

## CHAPTER XVII

### RETURN TO ENGLAND

“If I have done my dutiful service any way to her Majesties well liking and gracious accepting, I am greatly bound to thank Allmighty God, and during my life to frame the best of my little skill to do my bounden duty to her most excellent Majestie.”

— Dee, *Compendius Rehearsall*

Upon Dee’s arrival in Bremen on April 19, 1598, a house was at once hired, and the family moved in on May 13. He put out his three saddle horses to grass in the town meadow till Michaelmas, for nine ducats, and presented the twelve Hungarian coach horses to the Landgrave of Hesse, to whose kindness he had been indebted for protection as he passed through his territories. In June, Thomas Kelley, his wife Lydia; Francis Garland, and Dyer’s man, Edward Rowley, left for England. At the same time Edmond Hilton returned to Prague. An agreement or bond had been entered into between the late partners that the proceeds of the wonderful discovery should be shared. Hilton was back on July 30, with news of Kelley: perhaps not good news, for three nights after, towards daybreak, Dee’s sleep was disturbed by a “terrible” dream, which visited him not for the first time, that “Mr. Kelley would by force bereave me of my books.” Hilton left almost immediately for England with a letter from Dee to Walsingham to disclose the treason of the Jesuit, Parkins. This letter has been already referred to [p. 201 in original], but it contains other interesting matter, all conveyed in Dee’s beautiful neat hand. He has already written to acknowledge the Queen’s gracious letter of safe conduct, received from Walsingham, but Hilton and the two English gentlemen, Tatton and Leycester, are still detained at Stade, waiting for a wind. After speaking of the designs of the Jesuit, he goes on to give the Secretary an important summary of the state of affairs in the Low Countries, where the struggle for independence was well advanced. “The Provinces all incline to a desire to endure one fortune and become one whole united. They acknowledge Her Majestie’s Wars to be just but uncompassable. Their minds are getting alienated from us, only fayr means and great wisdom will win them over.” He has taken counsel of “the one of all the inhabitants the most sharp-witted, the greatest understander of all occurrences generall of secret purposes; the best languaged one (as knowing Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, Italian, Dutch, etc.); and one employed in the councils; one who was courageous in the first bickerings with Spaniards at Antwerp; who has observed all the beginnings and proceedings of errors, political and military, committed on all hands. Now and then he visiteth me, and I have asked him to pen his opinion on what can be done to recover and reform the States, but as yet he has not found leisure.” Then he begs the Secretary’s leniency if he has offended in writing of matters not pertaining to him, “and of which no doubt your honour has already had all necessary advertisement from properly authorised persons.” He will write no more of public affairs, his coming thither was no public but his private cause, the beginning of his “nere return-making into my most derely beloved Native Country.”

At the same time (August 20), Dee wrote to his friend, Mr. Justice Young, that the messengers had been delayed twenty-five days waiting for a wind; that he feared

the Low Countries were bent on shaking off the Queen's authority if they could; and that he feared he should have "to endure this Breamish habitation this winter, as I do not hear a word of the approach of Sir Ed. Kelley, or of Mr. Dyer's return."

In Bremen, Dee mingled with all the learned and distinguished men of the time. A memento of this period is to be found in an album, the *Thesaurus Amicorum*, of Timon Coccious (or Koch), a young Bremen student who died while at Leyden University three or four years after. The album of white vellum, faded and yellowed with age, with its edges still shining with the mellow lustre of old gold, was the receptacle of autographs, wise and pithy sayings, original or quoted, all inscribed after the beginning of July, 1589. Sayings from Plautus and Seneca, Juvenal, Pythagoras and Homer, follow and press close upon the wisdom of Boethius, from *De Consolatione*, and the divine poetry of Dante. The first to write in the book was Bruno, Count Mansfeldt, Helmstad, July 1. He is followed by Dr. Cristoph Pezel, then Professor of Divinity and superintendent of the churches at Bremen, and on the seventh page is Dee's beautiful signature and his motto — in the light of posterity's unchallenged view of him, full of irony — "Nothing useful if not honest."

Mr. Hart, minister of the English colony at Stade, who had escaped from the Spanish service in Flanders with Sir William Stanley, and the Deputy Governor of Stade, both came from the port town near by to see Dee. Dr. Heinrich Khunrath was the chief writer of the advanced school of alchemists who passed from the pursuit of material gold to the discovery of incorruptible spiritual treasures hidden in the palaces of truth to which they provided a spiritual key; and it is a pregnant fact that all of his books were published after this conference with Dee. Daniel Vander Muelen was another visitor, and from Mr. Southwell Dee had news that Edward Dyer was sent on a mission to Denmark. Two or three weeks later, he met Dyer unexpectedly in the town. News came of Rosenberg, and several of Dee's men left him to return to Kelley. He was warned to leave his house in Bremen.

By November, Dee resolved to wait no longer for Kelley, but to start for England. He still hoped, however, to meet that individual ere he embarked. On November 19, his whole party took ship by the Vineyard. A crowd of townspeople and students collected to bid him good speed, and to see the homeward bound travellers off; quite a little scene took place, which must have pleased and flattered Dee immensely, for there was no lack of a man's full share of vanity in him. Pezel had composed some verses on his departure, had got them printed the night before, and as the party were leaving Bremen for the seaport, a few miles away, the Professor distributed copies as a parting surprise. The travellers arrived in the Thames at Gravesend on December 2, and on landing the next day went straight to the house of Mr. Justice Thomas Young, at Stratford. We may imagine Jane's relief at getting her children safely back to England, with the addition of Michael, born at Prague, nearly four years, and little Theodore, born at Trebona, nearly two years before.

Since Dee's departure from England six years ago, great events had happened. The "invincible" Armada of Philip had been beaten in a six days' running fight up the Channel. The Queen's hated rival, Mary Queen of Scotland, had been put to death; Leicester's short dictatorship of the Netherlands had begun and come to an end. Leicester had been dead about a year. New favourites had arisen in the Queen's favour. But even more significant than these public affairs had been the

upward movement in literature, the birth of dramatic art, a passionate outburst of poetic fervour, the growth of a taste for well-disciplined prose. Many splendid fruits of this movement had not yet seen the light, Sidney's *Arcadia* and the first part of Spenser's *Faerie Queen* were to be issued within a few months; the first play of Shakespeare was publicly performed within little more than a year of Dee's return. But Lyly and Marlowe had already, during his absence, given *Campaspe*, *Tamburlaine* and *Doctor Faustus*, to be performed by actors in the first stationary home of the earlier nomadic players, the theatres of Shoreditch, immediately to be followed by those of Bankside. Bacon was perhaps even then meditating his *Essays*, published some half a dozen years later; Hooker issued the first books of his monumental *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* within four years; and Nash, Peele, Green, and a horde of other writers, were contributing to establish the English literary renaissance. One can scarcely help wondering how much the fabulous stories of Dee and Kelley, which must have reached Marlowe's ears, contributed to his splendid dramatisation of the Faust legend (first printed in Frankfurt in 1587). But after all, even the story of Dee's angels and Kelley's gold, pales before the lurid glow of the stories of the earlier alchemists, Agrippa and Paracelsus.

Dee landed in England a disappointed and a partly disillusioned man, clinging to a belief which was yet useless, unprofitable to him. He could prove nothing of Kelley's exploits. But he lost no time in repairing to Court, and on December 19 he was graciously received by the Queen at Richmond.

On Christmas Day he first slept in his own house at Mortlake, and beheld for himself his ruined and rifled library, with its precious books and instruments missing. He himself was in dire straits. He had little left him save his wife and children, and some still faithful friends. He took the house over as a tenant from his brother-in-law, Fromond, and settled down in the old quarters. Adrian Gilbert was the first visitor, generously offering "as much as I could require at his hands, both for my goods carried away, and for the mynes." Very soon Thomas Kelley arrived and followed suit by offering the loan of ten pounds in gold; he afterwards "sent it me in Hungary new duckettes, by John Croker the same evening. He put me in good hope of Sir Edward Kelley his returning."

A second daughter was born, and christened at Mortlake, on March 5. The name given her was Madinia, suggested by the busy little spirit who had been so helpful at her first coming. The child was christened at Mortlake on the 5th, Sir George Carew as godfather, Lady Cobham and Lady Walsingham, godmothers. Letters came from Kelley by Garland in March, and replies were despatched by Thomas Kelley in April. Dee is careful to give his former skryer his full title: — "Sir Edward Kelley, Knight, at the Emperor's Court at Prague." "Francis Garland was by, and Mr. Thomas Kelley, his wife. God send them well thither and hither again."

On Lady Day, the children begin to go to school with Mr. Lee at Mortlake. "I gave him his house rent and forty shillings yerely for my three sons and my daughter. The house rent was allmost 4s. yerely, of Mr. Fisher his new house." Arthur was now ten, Katherine nine, Rowland seven and Michael five. The youngest boy, Theodore, born at Trebona February 28, 1588, was rather more than two. Dee notes that he was "wened" on August 14, 1589. Katherine was not long under the Mortlake schoolmaster, for on May 21 "my dowghter was put to Mistress Brayce at Braynford [Brentford], hir mother and Arthur went with her after dynner." On April 15, he writes of his neighbour and friend, the Vice-Chancellor: "Good Sir

Francis Walsingham died at night hora undecima.” Burleigh was the only one of the old friends left. He records an interesting visit from “the two gentlemen, the unckle, Mr. Richard Candish, and his nephew, the most famous Mr. Thomas Candish, who had sayled round about the world.” Cavendish was a Suffolk man. His wonderful voyage occupied two years and nearly two months. He died at sea within a couple of years from Dee’s note. The uncle Cavendish interested himself with the Queen and the Archbishop to obtain for Dee the Provostship of Eton. This, too, fell to the ground, and Cavendish considerately sent him a hogshead of claret. He also lent or gave money to Dee and his wife, in all 302 pounds: in “ryalls and angels.” Dee gave him in return one of his most valued treasures — an alchemical work: —

“A copy of my Paracelsus, twelve lettres, written in French with my own hand, and he promised me before my wife never to disclose to any that he hath it; and that if he dye before me he will restore it agayne to me; but if I dy befor him that he shall deliver it to one of my sonnes, most fit among them to have it. Theoddor had a sore fall on his mowth at mid-day.”

Dee’s income was now almost a negligible quantity. The parsonages had paid him no rent since he left England. He went two or three times to Lambeth, and talked boldly to Archbishop Whitgift of his right to them.

He began to interst himself in his immediate neighbourhood with the idea of stopping the “Bacchus Feast,” at Brentford, a rowdy celebration which had excited his indignation and of which he gave the Bishop of London a warning.

In August a domestic tragedy occurred: one of the women servants became melancholy and went out of her mind. Lunacy being a disease beyond even Dee’s medical knowledge, and for 300 years after, being treated more or less as demoniacal possession, it is no wonder that the remedies he tried were ineffectual. It seems another instance of the false views of Dee’s character that have been repeated over and over again, that the editor of his Manchester diary urges as proof of Dee’s magic and evil experiments that “some of the inmates of his house became suicides when in his service.”

“Aug. 2. Nurs her great affliction of mynde. Aug. 22. Ann my nurse had long byn tempted by a wycked spirit, but this day it was evident how she was possessed of him. God is, and hath byn, and shall be her protector and deliverer. Amen.

“25th. Ann Frank was sorrowful, well comforted, and stayed in Gods mercyes acknowledging.

“26th. At night I anoynted (in the name of Jesus) Ann Frank, her brest, with the holy oyle.

“30th. In the morning she required to be anoynted, and I did very devoutly prepare myself and pray for vertue and powr, and Christ his blessing of the oyle to the expulsion of the wycked, an then twyse anoynted, the wycked one did resist a while.

“Sept. 8. Nurse Ann Frank wold have drowned hirsself in my well, but by divine Providence I cam to take her up befor she was overcome of the water.”

After this Dee had the woman carefully watched.

“Sept. 29. Nurse Ann Frank most miserably did cut her own throte, afternone abowt four of the klok, pretending to be in prayer before her keeper, and suddenly and very quickly rising from prayer, and going toward her chamber as the mayden her keper thoght, but indede straight way down the stayrs into the hall of the other howse behind the doore did that horrible act. And the mayden who wayted on her at the stayr fote followed her and missed to fynde her in three or fowr places, tyll at length she hard her ratle in her owne blud.”

In november the Queen came to Richmond and sent for Dee. She offered gaily to send him something to “kepe Christmas with.” This promise was repeated to his friend, Richard Cavendish, a week or so later: “she told him she wold send me an hundred angells to kepe my Christmas withall. Next day, December 4, the Queen’s Majestie called for me at my dore, circa 3 1/2 a meridie, as she passed by, and I met her at the East Shene Gate, where she graciously putting down her mask did say with mery chere, ‘I thank thee, Dee. There was never promise made but it was broken or kept.’”

The thanks were obviously ironical for the reminder of the promise; the rest of the speech was rather cruelly jocose, for, as Dee adds, she had promised to send the money that day. However, on the 6th, an earnest of the gift arrived, in the shape of 50 pounds. On the 14th, she again called for Dee as she rode by his door, “to take ayre,” and he met her at the park gate as before. He does not indicate the subject of the conversation, but it was probably a request on his part for some kind of royal permission to continue his experiments in alchemy or transmutation, for on the 16th he tells of a visit from Richard Cavendish, who has received from the Queen, “warrant by word of mouth to assure me to do what I wold in philosophie and alchemie, and non shold chek, controll, or molest me.” Coupled with this message, she sent another promise to make up the 100 pounds.

Dee’s mind was now bent, he says, to deal with his “alchemical exercises,” and the only distractions he appears to have had were the constant visitors and small disasters of the children. The boy Rowland fell into the Thames on August 5, over head and ears, about noon or soon after. Their favourite place of play seems to have been on the river bank, and accidents there were of no infrequent occurrence. Arthur, when a child, had fallen from the top of the Water-gate Stairs to the bottom, and had cut his forehead badly. Theodore also had a nasty fall.