

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05012-8 - The Love-life of Dr Kane: Containing the Correspondence, and a History of the Acquaintance, Engagement, and Secret Marriage Between Elisha K. Kane and Margaret Fox

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The Love-life of Dr Kane

Elisha Kane (1820–57) was a famous U.S. Arctic explorer who fell in love with the well-known New York spiritualist Margaret Fox (1836–93). When their secret engagement was revealed, it caused much controversy and Fox was later accused of fabricating their subsequent marriage. She wanted to publish their correspondence in 1862 to clear her name, but Kane's family – who disapproved of Fox and did not believe the couple ever married – halted the book's publication and they reached a settlement. When they failed to make agreed payments to Fox, she decided to publish the letters in 1866. The subsequent volume charts the couple's courtship from its beginnings in 1852 until Kane's death, and reveals the ups and downs of their tumultuous relationship, especially Kane's desire for Fox to stop her spiritualist practices. It presents an intimate account of the romance between two prominent nineteenth-century public figures.

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MARGARET FOX KANE.

From a Portrait taken 1862.

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Frontmatter

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ELISHA K. KANE AND MARGARET FOX,

WITH FACSIMILES OF LETTERS,
AND HER PORTRAIT.



NEW YORK:

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C O N T E N T S .

INTRODUCTION	13
MEMOIR.....	21
I.	
A New Excitement in Philadelphia.—Dr. Kane's First Visit.—Love at First Sight.—Charms of the Young Lady.—Her Freedom from Vanity.—Dr. Kane's repeated Visits.—Notes to Mrs. and Miss Fox.—“A Prophecy.”—Dr. Kane's Proposal of Marriage.—Its Acceptance.—Good Advice and Promises of Devotion.—Drives about Philadelphia.—Visit to Laurel Hill Cemetery.—Introductions as “The Future Mrs. Kane.”—“A Story” in Verse by Dr. Kane.....	21
II.	
Dr. Kane's Anxiety to remove Miss Fox from her Association with Spiritualists.—His Attentions noticed.—His Indifference to Mrs. Grundy.—His Discontent.—Plain speaking to his “Maggie.”—The Dream of Love.—Regard for Etiquette . . .	42
III.	
Mrs. Fox takes her Daughters to New York.—Residence in Twenty-sixth Street.—Dr. Kane follows them.—His Complaints of the Young Lady's Coldness.—His Loneliness without Her.—His burdensome Duties.—He proposes a Meeting at Sattler's Cosmoramas.—Miss Fox refuses any clandestine Meeting.—Dr. Kane goes to Boston.—Letters written while Miss Fox was in New York.—Dr. Kane buying a Bonnet	51
IV.	
Visit of Mrs. Fox and her Daughters to Washington.—Telegraphic Despatches and Letters from Dr. Kane.—Mayor Seaver's Dinner at the Revere House, Boston.—Dr. Kane's Lecture in Boston.—Dr. Kane admires his Lady Love, but complains of her not writing, and her Want of ardent Love.—Advice as to Behavior and Dress in Washington.—The Laces.—The Lover merged in the Friend.—Dr. Kane's Illness from hard Work.—His Longing for “Maggie.”—Her “Milk and Water Love.”—Dr. Kane craves “Her whole Heart.”—Telegraphic Despatches during Illness.—Miss Fox lost in Washington.....	59
V.	
Dr. Kane's Letter to Miss Kate Fox.—“The Spirits” in Boston.—Warnings against a Life of Deception.—A Sad Instance of Credulity.—Cruelty in the “Medium.”—Dr. Kane thinks “Maggie” esteems him too lightly.—Dr. Kane's Letter of Retrospection.—His own Destinies.—The “Little Priestess.”—His falling in Love deplored.—Is she worthy so much Affection?—Appeal to “Maggie” to decide if she really cares for him.—She is like Surrey's Geraldine.....	70

iv CONTENTS.

VI.

Dr. Kane comes to Washington.—Etiquette observed.—“The Preacher” at Fault.—The Soliloquy overheard in the Wardrobe.—Washing off the Cough Syrup.—Drives about Washington.—Influenza and Telegraphic Despatches.—Dr. Kane’s Letters from Philadelphia.—He claims “Maggie” as her Master.—Leading her to better Ways.—Return of Mrs. Fox and her Daughters to Philadelphia.—Dr. Kane’s Enquiries after Schools.—“Maggie” must give up her present Associations and settle down to School Life.—The Lovers’ Compact.—An immediate Union impossible..... 80

VII.

Return of Mrs. and Miss Fox to New York.—Dr. Kane’s Letters from Washington.—His Visit to their Hotel.—His Reminiscences and Cautions.—The Prospect of a Home for Miss Fox during his Absence.—Dr. Kane’s Misgivings.—He must give up his Love unless she abjures the Spirits.—Gloomy Forebodings.—Purity of Dr. Kane’s Affection.—His Indignation at an unworthy Suspicion.—Miss Fox too sparing of her Letters.—Dr. Kane’s Reproaches.—Proposal of a Visit to the Home selected —“You are my Child now.” 91

VIII.

Dr. Kane’s Presentiments.—Return from Washington.—He craves Love.—Letter sent by Mr. Grinnell.—Dr. Kane’s Fears lest the Rappings should be found out.—He would not know the Secret for Ten Thousand Dollars.—Letters in New York.—Dr. Kane’s Disgust at Spiritual Circles.—He does not wish to be thought a Fool..... 103

IX.

Dr. Kane’s Illness at Mr. Grinnell’s, in New York.—Notes to Miss Fox.—Craves her Presence.—Offers to Bind himself in Writing to her, and urges her to do the same.—His Sufferings and Patience.—Miss Fox replies that he need not bind himself.—His Notes.—Entreating her Affection.—He urges a Visit in her Sister’s Company.—His Reproaches for her Refusal.—Complaints of her Want of Love.—He cannot be angry with her.—Miss Fox’s Visit to Dr. Kane at Mrs. Grinnell’s House..... 108

X.

Convalescence of Dr. Kane.—The Wife of President Pierce and Miss Fox.—Notes from Dr. Kane to Miss Fox.—Visit to the Theatre with Kate and Mr. G.—Dr. Kane’s nocturnal Reflections.—Advice and Warnings.—His Indignation at Mrs. **** —He promises Miss Fox her Freedom in a Week.—Entreats her Promise never to permit Rappings in her Presence again 117

XI.

Dr. Kane’s Consultations with Mrs. Fox about sending Margaret to School.—Journey projected to New Haven.—Letters from Dr. Kane to Miss Fox preparatory.—Mrs. Fox accompanies them to New Haven.—The Sickness of a Relative.—The Visit to New Haven not satisfactory.—Preparations going on for the Arctic Expedition.—Dr. Kane’s Visit after the Decease of Miss Fox’s Relative.—His solemn Vow in Presence of the Corpse.—Moralizing Letter.—Warnings and Entreaty for a Promise of a complete Separation from Spiritualism.—Solemn Promise of Miss Fox.—Dr. Kane’s cheering Anticipations of Her Future Life.—Refers to their expected Happiness in the Wedding Visit to Italy on his Return..... 126

CONTENTS. v

XII.

Mrs. Fox and her Family go to Rochester.—Letters from Dr. Kane.—His Preaching.—Reference to the Vow made in the Presence of Death.—Dr. Kane presses for Mrs. Fox's Answer about the School near Philadelphia.—The Matter settled.—Crookville to be the Home of Miss Fox, near Dr. Kane's Aunt.—Letters hastening her Preparations.—Jeu d'Esprit.—"The Preacher" and "Maggie."—The Compact in Force.—Miss Fox's Portrait.—Dr. Kane's Superstition..... 136

XIII.

Dr. Kane escorts Mrs. and Miss Fox to Philadelphia.—The Parting.—The young Girl's Love and Sorrow.—Extract from her Journal.—Letter from Dr. Kane in New York on the Eve of his Departure.—His Reference to their Marriage on his Return.—The Farewell.—Mrs. Fox's Return from Philadelphia.—Her Account of Margaret's Grief.—Dr. Kane resolves to pay her one more Visit.—His Return from Crookville and Recovery of her Bird..... 147

XIV.

Sailing of Dr. Kane, May 30th, 1853.—Letters from Mr. Grinnell to Miss Fox.—Letter from Dr. Kane, written at Sea.—Another written at Sea.—More good Advice about School Matters and Studies.—Mr. Grinnell's Accounts of Dr. Kane.—His Advice about the School.—Mrs. Lelper's Interest in the Young Lady.—Her Sorrow affects her Health.—Visit to New York.—Letters from Mrs. Turner.—Mrs. W——'s Letter.—Mrs. Turner's Reply.—Letters to Miss Fox at School.—Mr. Grinnell forwards a Letter from Greenland..... 154

XV.

Dr. Kane's Letter from Greenland to Miss Fox.—Mr. Grinnell's further Account of him.—Suspense.—Miss Gray's Letters.—Mrs. Turner's.—Mr. Grinnell's.—Knowledge of the Engagement between Miss Fox and Dr. Kane.—Letter from Mrs. Bayard.—Mrs. Turner congratulates Miss Fox on Dr. Kane's Arrival.. 175

XVI.

The Letters quoted show the Knowledge of her Betrothal among the Friends of Miss Fox.—Newspaper Articles.—The Family Pride mortified.—Miss Fox in New York when Dr. Kane arrives.—She awaits his Visit.—He does not come.—Her Chagrin and Grief.—The Visit late at Night.—Not Dr. Kane, but Mr. Grinnell.—Dr. Kane's Visit next Morning.—Miss Fox refuses to see him.—Consents with Reluctance.—Trouble in his Family, and Opposition to his Engagement.—He loves her, but must defer their Marriage.—She assents and writes the Statement he requires.—Permits his Visits as a Brother.—Mrs. Lelper's Indignation at Dr. Kane's Conduct.—Visit of an Editor.—The Friends of Miss Fox interfere.—Dr. Kane entreats Miss Fox to "stand firm."—His Notes.—Promises to be true to her 190

XVII.

Letter from Dr. Kane entreating Miss Fox to have no Association with Spiritualists.—More of the "Preacher's" Moralizing.—A Fairy Story.—Miss Fox writes to her "Brother."—Dr. Kane's Reply.—Mrs. Fox remonstrates, and requests him to cease visiting her Daughter.—He cannot comply.—Meeting of Miss Fox's Friends.—Dr. Kane's Anguish and Dread of Separation.—He is forbidden to see or write to Miss Fox.—Her Farewell Letter.—Dr. Kane's Distress.—He entreats her to write to him, and promises Fidelity..... 201

vi CONTENTS.

XVIII.

Continuance of Dr. Kane's Visits.—He places his Fate in Miss Fox's Hands.—She refuses to marry him.—Defence of his Conduct.—He calls on Mrs. Fox, when he cannot see her Daughter.—He cannot give her up.—Newspaper Reports.—Article from the *N. Y. Tribune*.—The *Times* and the Lady author of its Statement.—Dr. Kane's Notes and Letters to Miss Fox.—Her reproving Letter.—The Cloud lifted.—Dr. Kane's Health impaired by the Struggle of Feeling.—Mrs. Fox returns his Letter to her Daughter, and forbids him to write to her again.—He writes Miss Fox a Farewell.—A formal Note, with his Portrait.. 214

XIX.

Dr. Kane's Renewal of his Engagement with Miss Fox.—Injunctions of Secrecy.—Shower of Notes.—Visits every Day.—Dr. Kane's Hours of Fun and droll Imitations.—Practical Joke on a Spiritualist.—The Parlor Sanctuary.—Dr. Kane's Recollections of former Times in Self-Defence.—Refers to his oft repeated Promise of Marriage..... 223

XX.

Dr. Kane's Letter to Mrs. Fox in reply to a Reproof from her.—Brotherly Letter.—"The Royal Family."—Dr. Kane asks Pardon for a Fault.—His Abhorrence of Spiritualism.—He shields his Lady-Love from the sight of any "Manifestation."—His jealous Care in Guarding her..... 240

XXI

Miss Fox's Letter.—Brief Missives written in the Midst of Dr. Kane's Labors.—The Wonderful Stove.—Departure of Mrs. and Miss Fox for Canada.—Letter of Miss Fox to Dr. Kane.—Dr. Kane's Letter written in "Maggie's" deserted Parlor in New York.—The Lover and the Poodle.—Letters of Miss Fox from Canada.—Dr. Kane keeps the Key of her Box containing his Letters.—He tells her she "has a Fortune in them"..... 250

XXII.

Return of Mrs. and Miss Fox to New York.—Dr. Kane has watched for them, and welcomes them.—The Diamond Bracelet.—The Billet pinned up in Miss Fox's Parlor.—Notes and Verses.—Dr. Kane an indifferent Poet.—The Surprise.—The Ambrotype.—Despondency of Dr. Kane in View of Separation.—The Solemn though Secret Marriage of Dr. Kane to Miss Fox.—He promises that the Marriage shall be made public in May.—His Note to his Wife..... 263

XXIII.

Dr. Kane's sad Forebodings.—He does not now doubt his Wife's Love.—The Envelope with a private Mark.—Making his Will.—A Legacy left to Mrs. Kane.—"A Secret Trust."—The Adieux.—The Final Parting.—Distress of Both.—"Shall I go, or stay?"—Dr. Kane's Notes from England and at Sea.—His last Letter.—Mrs. Kane's Letters to Havana.—Death of Dr. Kane.—Extract from Mrs. Kane's Journal.—Hicks's Painting of Dr. Kane described.—Mrs. Kane's Appeal for her Husband's last Message to her.—Her abiding Grief.—Her Admission into the Roman Catholic Church.—Baptism.—Letters of Condolence from Governor Tallmadge..... 278

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE.

It is customary, in publishing personal memoirs or private correspondence, to make some apology for presenting to the world that which was never intended to meet the public eye. In the case of love-letters this seems especially necessary, if one would avoid the imputation of want of delicacy. Perhaps many will think that no circumstances could justify the publication of the letters contained in this volume. But, after long consideration, those whose opinions are entitled to respect, have judged differently. The lady to whom they were addressed has ever held these letters as too sacred for any eyes save her own to rest upon. She has borne poverty and privation, when their publication many years ago might have given her an independence; and that, too, notwithstanding that the small sum left in trust for her by Dr. Kane has been (except the interest for a time) withheld from her. She has borne the sneers of the world, and the neglect of those whose regard for the deceased should have induced them to protect, comfort, and befriend her. She has borne most injurious calumnies, which from time to time have reached her in her seclusion. Those slanders against her fair name have been repeated in various publications; yet she might be willing to receive in silence even this bitterest portion of her cup of sorrow, and

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[More information](#)

go down to the grave covered with unjust obloquy, were the choice left entirely to herself. But it has not been so left. After repeated threats that Dr. Kane's letters (her only treasure and vindication) could and would be taken from her by process of law, she reluctantly consented to have copies of them made. After this was done, the judgment of friends overruled her objections, and the letters were incorporated in a memoir. Their publication, it was urged, would vindicate the honor of *both* parties to the correspondence; for *both* had severely suffered from the slanders spread abroad.

In 1862, the volume was in press; but its publication, as well as a suit in the Orphans' court, Philadelphia, for dower, on the widow's part, was stopped by a compromise with the brothers and executor of Dr. Kane. One of the brothers agreed to pay her an annuity equal to the interest of the money left her, in quarterly instalments, and the sum of two thousand dollars down, to repay the expenses she had incurred, provided she would discontinue the suit for dower, and would seal up the letters and copies, with the MS. memoir, proof-sheets, &c., and place them in the hands of a Trustee, who should be bound to prevent her access to them, and to surrender them to the Kane family at her death. The Trustee selected was Dr. Edward Bayard, of New York. A bond was executed by the brother aforesaid, for the faithful performance of the stipulated terms. In the event of the failure to pay any quarterly instalment of the annuity, Mrs. Kane was permitted to reclaim her

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE.

ix

letters, &c., from the Trustee. This agreement was soon violated by the refusal of the brother of the late Dr. Kane, to pay more than one half the sum named in his bond for her expenses. A demand was made on his part that she should release him from this obligation, which, in justice to those to whom she was indebted, she could not do. For the sake of others who had trusted her, she was compelled to resort to another suit in hopes of obtaining the remaining half of the promised sum; but she was unable to afford the expense necessary to carry it on, or to encounter the "legal dodges" and delays resorted to by the defendant to evade the fulfilment of the conditions of his bond. Then her quarterly payments of annuity—which she had regarded as strictly her own—the interest of money bequeathed to her—a mere pittance, insufficient of itself for the humblest maintenance*—were withheld from time to time, till she was forced to repeated applications and solicitations therefor. Threats were made of refusing payment of the annuity entirely, unless she released the thousand dollars aforesaid, and discontinued the suit to recover the same. Mortified at being compelled to receive as a grudging bounty what she was entitled to under any circumstances and without any contingencies—and worn out with the continuance of a strife so vexatious and humiliating—Mrs. Kane at length allowed matters to take their course; and when the quarterly annuity due in May, 1865, was in default, she availed

* It is said that the Kane family have received one hundred thousand dollars from the copyrights of the late Dr. Kane.

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[More information](#)

herself of the privilege guaranteed to her by the terms of the bond, and reclaimed her letters of the Trustee. She declared her determination never again to part with a treasure in which her very life was bound up.

When the fact of her marriage with the late Dr. Kane was alluded to in the newspapers a short time since, a telegram from Philadelphia, pronouncing "the story" "a canard," was sent in the name of the Kane family to the Associated Press. Could any woman who respected herself, submit to such an indignity? What was there about her whom Dr. Kane had wooed and wedded, that she should be thus insulted, and denied common justice under an outrageous imputation? Her sole means of defence, her only vindication—was the publication of this correspondence.

The world usually sides with the rich, the proud, and the powerful; and it is not expected that the poor, the humble, and the weak, will receive either justice or sympathy. But some good will be accomplished in the unquestionable proof afforded of the pure and spotless character of the two persons whose hearts are laid open in this correspondence. The publication may do service also to the community, in exhibiting the folly of that spirit of prejudice, which in this instance helped to cut short one valued life, and irreparably blighted another.

Several unimportant letters, and some nearly repetitions of others, have been left out of the collection; and in one or two instances, portions in which persons are mentioned or alluded to, have been omitted. Portions of other letters were taken out by Dr. Kane himself.

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(BEFORE MARRIAGE)

* * * Dear now dear Maggie, my
 ever dear Maggie. Live a life of purity
 and freedom. Consecrate it to me,
 , have no past eyes
 which even the heart of an angel could
 bear a stain. That live, dear Maggie,
 until God brings me back to you - and
 then - meeting my eye with the proud
 consciousness of virtue - we will rejoice
 united to the passion sanctified by
 love and marriage. Golden fields
 shall spread before us their summer
 harvest. Silver lakes mirror your
 very beauty. Let us live for
 each other - Farewell!
 E. K. Kane.

(AFTER MARRIAGE)

Dear Maggie - May I meet you at half
 past ten to night. I have a letter
 from your Mother. Do not say no
 but I shall spend the evening and
 I'll be with you.

I thank you, dear Maggie, for your kind
 letter. I have none in this oval mind
 nearly forgotten since but this afternoon
 shall see me in your company.

What say you to tomorrow for our
 holiday! - All your Mother's
 love and the spirit of "thank-
 ing" to each of us. For even if the
 dear old Polar winter should make
 us a perpetual exile, the memory
 of a dear affection would be better
 than a recollected coolness.

If you think me afraid
 of letting you be my contradiction

E. K. Kane!

L. S. Kang!!
 No St. Paul St!!
 "Delish"!!!!!

Will have you too
 Please?

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