

# CHAPTER VII

## THE CRYSTAL GAZERS

“To follow knowledge like a sinking star  
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.”  
— Tennyson, Ulysses

It is a curious picture to call up, that of the strangely assorted pair seated in the inner room at Mortlake, acting out this spiritual drama. Dee had asked for instructions about the room for the sittings: “May my little fartherest chamber serve, if the bed be taken down?” The table, covered with its cloth stood in the centre upon the seals. Kelley, perhaps with the black cap he is credited with having always worn, pulled close over his cropped ears, was seated at it. Dee at his desk sat writing in the great folio book. He was now fifty-six years old; his beard was long, but perhaps not yet “as white as milk,” as Aubrey describes it. He did not apparently ever see the visions himself. Once he reproachfully said, “You know I cannot see or skry.” He conversed with the spirits and sometimes heard what they said; but to the eye and ear of his body they were invisible; hence his dependence upon a skryer.

The sole object of his ambition was the attainment of legitimate wisdom. When conversing with the angels, how near within his grasp it seemed! Michael’s exposition seemed almost to promise it to him: —

“Wilt thou have witt and wisdom? Here it is.’

“Michael points each time to a figure of seven squares shown within a circle of light.

“The exaltation and government of princes is in my hand.

“In counsayle and Nobilitie, I prevayle.

“The Gayne and Trade of Merchandise is in my hand. Lo! here it is.

“The Qualitie of the Earth and Waters is my knowledge, and I know them.

And here it is.

“The motion of the Ayre and those that move in it, are all known to me. Lo! here they are.

“I signifie wisdom. In fire is my government. I was in the beginning and shall be to the end.

“Mark these mysteries. For this knowne, the state of the whole earth is knowne, and all that is thereon. Mighty is God, yea, mighty is he who hath composed for ever. Give diligent eye. Be wise, merry and pleasant in the Lord.’“

Quite early in the actions, it was told them that a third person was necessary to the complete work. Adrian Gilbert was the first selected, and permission was given for him to be made “privie of the mysteries, but not to be a practiser.”

Gilbert was making ready for a voyage to the North-West. Dee and the spirits seem to think it may be a kind of missionary enterprise, and Dee asks for (but does not actually obtain) a geographical description of the country he is going to. The answer is that Dee knows about it, as indeed he did, sufficiently well, as we have seen, to draw very good charts of North America and the Frozen Seas. An angel named Me tells him he must counsel A.G. and be his father. “Who made the sun of nothing? Who set Nature to thrust up her shoulder amongst trees and herbs like a

gentle fire? How great is his power in those in whom he kindleth a soul of understanding.”

In Dee’s absence in London, at the Muscovy House, on Maundy Thursday (March 28), Kelley tried to summon Medicina again, but was only visited by an “illuder.” Next day Dee asks for “the veritie of his doings,” and is told that darkness has presumed to put itself in place of light. Kelley will not be overthrown, but he is to brag not. “When I yoked your feathers together, I joined them not for a while.” The illuder is made to confess deception and is consumed by fire, and Dee turns to his skryer with “Master Kelley, is your doubt of the spirit taken away?”

Dee had been requested to prepare a calculation for the reformation of the Calendar, or at any rate to give his opinion on the scheme propounded by Pope Gregory. His calculations were approved by all the English mathematicians of the time, but the Queen, advised by the bishops, did not see her way to adopt them in effect. Dee tells his angel friends how “grieved” he is that “Her Majestie will not reform the Kalendar in the best terms of veritie.” He desires counsel what to do.

Easter Day passed, and the crystal gazing still went on. The sittings were often long. On April 3, Dee ventured to tell his visitor that “it will be dark soon, and our company will expect our coming down to supper. If without offence we might now leave off, it might seem good to do so.” Three days after, he again offered a slight remonstrance, asking why they had not been warned of Mistress Frances Howard’s coming, a gentlewoman of Her Majestie’s Privy Chamber. She had caused interruption of their exercise for a full hour, or two. Was this to be forgiven her because of her great charity, and goodness in procuring the Queen’s alms for many needy people?

The Queen was then at Richmond, and Dee was several times at Court. He seems to have been there to bid her adieu when she left for Greenwich on the 18th: — “At her going on horseback, being new up, she called for me, by Mr. Rawly his putting her in mynde, and she sayd, ‘quod defertur non aufertur,’ and gave me her right hande to kisse.”

Dee was now puzzling over some mysterious papers brought him by Kelley, whether those he is reported to have found in Wales of Glastonbury we can scarcely decide, but they seem to concern ten places in England where treasure was supposed to be hid. There is a curious drawing of them in the MS. diary: “After coming from the Court, I thought I would try to discover the cipher of the paper E.K. brought me as willed to do, found at Huets Cross, with a book of magic and alchemy, to which a spiritual creature led them.” Dee was by no means the easy dupe of Kelley that he has been called. Two or three months after he first knew him he writes in his diary of his “abominable lyes”; and he here makes a very telling remark, an aside, so to speak: “Of this K., I doubt yet.”

Kelley’s hot, uncontrollable nature and his overbearing ways had already begun to appear. There was an outbreak at supper one night because Charles Sled had “done him an injurie in speeche at my table.” Probably some story of his early career had been raked up. A voice next morning says to him appropriately: “Serve God and take hold of nettles.”

The manuscript in crabbed signs puzzled the astrologer desperately, and he was unhappy at the delay. An angel tells him they are to be “rocks in faith.” “While sorrow be measured thou shalt bind up thy fardell.” He is not to seek to know the

mysteries till the very hour he is called. "Can you bow to Nature and not honour the workman?"

A new spirit visits them, Il, "a merie creature, apparelled like a Vyce in a [morality] play. He skipped here and there." Dee asks where is his Arabic book of tables that he has lent and lost. Il says it is in Scotland and is nothing worth. Then Dee asks about the Lord Treasurer's books, for he had not seen Burleigh's library, and had all the rival collector's jealousy over his own treasures. He was never quite sure that Burleigh was his friend; there semed always a suspicion in his mind where the Lord Treasurer was concerned. The feeling was reflected in a curious dream that he had soon after the beginning of his partnership with Kelley: "I dreamed on Saturday night that I was deade, and afterwards my bowels wer taken out. I walked and talked with divers, and among other with the Lord Thresorer, who was cum to my howse to burn my bookes when I was dead. I thought he looked sourely on me." Now, Il tells him that Burleigh has no books "belonging to Soyga," and explains that name as in "the language of Paradise, before Babel's aery tower." Dee takes up a lexicon to look for the word, but Il points to another book on "the mysteries of Greek, Latin and Hebrew." Then Il becomes very practical, and says: "Your chimney will speak against you anon," and Dee remembers that he had hidden there "in a cap-case" the records of his doings with Saul and the others. Il advises Kelley to communicate to his employer the book and the powder, and all the rest of the roll. "True friends arenot to hide anything each from the other."

This was perhaps the cause of the "great and eager pangs" that now took place between Dee and Kelley. The medium pretends to fear they are dealing with evil spirits. He bursts into a passion, declares he is a cumber to the house, and dwells there as in a prison. He had better be far away in the open country, where he can walk abroad, and not be troubled with slanderous tongues. He is wasting his time there, and must follow some study whereby he may live. As for these spirit mysteries, Adam and Enoch knew them before the Flood. Dee responds gfravely to this tirade: He will wait God's time, and he will not believe a stone will be given them and no bread. As to Kelley's necessities, are not his own far greater? At the present moment, he owes 300 pounds, and does not know how to pay it. He has spent forty years, and travelled thousands of miles, in incredible forcing of his wit in study, to learn, or bowel out, some good thing, yet he would willingly go up and down England in a blanket, begging his bread, for a year or more, if at the end he might be sure of attaining to godly wisdom, whereby to do God service for His glory. He was resolved either willingly to leave this work, to enjoy the fountain of all wisdom, or to pass his days on earth in the enjoyment of its blessings and mysteries.

Another violent scene occurred before long; this time the mistress of the house was the one offended. Dee says: "By A[drian] G[ilbert] and Providence, E.K.'s vehement passions were pacified. He came back again to my house, and my wife was willing and quiet in mind and friendly to E.K. in word and countenance. A new pacification in all parts confirmed and all upon the confidence of God his service faithfully performed." Kelley's wife had not yet joined him at Mortlake, but he had occasional letters from her. One found him in a tender religious mood, about to "pray in his bedchamber, on a little prayer book which Mr. Adrian Gilbert had left here, ad it lay on the table during the action." It was Seven Sobbes of a Sorrowful Soul for Sinne, in English metre, "made by Mr. William Harris." When he opened it, he found some automatic script in the end, or, as he calls it, a

counterfeit of his own hand. He took it to Dee, who saw in it the work of a wicked spirit trying to shake their confidence. The next evening, both prayed against their enemy, Kelley on his knees before the green chair standing at the chimney. Uriel appeared and said temptation was requisite. "If it were not, how should men know God to be merciful?" He speaks to Kelley: — "Thou, O yongling, but old sinner, why dost thou suffer thy blindness to increase? Why not yield thy Limbs to the service and fulfilling of an eternal veritie? Pluck up thy heart, and follow the way that leadeth to the knowledge of the end." He explains how the trouble is caused by Belmagel, "the firebrand who hath followed thy soul from the beginning."

The whole of this spring, the pair of partners had been busily engaged in preparing the various things — the table, the wax seals, the ring and lamin — required for use. Most complicated diagrams of letters and figures had also been dictated to them, and Kelley, whose mathematical training had been slight, was sometimes very exhausted. Once fire shoots out of the crystal into his eyes, and when it is taken back, he can read no more. As Dee remarks one day to a spirit, apologising for his many questions: "For my parte I could finde it in my heart to contynue whole days and nights in this manner of doing, even tyll my body should be ready to synk down for weariness before I could give over, but I feare I have caused weariness to my friends here." A journey is foretold, but first of all Kelley is to go to the places of hidden treasure, and bring earth, that it may be tested. He may be away ten days. He bought a "pretty dun mare" for the journey, of "good man "Penticost," for which he paid three pounds ready money in angels. A day or two after, he took boat to London to buy a saddle, bridle, and "boote-hose."

At supper the night before he started, in a clairvoyant state, he had an extraordinary prophetic sight of the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, a beautiful woman having her head cut off by a tall black man. He also speaks of seeing the sea, covered with many ships. Uriel warns them that foreign Powers are providing ships "against the welfare of England, which shall shortly be put in practice." It is hardly necessary to remind the reader that the Queen of Scots' execution and the defeat of the Spanish Armada took place in two following years, 1587, 1588, four years after this vision.