

CHAPTER VI

EDWARD KELLEY

“Kelley did all his feats upon
The Devil’s looking-glass, a stone
Where, playing with him at bo-peep,
He solv’d all problems ne’er so deep.”
— Butler, Hudibras

It is now time to inquire who this Talbot, this seer and medium, was. Where did he come from, and what was his previous history?

That he came to the Mortlake philosopher under a feigned name is perhaps not so damning an accusation as might at first sight appear. There was in his case, certainly, every reason why he should change his identity, if possible, but an alias in those days was so common a thing that perhaps more stress has been laid upon Kelley’s than is strictly fair.

The whole of Kelley’s story is so wildly and romantically coloured, it is so incredible, and so full of marvels, that it is extremely difficult to know what to believe. There is no disentangling the sober facts of his life from the romance attributed to him; indeed, there are no sober facts, as the reader will see when the accepted traditions of this extraordinary man’s career are laid down.

From March 8 to November, 1582, Edward Talbot, the skryer, came and went in the Mortlake establishment, gazed in the crystal, and ingratiated himself into his employer’s liking. Then he disappeared, and Edward Kelley took his place. There had been a quarrel of some kind, precursor of many others, and Dee opens his fourth Book of Mysteries, on November 15, “after the reconciliation with Kelley.” Henceforth “E.K.” is his name.

Kelley was born at Worcester, on August 1, 1555, as appears by the horoscope drawn for him by the astrologer. He began life as an apothecary’s apprentice, and showed some aptitude for his calling. It has been stated that, under the name of Talbot, he studied for a short time at Oxford, but left abruptly under a cloud. A few years later, he was exposed in the pillory in Lancaster for having either forged ancient title deeds or coined base money. Both feats are accounted to him. The next incident in his career is a charge of having dug up a newly buried “caitiff’s” corpse in Walton-le-Dale churchyard, Lancashire, for the purpose of questioning the dead, or “an evil spirit speaking through his organs,” respecting the future of “a noble young gentleman,” then a minor. After this savoury episode, Kelley is reported to have been wandering in Wales (it is suggested that he was hiding from justice), when he stumbled accidentally upon an old alchemical manuscript and two caskets or phials containing a mysterious red and white powder. Another version of this discovery is that Dee and Kelley together found the powder at Glastonbury. This we may dismiss. Wherever he procured it, Kelley undoubtedly owned a small quantity of some substance which he regarded as of priceless value, inasmuch as, if properly understood and manipulated, it could be used for transmuting baser metals into gold.

The reputation of the learned doctor of Mortlake, who was known all over the Continent, was a favourite at Court, and in touch with every adventure by sea or

land, had of course reached Kelley. Dee's parsonage of Upton-on-Severn, near Worcester, did not trouble him much with responsibility, but it must have been on one occasional visit to it that he received from the Dean of Worcester Cathedral a Latin volume, in which he inscribed the gift thus: "Joannes Dee, 1565, Februarii 21. Wigorniae, ex dono decani ecclesiae magistri Beddar."

With the powder that he did not know how to use, and the alchemical manuscript which he could not decipher, and which yet might contain the invaluable secret (if indeed there is any truth in the story of his find), Kelley, the adventurer, sought out some means of introduction to the man so likely to help him. He had dabbled in alchemy, and came to Mortlake with something of a reputation, for Dee speaks of him as "that lerned man." It is utterly unlikely that Dee had heard anything of Kelley's exploits in the north. Such doings would scarcely penetrate the solmen recesses of the laboratory on the Thames side. So Kelley arrived, and was received in all good faith. He told Dee that the last seer, Barnabas, had "cosened" him, and seems to have at once impressed himself favourably upon the astrologer, who at the moment was without a reliable assistant. The sittings began, as we have seen, in March, and were successful immediately. In May the message comes that "none shall enter into the knowledge of these mysteries but this worker," and Kelley's position is secured.

Kelley was now about twenty-seven years old, and unmarried. He was bidden by the spirits on April 20 to take a wife, "which thing to do," he told Dee, "I have no natural inclination, neither with a safe conscience may I do it." but Michael had made him swear on his sword to follow his counsel, so he married reluctantly, not long after, Joan, or Johanna, Cooper, of Chipping Norton, who was eight years his junior, and about nineteen.

There was little love on his side apparently, but the girl seems at any rate to have essayed to do her duty as a wife. She was apparently a complete stranger to the Dees, although soon to become part of their household. What were Jane's feelings at the thought of this invasion of her domestic peace we can only guess from an entry in Dee's diary made two days after one of these first sittings. Dee does not write much about his wife in his diary, save only entries relating to her health, and this one he has carefully erased, as if he thought some disloyalty to her was involved in it. It is, however, possible to make it out almost entirely. "1582, 6 May. Jane in a merveyulous rage at 8 of the cloke at night, and all that night, and next morning till 8 of the cloke, melancholike and ch[?ided me] terribly for...." Something illegible follows, and then this: "that come to me only honest and lerned men." Finally, "by Mr. Clerkson his help was [?pacified]." What can this mean save that she had taken a violent dislike to, and disapproval of, Kelley; that she mistrusted his honesty and wished they might have no more to do with him; that it was only by his friend Clerkson's help that she was at last quieted? Her woman's intuition was scarcely at fault; however kindly she came to treat her husband's medium afterwards, however charitable she showed herself, she was right in suspecting no good to come to Dee through association with Kelley.

The accounts of the actions with the spirits which took place under Kelley's control were minutely written down by Dee, as we have seen, mostly during the time of the sittings. The papers had a romantic history. The last thirteen books, which were in Sir Thomas Cotton's library, were printed by Dr. Meric Casaubon about fifty years after Dee's death, under the title of *A True and Faithful Relation of*

what passed for many Yeers between Dr. John Dee, a Mathematician of Great Fame in Q. Elizabeth and K. James their Reigns, and some Spirits: Tending (had it succeeded) To a General Alteration of most States and Kingdomes in the World...With a Preface confirming the reality (as to the Point of Spirits) of this Relation; and shewing the several good Uses that a sober Christian may make of all” (folio 1659). Casaubon in his learned preface maintains stoutly that the visions were no distempered fancy, that Dee acted throughout with all sincerity, but that he was deluded. His book sold with great rapidity; it excited so much controversy, and incurred such disapproval from Owen, Pye, and the other Puritan divines, that it came near being suppressed; only the excellent demand for it prevented its confiscation, for not a copy could be found. The True Relation contains the record of all actions after the beginning of June, 1583. The earlier conversations, from the first with Barnabas, and Talbot’s appearance on the scene, are still to be found in manuscript, they having in some way parted company from those of which Cotton had possession.

These earlier papers were acquired by the antiquary, Elias Ashmole, in a rather romantic way. Ashmole had been visiting William Lilly, the astrologer, at Horsham, in August, 1672, when on his return his servant brought him a large bundle of Dee’s autograph MSS. which a few days before he had received from one of the warders of the Tower. The warder called on Ashmole at the Excise Office, and offered to give them in exchange for one of Ashmole’s own printed works. The Windsor Herald cheerfully agreed, and sent him a volume “fairly bound and gilt on the back,” of which of his works we know not.

Now for the history of the papers. Mrs. Wale, the warder’s wife, had brought them with her dower from her lamented first husband, Mr. Jones, confectioner, of the Plow, Lombard Street. While courting, these young people had picked up among the “joyners in Adle Street” a large chest whose “very good lock and hinges of extraordinary neat work” took their fancy. It had belonged, said the shopman, to Mr. John Woodall, surgeon, father of Thomas Woodall, surgeon to King Charles II. and Ashmole’s friend. He had bought it probably at the sale of Dee’s effects in 1609, after his death. The Joneses owned the chest for twenty years without a suspicion of its contents. Then, on moving it one day, they heard a rattle inside. Jones prized open the space below the till, and discovered a large secret drawer stuffed full of papers, and a rosary of olive-wood beads with a cross, which had caused the rattle. The papers proved to be the conferences with angels from December 22, 1581, down to the time of the printed volume; the original manuscripts of the (unprinted) books entitled, “48 Claves Angelicae,” “De Heptarchia Mystica,” and “Liber Scientiae Auxiliis et Victoriae Terrestris.” We may imagine Ashmole’s excitement when he found he had in his hand the earlier chapters of the very remarkable book that was still in every one’s mouth, published only thirteen years before.

We may now briefly examine this remarkable and voluminous Book of Mysteries. In view of the fact that it is perhaps the earliest record of mediumistic transactions, the first attempt to relate consecutive psychic transmissions, in fact a sort of sixteenth century Proceedings of a Society for Psychical Research, it seems to warrant investigation at some length.

The first book (still in manuscript) opens with a Latin invocation to the Almighty, and an attribution of all wisdom and philosophy to their divine original source. It ends “O beata et super benedicta omnipotens Trinitas, concedas mihi

(Joanni Dee) petitionem hane modo tali, qui tibi maxime placebit, Amen.” Then comes a table of the four angels — Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel, their particular attributes, and their descent from Annael. A long prayer in English follows, which gives a remarkable insight into Dee’s attitude of mind. Unfeigned humility towards God, a certain unconsciousness of self and of his own particular acquirements, are mingled with a calm assumption of authority and power to enter into the heart of knowledge. This was perhaps the chief characteristic of the exalted mysticism so prevalent at the time in a small section of alchemists, especially on the Continent. Dee was its representative in England, having, of course, imbibed much of it during his residence abroad. Paracelsus had been dead but forty years. His disciples everywhere were seeking three secrets which were to fulfil his teaching — the secret of transmutation, the elixir of life, and the philosophic stone, key to all wisdom. Bruno was still alive, developing his theories of God as the great unity behind the world and humanity. Copernicus was not long dead, and his new theories of the solar system were gradually becoming accepted. Galileo was still a student at Pisa, his inventions as yet slumbering in his brain. Montaigne was writing his gentle satires on humanity. Everywhere and in every sphere new thought was beginning to stir.

Dee did not scruple to claim in his prayer gifts like those bestowed upon the prophets. He deprecates any kind of traffic with unauthorised or unreliable spirits, and acknowledges again the only Source of wisdom. But since he has so long and faithfully followed learning, he does think it of importance that he should know more. The blessed angels, for instance, could impart to him things of at least as much consequence as when the prophet told Saul, the son of Kish, where to find a lost ass or two! A spirit afterwards told him that ignorance was the nakedness wherewith he was first tormented, and “the first plague that fell unto man was the want of science.”

He had reached that state of mind when he seemed unable to discern any boundary line between finite and infinite. His hope and his confidence were alike fixed on nothing less than wresting all the secrets of the universe from the abyss of knowledge, or, at any rate, as many of them as God willed. He explains how from his youth up he has prayed for pure and sound wisdom and understanding,

“such as might be brought, under the talent of my capacitie, to God’s honour and glory and the benefit of his servaents, my brethren and sisters. And forasmuch as for many yeres, in many places, far and nere, in many booke and sundry languages, I have wrought and studyed, and with sundry men conferred, and with my owne reasonable discourse laboured, whereby to fynde or get some yinking, glimpse, or beame, of such the aforesaid radicall truthes:...And seeing I have read in they booke and records how Enoch enjoyed thy favor and conversation, with Moses thou wast familiar, And also that to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Josua, Gedeon, Esdras, Daniel, Tobias, and sundry other, the good angels were sent, by they disposition, to instruct them, informe them, help them, yea in worldly and domesticall affairs; yea and sometimes to satisfy theyr desyres, doubts and questions of thy secrets; and furdere more, considering the Shewstone which the high priests did use by thy owne orderinge, wherein they had lighte and judgments in their great doutes, and considering also that thou (O God) didst not refuse to instruct the prophets (then called seers), to give answers to common people of things oeconomicall, as Samuel

for Saul, seeking for his father's asses, being gon astray: and as other things, vulgar true predictions, whereby to wyn credit unto ther waightier affayres. And thinking within myself the lack of thy wisdom to me to be of more importance than the value of an Asse or two could be to Cis (Saul his father): And remembering what good counsaile they apostle James giveth, saying Si quies autem vestrumetc. And that Solomon the wise, did so, even immediately by thyselve, atteyne to his wonderfull sidome: Therefore, Seeing I was sufficiently taught and confirmed that this wisdom could not be come by at mans hand, or by human powre, but onely from thee (O God) mediately or immediately. And having allwayes a great regarde and care to beware of the filthy abuse of such as willingly and wittingly did invoke and consult (in divers sorte) Spirituall Creatures of the damned sort: Angels of darknes, forgers and patrons of lies and untruths; I did fly unto thee by harty prayer, full oft, and in sundry manners: sometymes crynge unto thee Mittas Lucem tuam et veritatem, tuam quoque me ducant, etc."

Then he goes on to say that his slight experience with two different persons has convinced him of God's wish to enlighten him through His angels. He has heard of a man accounted a good seer and skryer, a master of arts and preacher of the Word, and through his means he has seen spiritual apparitions "either in the christalline receptacle, or in open ayre." He hopes to have help from this person until "some after man or meanes are sent him from on high." But Saul — for it is Saul he means — is not devout, sincere and honest. Evil spirits have come to him, much to Dee's terror "but that thou didst pitch thy holy tent to my defence and comfort." He has quoted to Saul Roger Bacon's warning to wicked devil-callers; but the man cannot brook rebuke, and is angry at being further debarred from the mysteries "which were the only things I desired, through thy grace." He begs, most humbly and deprecatingly for leave to note down the actions, and asks that Annael may come to his help.

Barnabas having proved so unreliable, he rejoiced at having found another skryer. The one accessory wanting, when all the table and seals were complete, was a "shewstone." Dee seems already to have owned several. He had used a crystal before this time, but a new one was desirable. One evening, towards sunset, a little child angel appears standing in the sunbeams from the western window of the study, holding in its hand a thing "most bright, most clere and clorius, of the bigness of an egg." Michael with his fiery sword appeared and bade Dee "Go forward, take it up, and let no mortall hand touch it but thine own."

Michael tells them, too, that he and Kelley are to be joined in the holy work, united as if one man. But one is to be master, the other minister; one the hand, the other the finger. They are to be contented with their calling, for vessels are not all of one bigness, yet all can be full. Dee is reminded that all his knowledge is "more wonderful than profitable, unless thou art led to a true use of the same."

Another spirit, Medicus Dei, or Medicina, says, "Great are the purposes of him whose medecine I carry," and on one of the early march days utters some remarkable words on the precious doctrine of the universality of the Light: —

"Your voices are but shadows of the voices that understand all things. The things you look on because you see them not indeed, you also do name amiss...

"We are fully understanding. We open the eyes from the sun in the morning to the sun at night. Distance is nothing withus, unless it be the distance which

separateth the wicked from His mercy. Secrets there arenone, but that are buried in the shaddow of man's sould....Iniquitie shall not range where the fire of his piercing judgment and election doth light.”

Calvin had been dead but twenty years, but with his scheme of election and eternal reprobation Dee had no affinity. His mind was far more in harmony with the ancient hermetic teaching that medicine, healing, was the true road to all philosophy.