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978-1-108-05056-2 - John Dee's Diary, Catalogue of Manuscripts and Selected Letters

Edited by James Orchard Halliwell, James Crossley, John Eglinton Bailey and M.R. James

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John Dee's Diary, Catalogue of Manuscripts and Selected Letters

John Dee (1527–1608), popularly remembered as an alchemist and spiritualist, was an enthusiastic scholar specialising in mathematics and astronomy, and collected manuscripts, early printed books and scientific instruments. Despite meeting Elizabeth I in person, he never progressed in the Church, and died in poverty. The four selections from his writings reissued here show Dee painstakingly listing his books before a journey to Europe, and appealing to the Queen for help when, after a catastrophic burglary at his library and the destruction of his laboratory equipment, his pay also failed to arrive. J.O. Halliwell (1842) reproduces the full text of Dee's diaries with an index; James Crossley (1851) transcribes Dee's appeals to the Queen; Bailey's book (1880), of which only twenty copies were printed, contains a full commentary on the last five years of the diaries; and M.R. James (1921) researches the fate of Dee's books over the centuries.

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THE
PRIVATE DIARY
OF
DR. JOHN DEE,
AND
THE CATALOGUE OF HIS LIBRARY OF MANUSCRIPTS,
FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS
IN THE ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM AT OXFORD, AND TRINITY
COLLEGE LIBRARY, CAMBRIDGE.

EDITED BY
JAMES ORCHARD HALLIWELL, Esq. F.R.S.,
HON. M.R.I.A., &c. &c. &c.



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P R E F A C E.

THE present volume contains two curious documents concerning Dr. Dee, the eminent philosopher of Mortlake, now for the first time published from the original manuscripts. I. His Private Diary, written in a very small illegible hand on the margins of old Almanacs, discovered a few years ago by Mr. W. H. Black, in the library of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. II. A Catalogue of his Library of Manuscripts, made by himself before his house was plundered by the populace, and now preserved in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge.

The publication of this Diary will tend perhaps to set Dee's character in its true light, more than any thing that has yet been printed. We have, indeed, his "Compendious Rehearsall," which is in some respects more comprehensive, but this was written for an especial purpose, for the perusal of royal commissioners, and he has of course carefully avoided every allusion which could be construed in an unfavourable light. In the other, however, he tells us his dreams, talks of mysterious noises in

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PREFACE.

his chamber, evil spirits, and alludes to various secrets of occult philosophy in the spirit of a true believer. Mr. D'Israeli has given a correct and able view of his character in his "Amenities of Literature," which is remarkably confirmed in almost every point by the narrative now published. "The imagination of Dee," observes that elegant writer, "often predominated over his science; while both were mingling in his intellectual habits, each seemed to him to confirm the other. Prone to the mystical lore of what was termed the occult sciences, which in reality are no sciences at all, since whatever remains occult ceases to be science, Dee lost his better genius." I shall refer the reader to this popular work instead of attempting an original paper on the subject, which would necessarily be greatly inferior to that drawn by the masterly hand of the author of the "Curiosities of Literature."

The Catalogue of Dee's Library of Manuscripts, although long since dispersed, is valuable for the notices which it preserves of several middle-age treatises not now extant. He is said to have expended on this collection the sum of three thousand pounds, a very large sum in those days for a person of limited income.

J. O. H.

35, Alfred Place,
March 15th 1842.