

CHAPTER XX

ADIEU TO COURTS AND COURTING

Let me weep—
My youth and its brave hopes, all dead and gone,
In tears which burn! Would I were sure to win
Some startling secret in their stead, a tincture
Of force to flush old age with youth, or breed
Gold, or imprison moonbeams till they change
To opal shafts! — only that hurling it
Indignant back, I might convince myself
My aims remained supreme and pure as ever.
— Browning, Paracelsus.

The immediate result of the Commissioners' visit to Mortlake was a gift of a hundred marks from the Queen. The Countess of Warwick sent off "her gentleman, Mr. Jones, very speedily," to tell Dee that Sir Thomas Gorges "had very honorably dealt for" him in the matter, and that the gift was granted. The money was brought next day (December 2) by Sir Thomas himself. He brought also a letter "full of courtesie and kindness and a token of six old angells of gold," from Lady Howard to Jane. Dee seems to have become intimate with Lady Warwick through his early friendship with John Dudley, Earl of Warwick, who died, aged twenty-four, in 1554. In his Preface to Euclid, Dee has left an etched portrait of his own age. "No two besides himself," says Dee, "can so well say what roots vertue had fastened in his breat, what rules of godly and honorable life he had framed to himself, what vices notable he took great care to eschew, what prowesses he purposed and meant to achieve."

Dee's "few lynes of thankfulness" to the Queen for her gift were probably written at once, but only delivered by Lady Warwick on February 15, at Hampton Court, on the eve of a move to Somerset House.

On the strength of this dole, Dee was able to settle some pressing debts, and to hire a coach and go off with his wife and Arthur and Kate, to spend Christmas and New Year's Day at Tooting, "at Mr. R. Luresey his howse." The Lord Treasurer, he reports, lay dangerously sick at the time. On the 2nd they returned. On the 7th, welcome letters, perhaps containing money, arrived from Count Laski in Livonia, to which Dee replied on the 20th, sending his letter by a Danish ship called the John of Dansk.

His reputation as an astronomer and mathematician now procured for Dee a pupil, from whom he was to receive in exchange a considerable gift or loan.

"March 17, 1593. At six after none received from Mr. Francis Nicholls 15 pounds, part of one hundred pounds, the rest whereof, 85 pounds, is to be receyved from Mr. Nicholls within a fortnight after the annunciation of Our Lady next; and after that in the beginning of June 100 pounds, and in Julie the third hundred pounds, and I am to teach him the conclusion of fixing and teyming of the moon."

A rather unwise purchase seems to have been made this may; Dee bought the "next mansion house, with the plat and all the appertenances about it," of Mr. Mark Pierpoint, of Mortlake. It is true the whole mansion only cost 32 pounds, but it entailed other purchases and soon had to be mortgaged. Possession was not obtained till the autumn. A "hovel" in the yard was bought from Goodman Welder in July for a new angel and five new shillings. The bargain with Pierpoint was concluded in the street, when "before Jane my wife, I gave him a saffron noble in earnest for a drink penney."

Crowds of visitors came to Mortlake to dine. Mr. Beale (who was a borrower of books from Dee — his own Famous and Rich Discoveries, and the *Chronica Hollandiae Magnae*), and his wife; Francis Blount, uncle of Sir Charles, who had been in Constantinople; Mistress Banister; Mr. Redhead, one of the Queen's gentlemen ushers, and his wife; the mother of John Pontoys, about whom we shall hear more; Mr. Gubbens, book-binder, and Mrs. Gubbens, and many others. Hospitable as ever, Dee had offered shelter for two months to Antony Ashley, Clerk of the Council, his wife and family, "who used me worshipfully and bountifully for our friendship. They had my mother's chamber, the mayde's chamber, and all the other house."

Not only books were lent, but instruments also. "On Thursday, Mr. Saunders of Ewell, sent home my great sea cumpass, but without a needle. It came in the night by water."

In August he is much in train with the Lord Keeper, Sir John Eckford, at Kew. On the 8th he dined there, again on the 17th, this time taking Mrs. Dee and Katherine, who at twelve was sufficiently grown up to dine out. On the 28th he was all day with the Lord Keeper. The entries we have here, "Mr. Web and the philosopher came as I was with the Lord Keeper," and "Mr. Web and the philosopher cam again," pique one's curiosity.

At the end of the month, Dee notes the departure from his service "uppon no due cause known to me," of Elizabeth Kyrton, a servant who had been with him twelve years, had passed through the vicissitudes of travel-life in Bohemia, as Rowland's nurse; left in charge of him, as we have seen, in Cracow when the others went on to Prague. She had served five years on apprenticeship and seven for wages: five at four and two at five nobles a year. Of her wages there was now four pounds four shillings due. Dee in paying her, presented a new half-angel; Jane Dee gave her another; Arthur half-a-crown for him and his brother (Rowland), and Katherine the like sum for herself and Madinia. Elizabeth's going seems to have upset the domestic arrangements for a month or so later Dee makes an unusual entry about his wife: "Jane most desperately angry in respect of her maydes." Margery Thornton, Elizabeth's successor, left next day, and Dorothy Legg came for 30s. yearly.

A messenger from Laski arrived, Mr. Cornelio Camaiere, and stayed a week. These constant communications do not by any means support the contention that Laski parted with Dee in anger, ruined by his costly experiments. It is more probable that Laski was urging him to return and continue Kelley's work.

The Countess of Cumberland, Lord Willoughby and his sister, the Countess of Kent, came to visit Dee. Willoughby dined and next day sent him 20 pounds. Dee was annoyed by "Mr. Gray, the Lady Cumberland's preacher, his wrangling and

denying and despising alchemicall philosopher.” A New Year’s gift of 20 angels, in a new red velvet purse, came to Jane Dee from the Lord Keeper.

Michael Peiser, doctor to the Duke of Brandenburg, visited Dee, also Walter Van der Laen, “an astronomer of great promise.” Mr. John Aske sent as a present two little double gilt bowls, weighing thirteen ounces and a half. “Sir Thomas Willes offer philosophical came to my hands, by Mr. Morrice Kiffen.” The children, Madinia and Theodore, were not very well. Several visits were paid to Mr. Webbe, who had been in the Marshalsea prison since the days before Christmas. His chests and boxes were sealed up. It is possible he was the Mr. Webbe who was employed by the Queen to visit and report on Dyer and Kelley at Prague. He may even have been suspected of bringing some of Kelley’s manufactured gold to Dee. Bartholomew Hickman and his brother were a good deal to and fro; Bartholomew was first brought to Dee as a lad by his uncle, in 1578, with an introduction from Sir Christopher Hatton. Now, his daughter Jane was taken into service. Dee gave him a nag that the Lord Keeper had presented, and he rode frequently “homeward,” to Shugborough in Warwickshire. In December 1594, Dee “preferred” him to Lord Willoughby’s service at the Barbican, and there is a whole history about his livery, which was ordered from a Fleet Street tailor, Mr. Jonson.

Dee’s health was now often affected in one way or another. The first mention of trouble in the kidneys was in 1592, when, at Court at Greenwich, a midnight seizure was eased by a glyster, applied by Dr. Giffard. There were other slight attacks, and in March 1594, he had a

“Great fit of stone in my left kidney: but I drunk a draught of white wyne and salet oyle, and after that, crabs’ eyes in powder with the bone in the carp’s head, and about four of the clock I did eat tosted cake buttered, and with sugar and nutmeg on it, and drunk two great draughts of ale with it; and I voyded within an hour much water and a stone as big as an Alexander seed. God be thanked! Five shillings to Robert Web part of his wages.”

This servant was discharged on June 23 with forty shillings for a full satisfaction of all things. “On July 1, I gave Robert yet more, a French crown for a far well.”

A year and a half passed after the visit of the Commissioners, and beside the immediate result of a donation of a hundred marks, nothing had accrued to better Dee’s position. He determined then to redouble his efforts and bring something to pass. He certainly had enlisted the aid of powerful friends, although no doubt there were still many suspicious enemies.

On May 3, 1594, the Queen sent for him to come to her in the privy garden at Greenwich, between six and seven o’clock in the evening. She received him alone save for the presence of her two ladies, Lady Warwick, Dee’s very good friend, and Lady Cecil. Dee presented her with a writing which he calls “the heavenly admonition,” which he says she took with grateful thanks. On the 18th, he writes “Her Majestie sent me agayne the copy of the letter of E.K. with thanks by the Lady Warwick.” He had received letters from Kelley four or five weeks earlier, on March 28, and he probably had copied out for her certain passages, doubtless referring to the fabulous transmutation of metals. Did he still hold out hopes that he might be able to achieve a like success? On the 21st, “Sir John Wolley moved my sute to her

Majesty. She granted after a sort, but referred all to the Lord of Canterbury.” “On the 25th. Dr. Aubrey moved my sute to her Majesty, and answered as before.” His suit was promotion to the Mastership of St. Cross, the post which had so long been the goal of his hopes, but which he was never destined to attain. He had set out at length in his Rehearsall for the Commissioners, sundry good reasons why he desired it, “rather than any other living, see, or dignity of like value in any other place.” First, he gave as a reason his longing to retire to a quiet spot away from the multitude and hoards of friends and acquaintances, chance visitors, and distinguished strangers, who positively “haunted” his house at Mortlake. There, he could deny himself to no one without offence or breach of friendship. It was fatally easy and cheap for every curious person from London, or from the Court, to find his way down to that big rambling place by the riverside, with whose stills and furnaces, and wonderful doings, rumour was so rife. So much for privacy, next for economy. Fuel, coals, bricks, and all things necessary for his purpose, will be cheaper at Winchester than near London; the glass-houses of Sussex are not far away, and he will be able to give personal supervision to the making of special vessels. At Mortlake there are too many eyes and tongues. The south coast is within easy reach, and it will be possible to communicate with his friends abroad, to get over things and workers necessary, and “have the more commodious place for the secret arrival of special men to come unto me there at St. Crosses; some of which men would be loath to be seen or heard of publicly in Court or City.” Is it possible that he is still thinking of Kelley, who, though then (1592) an Emperor’s favourite and the bearer of a title, could easily in England be identified with Talbot the coiner, forger, and necromancer of former days?

Then Dee sets out in his Rehearsall the capacity of the dwelling at St. Cross, which is roomy enough to entertain rare and excellent men from all parts of the world, as well as any of his fellow-countrymen. This will be for the honour and credit of England. There is room also for lodging his staff of mechanical assistants; for a printing house to be set up for “reproducing good, rare, and antient bookes in Greek and Latin,” and “some of my own, to be printed with my own ordering and oversight.” Then he lays stress upon the desirable surroundings, a chapel where divine service is held every day, for bringing up his children and family devoutly. He ends with the advantages of Winchester School, close at hand, not only for his four sons “to become Grammarians in,” but for his obtaining help from the “good Greek and Latin Grammarians and fair writers in that school, for copying out books for her Majesty.”

He is teeming with all these projects and activities in spite of his sixty-five years. He was a born librarian; and still had a national library of books and manuscripts at heart as much as when, nearly forty years before, he had tried in vain to induce Queen Mary to found one.

Dee’s eloquent persuasions so far prevailed with the Queen that a draft was prepared before the end of May, granting to Lord Cobham the next advowson of “Holyrood,” or St. Cross, at Winchester, in the Queen’s gift, to present to John Dee, M.A., on the death or resignation of Dr. Robert Bennett, the present incumbent.

Having drawn up this very full account of his doings and writings, to present to the Commissioners, Dee was naturally anxious that the appeal should be as widespread and far-reaching as possible. Archbishop Whitgift had shown himself favourably inclined, and Dee determined to approach him with a copy of that part of

the Rehearsall in which he recited the titles of the books he had written. He prepared a Letter containing a brief Discourse apologeticall with a plaine Demonstration and fervent protestation for the lawful sincere and very faithful and christian course of the philosophicall studies and exercises of a certaine studious gentleman, an ancient servant to her most excellent Majesty Royall, addressed to the Archbishop; he probably presented it himself during this summer of 1595. It is a protest and an appeal, and emphatically states that from his youth he has used good honest lawful and Christian means to attain such knowledge as shall honour God, his country and his Queen. It ends with a prayer that he may be found of the Archbishop, and undoubtedly acknowledged by the wise and just, to have been a zealous and faithful student in the school of Verity and an ancient Graduate in the school of Charity.

On June 3, Dee and Jane, accompanied by all their seven children, four boys and three girls, their ages ranging from Arthur, the Westminster boy of fifteen, to Frances, the baby of two and a half, presented themselves before the Queen at Sion House, Isleworth. Jane was permitted to kiss her hand. Evidently this was an expression of thanks for the official preliminaries of the grant of St. Cross. The Archbishop was present, and Dee humbly requested him to come to his "cottage." The invitation was repeated on the 6th, when Dee supped with the Primate. Things were not, however, settled so quickly. Dr. Robert Bennett had to be provided with a better position before he would resign; some hitch occurred, and on June 29, after a visit to the Archbishop, at Croydon, the poor man writes distractedly of his broken hopes: —

"After I had hard the Archbishop his answers and discourses, and after that he had byn the last Sonday at Tybalds with the Quene and Lord Threasorer, I take myself confounded for all suing or hoping for anything that ever was. And so adiew to court and courting tyll God direct me otherwise! The Archbishop gave me a payre of sufferings [sic] to drinke. God be my help as he is my refuge. Amen."

Everything fell through, and things began to look darker than ever. Michael, who had been a delicate child, fell ill in July. On the 6th, he "becam distempered in his head and bak and arms." Dee himself was unwell, complaining of headache and internal pains, but he does not forget to note that he paid "Letice my servant 5s., part of her wages, with part whereof she is to buy a smok and nekercher." Michael's illness was short: "July 13th, in ortu solis, Michael Dee did give up the ghost, after he sayed `O Lord, have mercy upon me!'" His father omits any reference to the child's burial.

The summer passed with very little to record in the diary beyond a visit on Aug. 25, from Ferard, the herbalist of quaint and fragrant memory; another on the 30th, from "Monsieur Walter Mallet, who toke his leave to go to Tholose. He had the fix oyle of saltpetre." Dee sends letters in September to Kelley, and in October determines on another appeal to royal favour. But Elizabeth was getting old and hard to move; Burleigh also was failing. Dee wrote in his wife's name to Lady Scudamore, her old friend and Katherine's godmother, begging her to intercede with the Queen that either he might appear and declare his case before the Council, or else have a licence under the Great Seal to go where he would. St. Cross was farther off than ever; England cold and inhospitable; and he prepared to say a final

good-bye to courts and courting at home, and betake himself to Germany, or Austria, or some other land. Francis Garland arrived on December 2 from Prague, "just as I came five years ago to a day from Bremen to England." Little profit indeed had he reaped in that five years.

On the 7th, "Jane delivered her supplication with her own hand to the Queen, as she passed out of the privy garden at Somerset House, to go to dinner with Sir Thomas Heneage at the Savoy." Elizabeth handed the letter to the Lord Admiral, but took it again from him, and kept it on her cushion. The next day, the Lord Admiral and Lord Buckhurst reminded her of the matter; presently she told the Archbishop that she wished Dee to have Dr. Day's place of Chancellor at St. Paul's. "8th Dec. The Chancellorship presented. The Archbishop of Canterbury willing," he writes; but this was apparently another castle in the air, for Dr. William Day was not appointed Bishop of Winchester till a year later, November 23, 1595, and although Dee's name appears as Chancellor under the date of December 8, 1594, he seems never to have held office.

His friends, however, were not idle. In a month's time, January 3, Archbishop Whitgift was recommending Elizabeth to grant him the Wardenship of Christ's College, Manchester, in her own gift. Dr. William Chadderton, who was then Warden and Bishop of Chester, was to be promoted to the see of Lincoln, and here was an opening for Dee. On February 5, Sir John Wolley endeavoured to get her to sign the patent for his appointment, "but she deferred it." Dee was up and down to London from Mortlake, and on February 10, at two in the afternoon, he "toke a cut-purse taking his purse out of his pocket in the Temple." On April 18, the Queen did sign the bill, when it was offered her by Dee's friend and neighbour at Mortlake, John Herbert, Master of the Requests. On May 25, 26, 27, it passed the Signet, the Privy Seal, and the Great Seal; and, as a climax to his entry in the diary, Dee adds, "3 pounds 12s. borrowed of my brother Arnold," doubtless to pay the fees.

The Earl of Derby gave him letters of introduction, and he was soon in correspondence with Oliver Carter, one of the Fellows; with Thomas Williams, another; and with Mr. Goodier, lessee of the tithes belonging to the Warden and Fellows. Carter and Williams were already at law with each other, and soon were both to be at loggerheads with Dee and his laudable desires to set the tangled affairs of the college straight. Carter was one of the moderators of the monthly lecture in Manchester, had great influence, and seems to have been unprepared to welcome a Warden of Dee's reputation.

"July 31st. The Countess of Warwick did this evening thank her Majestie in my name, and for me, for her gift of the Wardenship of Manchester. She toke it graciously and was sorry that it was so far from hense, but that some better thing neer hand shall be fownd for me; if opportunitie of time would serve, her Majestie wold speak with me herself. I had a bill made by Mr. Wood, one of the clerks of the signet, for the first frutes forgiving by her Majestie."

So at length there was something tangible in prospect. Things had to be settled up at Mortlake and preparations made for the journey northward. We may be sure that Dee's gratification at receiving a post of some sort, after a lifetime of waiting, was mixed with regret at quitting the place that had been his home for so

long. His “yong coosen, John Aubrey, came in May to recreate himself for a while,” and stayed nearly a month.

On August 14, Jane’s youngest child, a girl, was born. She was baptised at Mortlake as Margaret Dee on the afternoon of August 27; godfather, the Lord Keeper; godmothers, the Countesses of Cumberland and Essex, all three represented by deputy. The Countess of Essex was Walsingham’s only daughter and heir. She had been Sidney’s widow, and was now married to Essex.

Dee was now entertained often by Lord Derby at Russell House, once to meet some German guests. On October 9 he dined with Sir Walter Raleigh at Durham Place. This palace in the Strand had seen many vicissitudes before it had been given to Raleigh by the Queen. Originally the residence of the northern bishops, it had been seized by an earlier king. Lady Jane Grey had been wedded there. Her too ambitious father-in-law had gone thence to the Tower and the scaffold. Catholic plots against Elizabeth had been hatched by Spaniards in this, her own house, and now the great seaman, fresh from far Guiana, was housed in a little turret, overlooking the river and the ships.

Dee was anxious to reclaim, before going to his new home, an Arabic book lent to some friend in Oxford. He had written to Mr. Harding and Mr. Abbott several times for its return about a year and a half before. Now, on October 20, he sent his man Richard Walkden to Oxford to find and bring it. The man returned from a fruitless errand, but on November 19 “my Arabic book was restored by God’s favour.” His gratitude expressed itself in a practical manner to the trusted Richard:

“I delivered unto Richard Walkedyne my man, Mr. Robert Thomas his fustian dublet, for 10 shillings of his wages. I gave him more when he was to ride down with my wife: 10s., whereof 6s. 4d. was due to him that he had layd out for me. The other 3s. 6d. was of his wages.”

A portion of goods and furniture had already been despatched towards Manchester by a carrier named Percivall, and on the 26th Jane and her children all set off by coach towards Coventry, a usual half-way halting place on the high-road to Lancashire. A last piece of business was transacted on December 23 with John Norton, stationer, to whom Dee owed money, perhaps for printing: “I payd him ten poulds in hand and was bound in a recognisance before Doctor Hone for the payment of the rest, 10 poulds yearly, at Christmas, and Midsummer 5 poulds, tyll 53 poulds 14s. 8d. more were paid.” The same day he received 30 poulds in part payment of 100 poulds for the house at Mortlake, which he had lent to Mr. Paget.