke of Bavaria at Munich, on April 25. (Of him, too, Burleigh has written in his letter to Dyer.) Thirdly, the Emperor's fear that Kelley would depart for England is adduced. Dyer had brought autograph letters from the Queen recalling him. A doctor's son in the town, who had served Sir Philip Sidney in England, and knew her hand, had reported this. It was of course an invention; and the merchant opines Dyer is of too rare a discretion to permit secret letters to be seen or even heard of; it is more likely that Kelley has some time or other vaunted at table that the Queen had sent for him. "He is a man who taketh, as I hear, a pleasure that Princes desire him." Fourthly, it is the doing of the powerful family of the Poppels, second family in the kingdom, and great enemies of the Rosenbergs,

who have been “the setters up and principal maintainers of Sir Edward Kelley hitherto.” The fifth report is that Kelley had distilled an oil or medicine for the Emperor’s heart disease, which was poison. Lastly, the writer comes to what he takes for the true reason of Rudolph’s anger.

An Italian, named Scoto, having cast imputations on Kelley’s powers of projection, the Emperor sent for him to come and make proof of his art at Court. Kelley of course excused himself, saying he was sick. Three times he was summoned, and then the guard was despatched to bring him. The accusation was *Laesus Mejestatis*, and the city wonders what will be the end. The Emperor dare not openly execute him, for fear of Rosenberg and the strong feeling in the State for a change of ruler. Yet he may easily be put to death secretly in that castle where he is confined, “and Rosenberg not know otherwise than that he liveth, or is dead by disease. Almost grown now to be a common Practice in the Empire, and in the Palatine especially, noted that way.”

This dark hint is almost a prophecy of Kelley’s fate; but the doom was not yet quite prepared. On December 5, 1593, Dee received news of his having been set at liberty on the previous October 4, just two and a half years after his arrest. Not a word of him in Dee’s diary in the meantime, until March 12 of that year, when the old man records that he dreamt much of Kelley two nights running, “as if he wer in my house, familiar, with his wife and brother.”

Kelley characteristically says he was “utterly incapable of remaining idle even in prison, and employed his time in writing alchemical treatises,” from which it seems he was allowed books and papers, for his writings are mere compilations from ancient chief masters of the art. In *The Stone of the Philosophers*, dedicated to Rudolph, he speaks of two imprisonments, tells him grandiloquently that he has for two or three years (1588-91) used great labour and expense to discover for him that which might afford profit and pleasure; and adds, with great bombast, “If my teaching displeases you, you are still wandering astray from the true scope and aim of this matter, utterly wasting your money, time, labour and hope.” Truth is more desirable than anything else, and posterity will discover that he is to be counted among those who have suffered for it. Kelley as a sufferer for truth is highly entertaining, but he goes on to make a still more distasteful allusion. “It always way, and always will be, the way of mankind to release Barabbas and crucify Christ.”

Beside this treatise Kelley certainly produced an earlier writing of some sort on the subject, which Dee discussed with the Archbishop of Canterbury on July 13, 1590. It had apparently incurred his displeasure. Mr. Waite attributes two other short papers to Kelley, *The Humid Path* and *The Theatre of Terrestrial Astronomy*. A couple of rather quaint alchemical poems — one of thirty-nine stanzas, from which the heading of this chapter is taken — are doubtless by him, perhaps written also in captivity.

During the next year letters were two or three times exchanged between Kelley and Dee, and in March, 1595, Francis Garland, who had then not long returned from Prague, “came to visit me and had much talk with me of E.K.” Kelley was apparently then restored to the Emperor’s favour, for on August 12, Dee says he “receyved Sir Edward Kelley’s letters of the Emperor, inviting me to his servyce again.” Did Kelley think there might be further hints to be got from his old alchemical master? Then under date of November 25, 1595, Dee enters this curt

note: “the news that Sir Edward Kelley was slayne.” Never thereafter does he mention this adventurer’s name.

The prevalent story is that Kelley was again imprisoned in one of Rudolph’s castles, and that, attempting to escape by a turret window, he fell from a great height and broke both legs, receiving other injuries, from which he shortly died. It is even said with some amount of credibility, that the Queen wrote imperatively to Dyer to secure his release, and that everything was prepared in readiness to convey him secretly to England, and that he was escaping for that purpose when the accident happened. This story has hardly been tracked home to its source. It may be true. On the other hand, the end may have come in the more swift and secret manner suggested by the English merchant. In either case, the spirit warning of eleven years before, that he should die a violent death, was fulfilled. Into his forty years as much adventure, folly, trickery and deceit, fortune, fame, favour, riches and poverty, had been crowded as could supply material for many a volume of romance.

Some of the incidents were indeed used a few years after his death by more than one dramatist. Dee had only quitted the world about a year and a half when Kelley’s pretensions, Dee’s learning, and the whole paraphernalia of alchemy, were severely satirised by Ben Jonson in *The Alchemist* (1610), a play which reflects all the crudest superstitions of the time. The credulous knight, Sir Epicure Mammon, describes Subtle, the alchemist, as

“A divine instructor can extract  
The soul of all things by his art; call all  
The virtues and the miracles of the sun  
Into a temperate furnace; teach dull nature  
What her own forces are.  
A man the Emperor  
Has courted above Kelley; sent his medals  
And chains to invite him.”

In Butler’s *Hudibras*, first published in 1663, but written ten or fifteen years earlier, Dee and Kelley are again cited, though the satire is chiefly directed against Sidrophel, i.e., William Lilly. The devil is said to have appeared “in divers shapes to Kelley;” and in the description of Sidrophel, these lines occur:

“He had been long toward mathematics,  
Optics, philosophy and statics,  
Magic, horoscopy, astrology,  
and was old dog at physiology;...  
He had read Dee’s Prefaces before  
The Devil and Euclid, o’er and o’er;  
And all the intrigues ‘twixt him and Kelley,  
Lescus, and the Emperor, would tell ye.”

One may wonder how much these scurrilous references had to do with fixing Dee’s reputation in the eyes of his immediate posterity.