

CHAPTER XXII

COLLEGE AFFAIRS

“I came among a people who relied much on dreams. And I told them except they could distinguish between dream and dream they would mash or confound all together. For there were three sorts of dreams. For multitude of business sometimes caused dreams; and there were whisperings of Satan in man in the night season; and there were speakings of God to man in dreams.”

George Fox, Journal

The Warden was apparently absent from his charge at Manchester for two years and a quarter, between March, 1598, and June, 1600. When he resumed his diary to chronicle his return, it appeared that he had been very busy in London, arranging for a special commission to sit in the college chapter house, to inquire into encroachments made upon the manor of Newton. His wife and two elder sons, Arthur and Rowland; Mary Nicholls, daughter of his old friend and pupil, Francis Nicholls; all travelled with him from London. What became of the younger children we can only guess. The party set out on the 10th and arrived in Manchester on June 18. Rowland was then seventeen, a Grammar School boy on Bishop Oldham's foundation in Manchester. Early in the following December, he obtained an exhibition at Oxford from the school. Dee, as Warden, was charged with certain official visits of inspection of the Grammar School, and was by no means always pleased with the result. He says, for instance, on August 5 of this year, “I visited the Grammar Schole, and fownd great imperfections in all and every of the scholers, to my great grief.” Of an earlier visit he says it was “to see the ower, &x., for Mr. Heton,” i.e., to see the clock.

Dee had almost completed his seventy-third year, and had maintained his bodily strength on the whole remarkably well. This summer he observed that for the first time in his life his pulse assumed the well-known symptom of intermittent beating, or pulsation. With all his usual exactitude, he records that his pulse kept on missing a pulsation after the fifth, or the seventh, or eleventh beat, although it was for the rest strong and equal. He mentions a great many sleepless nights. “Nocte Amaritudo mea,” “Circa mediam noctem Amaritudo mea,” are entries that occur with some frequency. On July 7, he says, “This morning, as I lay in my bed, it came into my fantasy to write a booke: De differentiis quibusdam corporum et spirituum.” His views on this subject are again sometimes noted. If they are not about books, they concerned that long-frustrated hope of his life, that he might actually one day, and by no fraud or trickery, stumble on the secret which Kelley had professed to know. By this time, Dee must have been assured of Kelley's knavery, and yet his faith in the possibilities of alchemy remained unshaken to the end. “I had a dream after midnight,” he says, “of my enjoying and working of the philosopher's stone, with other. My dream was after midnight, toward day.” Alas! this pleasure he was never to enjoy in the flesh. Next night: “I dreamed that along betwene Aldgate and the postern on Tower Hill did men stand in a lane, with pikes in theyr hands, as though more should come to them, or that they wayted for somebody. But theyr regard and looking was directly to Y Towre, where certeyn

great personages dyd stand; and one of them as upon a stage did declare with a loud voice to the pikemen, matter of importance, very loud.”

The description of the topography of his dream, given by this Londoner born, is very exact. The gate of Aldgate, taken down in 1606, was the eastern postern of the City, not far from St. Botolph's Church. So the lane of pikemen was a very long one, or seems so to us, who know the distance covered with hundreds of buildings and a network of streets.

There was little time now for him to devote to alchemy by day. His work lay in a more practical direction: —

“July 17. I willed the Fellows to com to me by nine the next day. July 18. They cam. It is to be noted of the great pacifications, unexpected of man, which happened this Friday; for in the fore-noone (betwene nine and ten) when the Fellows were greatly in doubt of my heavy displeasure, bu reason of their manifold misusing of themselves against me, I did with all lenity interteyn them, and shewed the most part of the things that I had brought to pass at London for the Colleg good; and told Mr. Carter (going away) that I must speak with him alone. Robert Leghe and Charles Legh [the singing men] were by. Secondly, the great sute between Redich men and me was stayed, and by Mr. Richard Holland, his wisdom. Thirdly, the organs, uppon conditions, wer admitted. And fourthly, Mr. Williamson's resignation granted, for a preacher to be gotten from Cambridge.”

Richard Holland, of Reddish and Heaton House, was a man of some note in Manchester, a feoffee of the Grammar School, and three or four times sheriff of the county. The “preacher gotten from Cambridge” to succeed the last unsatisfactory curate was William Bourne, a Fellow of St. John's. “July 31. We held our audit, I and the Fellows, for the two yeres last past in my absence: Olyver Carter, Thomas Williams and Robert Birch, Charles Legh, the elder, being receyver.” This entry in the diary seems to make it plain that Dee was absent from Manchester during the whole of the two years of which we have no account. In July, too, Dee records the loan of his second part of Holinshed's Chronicle to Mr. Randall Kemp.

In September, the commissioners appointed by the Bishop of Chester again met, and called Dee before them in the church, “about thre of the clok after none, and did deliver to me certain petitions put up by the Fellows against me to answer before the 18th of this month. I answered them all eodem tempore; Yet they gave me leave to write at leisure.” The commissioners were Richard Holland and William Langley, both of whom we have met before, with the rector of Stockport, Richard Gerard. Things perhaps were set on a little better foundation for a time. Points of dispute were referred to the steward, Humphrey Davenport, “Counsayer, of Grays Inn,” and Oliver Carter, the contentious Fellow, died within three or four years.

The last troublous years in Manchester must be briefly passed over, and indeed the material for them is scanty. Dee had to borrow money on more plate, “double gilt potts with cover and handells,” “bowles and cupps with handles,” from Edmund Chetham, the high master of the Grammar School; and he had not been able to redeem them when Chetham's father and executor made his will in March, 1603. He says in it that Dee delivered to his son “six severall parcells of Plate to be kept as a payne or pledge for the same [loan], which by reason of my said

executorshippe are now come into my possession," and he wills the ten pounds lent upon them to his other sons Humfrey and Ralphe. When, if ever, the pieces were redeemed, does not appear. Another valuable article — "a silver salt, dubble gilt, with a cover, waying 14 oz.," had to be deposited with Adam Holland in January 1601, for a loan of five pounds for one year. Dee's store of plate, though large, was being heavily drained and irrevocably scattered in this way. The old man doubtless saw his treasures, the gifts of friends and patrons of half a century, disappear with feelings of deep chagrin and disappointment, mingled with memories of past triumphs, and little light upon the future. A piece of the plate came to light at the Tudor Exhibition in the New Gallery in 1890, when a silver cup, the property of Mrs. John Hookham Frere (said to be Dee's great-great-niece), was exhibited. Writing of this cup to her son Bartle Frer, about the end of the eighteenth century, Mrs. Frere says, "My great thrice- great uncle, John Dee, because he was a wise man, was taken for a conjurer. I have his silver cup now here with me, and you may drink of it, but I know no story in the family that he ever divined by it. It serves me here for a sugar basan." Evidently Mrs. Frere took an entirely rational view of the powers attributed to her famous ancestor.

Perhaps in these sad days he looked back regretfully to the glorious visions and promises made him by those angelic visitors in the years when he and his skryer lived in the Courts of kings and emperors, and were consulted and deferred to as seers and wise men. Even the thoughts of suspicions harboured; of secret and open foes, at home and abroad; the recollection of heart burnings and passionate scenes with the incalculable Kelley, must have seemed dazzlingly brilliant as compared with these grey hopeless years. It is little wonder that he began to seek among his assistants and friends another skryer, through whom he might renew some glimmer of the former days. Mr. Francis Nicholls, who had come to Mortlake in 1593 to learn astrology, seems to have been tried. He was frequently with the Warden, and his daughter Mary stayed for two or three months with the Dees in Manchester on their return from London. She would be a companion in age for Katherine, and the Warden tells how the two girls, his wife and himself, partook of the sacrament together on August 10, 1600. Bartholomew Hickman was more successful as a medium than Mr. Nicholls, and yet at first not always to be trusted. Dee had learned by now to be very discriminating, and he found many of the "reports of sight and hering spirituall," obtained through this skryer, so untrue that he made a bonfire of all the writings on Michaelmas Day, before his wife; Mr. Nicholls; his brother, William Nicholls, and a Mr. Wortley. "A copy of the first part, which was afterward fownd, was burnt before me and my wife." The revelations afterwards transmitted through Bartholomew were not so treated, and were evidently considered by Dee to be genuine messages from the unseen. His visitors left the next day after the Michaelmas bonfire, the Warden accompanying them on foot as far as Deansgate, where they parted. On his return home a surprise awaited the old man.

Dee's servants, many of them, attached themselves to him for life, as we have seen. They, at least, regarded him without suspicion. He was no invoker of devils or conjurer of evil spirits to them. No master could be kinder, more gentle, considerate or more strictly honourable. In whatever straits he found himself, he always contrived to pay, and faithfull record in his diary the payment of, their wages. We have seen how he writes to Sir Edward Dyer of their diet. It will be

remembered that one of his early apprentices, Roger Cook, left him after fourteen years, jealous that another man should be admitted to processes from which he was excluded. This was over twenty years ago, nor had his name ever been mentioned in the diary since. Now, Roger Cook reappeared in Manchester, quite unsought, offering and promising

“his faithful and diligent care and help, to the best of his skill and powre, in the processes chymicall, and that he will rather do so than be with any in England; which his promise the Lord blesse and confirm! He told me that Mr. Anthony (his late master) considered him very liberally and frendely, but he told him that he had promised me. Then he liked in him the fidelity of regarding such his promise.”

A week or two later, on November 1, Dee writes that R.C. began to distil. Afterwards there seems to have been cause for suspicion that Roger had spread false reports about his former employer, but the mistake was generously acknowledged; matters were cleared up, and peace once more reigned: —

“Feb. 2. Roger Cook, his supposed plat laying to my discredit was by Arthur, my sone, fownd by chaunce in a box of his papers, in his own handwriting, circa meridiem, and afternone about 1 1/2 browght to my knowledg face to face. All was mistaken and we reconcyled godly. Feb. 5. O libera nos a malo. Feb. 10. Reconciliation between us, and I did declare to my wife, Katherine my dowghter, Arthur and Rowland, how things were mistaken.”

In October, Sir George Booth, High Sheriff of Cheshire, came to Manchester to see the steward of the college, Humphrey Davenport, of Gray's Inn, about some of the college property in Cheshire, which he held. Booth had been knighted since his last visit. After all parties had been interviewed, they came to a mutual agreement that the Warden and Fellows would accept the arbitrament of the steward on the point in question, his decision to be delivered after the lawyer had paid his next visit to London. Davenport's clerk, John Radclyffe, and Mr. Dumbell were at the college at the time, but Dee says “they hard not our agreement, we were in my dining room.”

He received a kind letter from the Bishop of Chester (Richard Vaughan), recommending Mr. Thomas Billings to him for a curacy. He does not say if the spiritual ministrations of Mr. Billings were accepted. The commissioners were still sitting, and in November they made an award against Mr. James Ashton, of Chadderton, for holding the manor or property of Nuthurst while its title belonged to the college. There was a final scene with Oliver Carter in the college, before Mr. Birch, Robert and Charles Leigh. At the college audit on December 2, Dee was allowed his portion of 7 pounds yearly for house rent up to the Michaelmas before. A grant was now made to Arthur of the chapter clerkship, but the holder, Owne Hodges, was only going to relinquish it on condition of 6 pounds being paid for his patent. So more silver had to be pledged to meet a loan.

The last entry made by Dee in his diary is on April 6, 1601, when he made “Mr. Holcroft, of Vale Royall, his first acquaintance, at Manchester, by reason of Mr. William Herbert, his servant. He used me and reported of me very freely and worshiply.”

For the concluding seven years of the old man's life there are only a few scanty outside records on which to rely, beside two or three fragmentary entries printed in the end of the Book of Mysteries. In such a practised and ready writer as our aged mathematician and astrologer, the failure to set down records seems to betoken failing strength of both intellect and body.