

The Magicians of the  
Golden Dawn  
A Documentary History of a  
Magical Order  
1887-1923

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*by*

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*with a Foreword by*

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an N.C.O. in the First Hants Infantry Volunteers, probably before he left Bournemouth in 1885, and that he was masquerading as an artillery lieutenant when the photograph was taken in London. Thus the picture represented his private fantasies of military prowess rather than the truth.

The last of the three Chiefs was Dr William Robert Woodman, who was never as active in the Order as Westcott or Mathers. He was born in 1828, studied medicine in London and qualified in c. 1851. He became Secretary of the Rosicrucian Society in 1867 and succeeded R. W. Little as its Supreme Magus when the latter died in 1878.

When the Rosicrucian Society was founded in 1866 he was practising medicine at Vittoria Villas, Stoke Newington, but moved to Exeter late in 1871. An uncle who was the proprietor of a well-known horticultural nursery had died and Woodman was his heir. He was back in London by 1887.

In his first Soc. Ros. pamphlet (1900) Westcott described him as a student of 'old Hebrew philosophy [i.e. the Cabbala], of Egyptian antiquities, and familiar with the works of the Gnostics, Platonists and Neo-Platonists; he had studied curious medieval science such as astrology, alchymy and the Tarot'. However much he knew about these matters, he revealed nothing of his knowledge in either series of *The Rosicrucian*, which he edited jointly with R. W. Little.

*The Golden Dawn in the Outer*  
1888-96

A. E. Waite recalled the gossip that was current, perhaps not in 1888 but certainly soon after.<sup>1</sup>

In Theosophical and kindred circles, the rumours of an Occult Order making great pretences were abroad in those days. Obscure persons were placing cryptic sigils after their names in unexpected communications, as if to test whether I was already a member. Dark hints were conveyed in breathless murmurs. A disciple of Thomas Lake Harris was disposed to be confidential if he could obtain licence. People from the North, one of whom made spectacles, went so far as to say that those who knew could speak and referred to one.<sup>2</sup> Rough customers from the Lowlands of Scotland talked about strange things in the modern world. It transpired presently that MacGregor Mathers—who had assumed the additional patronymic presumably to sustain the cause—was something to do with this darkly glittering business. The name of Wynn Westcott also loomed remotely. Mathers was like a comic Blackstone of occult lore and Westcott like a dull owl, hooting dolefully among cypresses over tombs of false adepts.

Westcott made an oblique reference to the G.D. at a meeting of the Metropolitan College of the Soc. Ros. on 11 October 1888. That evening he read a short paper on *Die Geheime Figuren der Rosenkreuzer aus den 16ten und 17ten Jahrhunderten*, 1785, and exhibited a copy of the book that had once belonged to the Rev. Woodford.<sup>3</sup>

The one I show you was once in the possession of the

<sup>1</sup> A. E. Waite, *Shadows of Life and Thought*, 1938, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> The 'cryptic sigils' may have been the G.D. grade numerals,  $0^{\circ} = 0^{\circ}$ .  $1^{\circ} = 10^{\circ}$  etc. T. L. Harris (1823-1906) was a well-known American mystagogue. His disciple was Dr Edward Berridge, a London homoeopathic physician. The spectacle-maker was T. H. Pattinson, of Bradford, a zealous member of the Soc. Ros. and the Theosophical Society who was in fact a watch- and clock-maker and repairer.

<sup>3</sup> *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, Transactions of the Metropolitan College*, 1888-9, p. 19.

Rev. A. F. A. Woodford, M.A. He was a very learned Hermetist, and a member of a very ancient universal Rosicrucian Society, composed of students of both sexes, whose English name is unknown except to members of it; but its Hebrew title was ChaBRat ZeReCH BoQR (Society of the Shining Light of the Dawn), and its students are now known in England as 'Hermetic Students of the G.D.'. I learned from him that it consisted of students and adepts only, and possessed no merely honorary or ornamental members. It was, I believe, his association with this sodality, that rendered him inattentive to my repeated requests that he should join our Rosicrucian College, which he deemed a mere exoteric institution, for he was the last man to neglect a means of increasing his store of occult knowledge.

All of this was intentionally misleading. The G.D. was not a 'very ancient universal Rosicrucian society' but had been founded only a few months before. Nor could Westcott have learned anything about the G.D. from Woodford because he himself was its founder. Woodford had not refused to join the Soc. Ros. because it was esoterically inferior to the G.D. He had been a candidate for admission to the Soc. Ros. in April 1885, long before the G.D. was projected, but did not go any further in the matter. Finally, he was never a member of the G.D. and died on 23 December 1887, three months before the first initiates were recruited.

The following communication, which was published in *Notes and Queries* on 8 December 1888 above the name of Gustav Mommsen, might have been 'planted' there by Westcott.

A SOCIETY OF KABBALISTS.—Johann F. Falk succeeded to the directorate of a secret society of students of the Kabbalah about 1810, in London, I believe. Its name was 'Chabrah Zereh aur bokher', as nearly as Hebrew can be put into English. The late Eliphaz Levi, of Paris, was concerned in it later on. Is this society still in existence?

Westcott's reply appeared in the issue dated 9 February 1889.

The order of mystics which gave Eliphaz Levi (Abbé Constant), his occult knowledge, and of which Johann Falk was at one time the Lecturer on the Kabbalah in London, is still at work in England. It is not a Masonic order, and there is no distinction between men and women students. The greatest privacy is maintained, and some knowledge of Hebrew is essential, but the

whole course of study and experiment is so abstruse and complex that membership is very limited as to number, and the proceedings have no public interest. Its true name is only told to initiates, and the few outsiders who have heard of its existence only know of the society as 'The Hermetic Students of the G.D.'.

Once again a spurious antiquity was attributed to the Order. Next, since Westcott clearly knew all about the 'Hermetic Students' and provided his own address, any reader of *Notes and Queries* who was sufficiently curious had only to write to him. Drafts of two letters that could then be sent to prospective members are in the Private Collection.

Westcott identified himself a 'Praemonstrator of the Kabbalah to the Isis-Urania Temple of the G.D.' in the 1889-90 issue of the Soc. Ros. *Transactions* (p. 15). This publication, which had a small circulation and was published privately, would not have been seen by members of the general public.

An intriguing announcement of the existence of an Order calling itself 'The Hermetic Students of the G.D. in the Outer' appeared in the June 1889 issue of Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical periodical *Lucifer*. It was carefully stage-managed and was printed in connection with the denunciation of an obscure group of 'occultists' at Keighley, Yorkshire. A correspondent who signed him- or herself as 'One who has been duped' had sent a long letter of complaint about the activities of the Keighley 'Ros Crux Fratres'. The communication was shown to Mathers, who was temporarily the Secretary of the Metropolitan College of the Soc. Ros., perhaps in order to learn what he had to say about the activities of a rival 'Rosicrucian' group. His 'official statement' was published in the same number. The person who had been duped alleged that the Keighley Fratres practised Black Magic and sacrificed kids.

They are also untiring in telling how they can raise Elementals, and they are on the point of forming a circle for obtaining information of a forbidden kind. The Society is composed of Spiritualists and bogus Astrologers . . . In the beginning of the year 1888, they started a magazine entitled 'The Lamp of Thoth', which they issued monthly, price one shilling.<sup>1</sup> It existed

<sup>1</sup> *The Lamp of Thoth*, being the Magazine of the 'Ros Crux Fratres', edited by 'Zanoni'. Office: 14 Park Wood Street, Keighley, 15. Vol. I, Jan.-June 1888; vol. II, no. 1, July 1888 (all published). Each issue consisted of 60 pages reproduced from handwriting by the primitive cyclostyle process. This must be the rarest of all British occult periodicals.

for seven months and then fell through. Nearly all the matter it contained was copied from occult books, and that which was said to be original was nothing but Black Magic or nonsense.

In *Lucifer* these surprising disclosures were followed by a letter from Mathers who vigorously denied any connection between the Soc. Ros. and the sham Rosicrucians at Keighley. However, he did more than write on behalf of the Soc. Ros. because *Lucifer* clearly identified him as the source of the following manifesto:

*The Hermetic Students of the Rosicrucian G.D. in the Outer*

The Chiefs of the Second Order fearing that the proceedings of certain men in the Northern Counties of England may by exhibition of pretended powers and Rosicrucian dignities lead students away from the Higher Paths of Mysticism, into Goetic [i.e. Magical] practices, desire that all Fratres and Sorores of the G.D. will accordingly warn the unwary and uninitiated that no such persons hold any warrant from us, nor possess our ancient and secret knowledge.

Given forth from the M.: A.:

of

Sapiens dominabitur astris [Fräulein Sprengel]

Deo duce comite ferro [Mathers]

Non omnis moriar [Westcott]

Vincit omnia veritas [Woodman]

Published by order of the above: Sapere Aude [Westcott],  
Cancellarius in Londinense.

The initials M.: A.: referred to 'the Mystic Mountain of Abiegnus, which is the Mountain of God in the Centre of the Universe, the sacred Rosicrucian Mountain of Initiation'.<sup>1</sup>

But for the publication in *Lucifer* it is unlikely that the nonsense at Keighley would have attracted any attention. My assumption is that Mathers, with Westcott's approval, was merely contriving a little suitably mysterious publicity for the G.D.

The last minute availability (see Preface) of the parchment roll containing details of the London Isis-Urania Temple's membership between March 1888 and January 1910, also the more detailed list of all the G.D. members between March 1888 and September 1897 has provided much information that was hitherto missing. Table 1

<sup>1</sup> Aleister Crowley's definition in *The Equinox*, I, iii, 1910, p. 209.

shows the number of initiations for all the G.D. Temples during the nine years from 1888 to 1896. The figures in brackets indicate the number of women members.

The records show that the Osiris Temple at Weston-super-Mare had only a brief life, while at Edinburgh the Amen-Ra Temple expanded very rapidly during 1895-6. The number of active members at any given time cannot be stated since the dates of resignations or deaths are not invariably given.

Table 1. Initiations for all G.D. Temples 1888-96

	Isis-Urania London	Osiris Weston- super- Mare	Horus Brad- ford	Amen-Ra Edin- burgh	Athathoor Paris	Total
1888	32 (9)	8	11	—	—	51
1889	14 (4)	—	2 (1)	—	—	16
1890	14 (11)	2	8	—	—	24
1891	23 (18)	—	12 (5)	—	—	35
1892	22 (6)	—	9	—	—	31
1893	14 (8)	—	3 (1)	7 (3)	—	24
1894	29 (9)	—	6	7	2 (2)	46
1895	22 (9)	—	3 (3)	14 (8)	5 (2)	44
1896	19 (10)	—	3	20 (9)	4 (1)	46
	189 (84)	10	57 (10)	48 (20)	11 (5)	315 (119)

A typed document in the Private Collection dated 2 September 1893 headed 'Erasures from the Roll of the G.D. in Anglia' shows that by that date approximately 170 people had been initiated in all the existing Temples. Twenty-three resignations were recorded, three had been 'excluded' and twenty-three had demitted. I infer that those who had demitted had left the Order without formally resigning. There had also been seven deaths, including that of 'No. 4 Sprengel'. Since Westcott must have announced her decease it was necessary to include her name in the list. Hence at that time the Order appears to have had c. 124 active members.

The first four names inscribed on the parchment roll and entered in the manuscript book were those of Mathers (No. 1), Westcott (No. 2), Dr Woodman (No. 3) and Fräulein A. Sprengel (No. 4). By the end of March 1888 the membership of the G.D. totalled nine. The first to be initiated in the Isis-Urania Temple were Miss Mina Bergson ('Vestigia Nulla Retrorsum'), later Mrs MacGregor Mathers, and Miss Theresa Jane O'Connell ('Ciall agus neart'). By the end of



the year at least a dozen Soc. Ros. members had joined. Mrs Alexandra Mackenzie ('Cryptonyma'), K. R. H. Mackenzie's widow, was one of the earliest initiates and was probably invited to join as a compliment to her husband's memory. She never progressed beyond the Neophyte grade and resigned in 1896. Three of the first recruits were a Dane (J. Hermann Simonsen), an Englishman resident in Switzerland and yet another with an address at Jerusalem. None of them was in the Order for very long.

Apart from the Rev. W. A. Ayton, who joined together with his wife Anne in July 1888, during the Order's early days there was another clergyman in the person of the Rev. Dr T. W. Lemon, of Plymouth, who was also in the Soc. Ros.

Perhaps the most surprising discovery of all was the name of Mrs Constance Mary Wilde, the wife of Oscar Wilde, who joined in 1888 and had reached the senior Philosophus grade by November 1889. Her entry includes the statement 'In abeyance with the sympathy of the Chiefs'. It is possible that her worldly husband had learned about her occult interests and had raised objections.

Most of the members had conventional middle-class backgrounds but there were a few with high social pretensions. However, the claim to a title did not guarantee the Chiefs' approval. The Countess de Brémont, who joined in November 1888, was soon told to resign. The Baroness de Pallandt left in April 1893 after two years' membership and Westcott wrote 'no good' against her name in the register. The Hon. Mrs Ivor Herbert was in the G.D. for a year (1889-90) and might have remained longer had she not gone to Canada with her husband. The Hon. Miss Gabrielle Borthwick ('Sine Metu') joined the Isis-Urania Temple in July 1891 and eventually reached the Second Order in 1897.

There were two foreign noblemen in the persons of Count Franz Otto Bubna (initiated December 1889) and Baron Alphonse Walleen, a Dane who joined Isis-Urania in June 1890 and soon resigned. In August 1893 he was 'excluded from re-admission by ballot'. During the early 1900s he had a finger in Rudolph Steiner's obscure pseudo-Masonic activities.<sup>1</sup> Possibly the most exotic initiate was the Nawab Mahomet Eusouf, who joined Isis-Urania in March 1890 and resigned six months later.

Mr William Crookes, a Fellow of the Royal Society—he was knighted in 1897—already a famous scientist and prominent member of the Society for Psychical Research, took the Neophyte grade in

<sup>1</sup> See Francis King, *Ritual Magic in England: 1887 to the Present Day*, 1970, pp. 101-6.

Isis-Urania in June 1890 and had allowed his connection with the G.D. to lapse by September.

The year 1890 was particularly memorable in the G.D.'s annals since it witnessed the admission of three people who were later to be particularly prominent members of Isis-Urania. They were Miss Annie Horniman ('Fortiter et Recte', January), William Butler Yeats ('Demon Est Deus Inversus', March) and Mrs Florence Farr Emery ('Sapientia Sapienti Dono Data', July), known to a wider public as the actress Florence Farr. All of them introduced friends to the G.D. Indeed, it is tolerably sure that Yeats was Florence Farr's sponsor. Others he brought to the Order included the beautiful Maud Gonne ('Per Ignem Ad Lucem' November 1891), whom for years on end he vainly hoped to marry. She, however, was too dedicated to the cause of Ireland's freedom to contemplate marriage to him or anyone else at that time. George Pollexfen ('Festina Lente'), his uncle, joined in December 1893. There was, too, his father's and his own close friend Dr John Todhunter ('Aktis Heliou', February 1892). Formerly a physician but now a minor poet he had emigrated from Dublin to London in 1888 and helped Yeats senior to find a house close to his own at Bedford Park in the quiet West London suburb of Chiswick.

The first of the fourteen medical men, apart from Westcott and Woodman, who were in the G.D. before 1900 were Dr T. W. Coffin, a London physician who was also in the Soc. Ros., Dr George Dickson who practised at Edinburgh, and Dr Bogdan Jastrzebski Edwards of Bradford.

Dr Robert Masters Theobald ('Ecce In Penetralibus') was initiated in 1893. He originally intended to become a Nonconformist minister but was expelled from a theological college because he refused to believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible. Later he was in bad odour with the medical Establishment because of his advocacy of the 'Electro-homoeopathic' theories of an Italian quack called Count Caesar Mattei. He also believed that Bacon wrote the works of Shakespeare. His consulting rooms were at 5 Grosvenor Street, Mayfair. His fellow homoeopath Dr Berridge may have introduced him to the Order. Dr Charles Lloyd Tuckey, yet another homoeopathic practitioner—his consulting rooms were at 33 Green Street Mayfair—joined the Isis-Urania Temple in July 1894. He was the author of *Psycho-Therapeutics, or Treatment by Sleep and Suggestion*, 1889.

I have searched in vain for a book with the invigorating title *Our Morning Bath* by Dr Henry Pullen Burry, who was initiated in