

One version of an endeavour

A History of the Golden Dawn

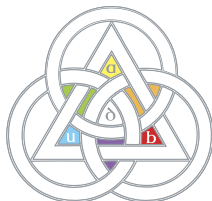


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A History of the Golden Dawn

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Magic has fallen into disrepute. Four thousand years ago it was part of established religion and the repository of such scientific knowledge as was then known. With the rise of Christianity it was persecuted and driven underground as Satanic. With the growth of science it has become discredited as mumbo jumbo. A few scattered “wise” women, a warlock or two, a set of rituals and some folk lore are all that survive of the witch cult in England.

Spiritualism has its roots in necromancy, but few of its followers know what they are doing. They do not work in a consecrated circle, and have no traditional means of checking the identity of the intelligences or whatever it is with whom or with which they get in touch. Commercially minded fortune tellers have replaced the sacred oracles of Greece and Rome, and batten on the credulous, while the art of interpreting dreams has been divorced from religion and taken over by the followers of Freud.

Astronomy and astrology have parted company, and the transmutation of metals has become a province of atomic scientists. And yet in England magic is still practised by a few because they say it works. If you perform the rituals with understanding and faith, you get results in a higher proportion of cases than can be accounted for satisfactorily by chance – or so these modern magi assert.

This survival of ritual magic in England is due largely to the activities and teaching of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn with its twin offshoots the A..A.. or Silver Star, and the Stella Matutina or Morning Star. Magic however is only one of the subjects taught to the neophyte, who in the A..A.. swears “to prosecute the Great Work: which is to obtain control of the nature and powers of my own being”.

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in the Outer was founded in 1887 by three members of the Rosicrucian Society in England (*Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia*) which itself was only founded in 1865. The Order had eleven grades or degrees subdivided into three groups, the Golden Dawn with five degrees, the Rose of Ruby

and the Cross of Gold (R.R.A.C.) and the Silver Star (A..A..) each of three degrees.

Members of the G.D. group were not allowed to know those of the R.R.A.C., whilst the third group, the A..A., consisted of the "Secret Chiefs". Since the latter were not living, they may well have been mythical.

The cipher manuscripts on which the Order was founded were bought at a bookstall by the Reverend A.F.A. Woodford in 1884. They consisted of notes and rough diagrams for the first five degrees. He showed them to his Masonic and Rosicrucian colleagues, W.R. Woodman, W. Wynn Westcott the coroner for North East London, and S.L. MacGregor Mathers, an able but autocratic and somewhat theatrical man who called himself Count MacGregor of Glenstrae.

Between them they deciphered the documents, which were in English and revealed the address of Fraulein Sprengel (*Sapiens Dominabitur Astris*) in Hanover. On writing to her they received permission to open the Isis-Urania temple in London.

The rituals were then expanded and rewritten by Mathers, and – if tradition is correct – their English was improved by the poet W.B. Yeats, who became a prominent member of the Order. Whence Mathers obtained his material for the three degrees of the R.R.A.C. is uncertain, but it is said that he received them from a “Continental adept”, Frater E.S.L. No rituals are known for the three degrees of the A..A., of which Mathers was never a member, though he claimed to be in “astral communication” with at least one of these elusive chiefs.

Thus the rituals and teaching of the Golden Dawn have a modern Continental origin. This is confirmed by the fact that the original instruction on “The Tarot Trumps and their attributions to the Hebrew Alphabet” bears a cipher note signed A.L.C., the initials of Alphonse Louis Constant, or Eliphas Levi. The more important rituals and instructions have been published in full by the Aries Press, Chicago, the author being Israel Regardie (*Ad Majoram Adonai Gloriam*).

The Order grew quickly. Within ten years there were five temples or lodges, the Isis-

Urania in London, Osiris in Weston Super Mare, Horus in Bradford, Amon Ra in Edinburgh, and Ahathoor in Paris. Soon members and temples were quarrelling. In 1901 the mother lodge disowned MacGregor Mathers (*Deo Duce Comite Ferro*), who was the autocratic head of the whole Order.

About 1905 Aleister Crowley (*Perdurabo*) in his turn broke with Mathers and founded an offshoot of this own, the A..A.. In his variation, the third group is called the S.S. or Silver Star instead of the A..A., which means the same thing in Latin, while he used the initials A..A.. as an inclusive term to cover the three groups.

He claimed to be inspired by one of the "Secret Chiefs", a "praeter-human Intelligence" called Aiwaz. Later he also claimed initiation into the three last degrees, thus breaking with the tradition of the Golden Dawn, which did not admit living members to this group.

Dr. Wynn Westcott (*Sapere Aude and Non Omnis Morior*), W.B. Yates (*Demon Est Deus Inversus*), and Arthur Machen (*Filius*

Aquarum) resigned, while Florence Farr (*Sapientia Sapienti Dono Data*) retired to Ceylon. Then Dr. Felkin (*Finem Respice*) founded a second offshoot, the Stella Matutina – in full “The Order of the Companions of the Rising Light in the Morning” - with a temple, Amoun, in London.

In 1914 the mother temple of Isis-Urania, which had been kept going by A.E. Waite (*Sacramentum Regis*) was closed to be reopened later as the Merlin Temple of the Stella Matutina under Dr. Felkin. The latter founded a second but smaller temple in London, the membership of which was restricted to members of the Rosicrucian Society of England.

He also founded the Hermes Temple in Bristol, then retired to New Zealand, where he started yet another temple. All but the Amoun had a short life.

When Mathers died in 1917 the Athoor temple in Paris was closed, but his wife, who was a sister of the philosopher Bergson and was known in the Order as *Vestigia Nulla Retrorsum*, joined Brodie-Innes (*Sub Spe*), who was still head of the Amon Ra Temple in Edinburgh.

They disapproved of Dr. Felkin's Stella Matutina, but remained for a time in close touch with a temple founded by one of Mathers' followers in New York. Today the A..A.. survives in New York, the Stella Matutina though dormant is not quite defunct, and the Golden Dawn in its original form is no more.

Thus the G.D. had a short life. Like so many of these orders its history was one long quarrel. Yet it dominated the occult world of its day and various members – Crowley and Waite in particular – were responsible for publishing for the first time much traditional lore.

Teaching

Esoteric Cabalah with its numerology and complex system of correspondences based on the diagram of the Tree of Life was taught. The symbolism of the Tarot cards was explained and divination by them practiced, astrology and geomancy being used by members who preferred those methods.

Special stress was laid on Egyptian mythology and on the technique of assuming god forms. Skrying and travel on

the astral planes were taught, while to pass one of the grade tests the candidate had to interpret a symbol correctly, or visit the plane of some system unfamiliar to him. Three varieties of magic were included, and to pass another test, the candidate had to perform a classical operation successfully.

The varieties of magic taught were the Clavicula of Solomon the King, the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage, and the Enochian system with its peculiar alphabet and language as revealed to Dr. John Dee, Queen Elizabeth's astrologer, through his skryer or medium Sir Edward Kelly.

The Enochian system appears in a fuller form than that in which it survives in Dee's own manuscripts in the Ashmoleum and British Museums. It must therefore have been studied and developed on the Continent before it reappeared in the teachings and ritual of the Golden Dawn.

No dictionary of the Enochian language has been published, and no book written which describes or explains this remarkable system in full. It is therefore difficult

for anyone to work who is not a member of some order like that of the Rose of the Ruby and the Cross of Gold.

The theory of alchemy was included, and the central rituals were based on the Rosicrucian myth of Christian Rosencreutz, not on the masonic legend of Hiram Abiff.

One important subject was omitted, sex. This played a vital part in the witch cult, in certain Gnostic sects, and in the Templar or pseudo-Templar tradition of Baphomet. Crowley however included it in his derivative order the A..A..., while he also incorporated various elementary practices of yoga, which, strictly speaking, form no part of Western Tradition.

Finally he produced much of the symbolism and morality of his private “revealed religion” of Thelema, with the Book of The Law as a new Bible for humanity. This neo-Egyptian and sexual revival was contrary to the original teaching of the Golden Dawn and was the main reason why its members objected strongly to Frater Perdurabo.

At first sight it would appear that the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was the repository of all the childish nonsense rightly discarded by Western man in his progress from the Stone Age to the Atomic Age. There is much truth in this criticism, for much curious but useless knowledge was taught. Yet members of the Order were made acutely conscious of the existence of the spiritual world, the denial of which is responsible for many of our troubles today.

No one who has performed a ceremonial invocation or evocation successfully, who has actually charged a talisman, or travelled with a guide on the astral plane, can deny the existence in consciousness, if not in nature, of angels, demons, praeter-human intelligences, blind forces – call them what you will – whose barbarous names and often bizarre descriptions are listed in the various traditional systems.

Whether the members of the Order descended into the limbo of their subconscious and meddled dangerously with the shells (Qliphoth), or, following their aspirations learned from the Angels concerned, the secrets of the thirty Aethyrs

from Tex to Lil, they enlarged their understanding of the universe and of themselves. To what end? The short and turbulent history of the Order suggests that many of the brethren fell by the way-side.

This is not surprising. To be a successful a magus must become conscious of all the elements of his soul without exception. This is often represented as a descent into Hell, since it is precisely these unknown parts of the soul – of the subconscious – that are the abodes of demons. Many who are rash enough to rouse these demons by evocation end by succumbing to them.

If they restrict themselves to invoking that to which they aspire, they generally fall foul of enthusiasm. Not being integrated, they succumb to the subtle temptations of the spirit, which accompany or follow successful invocation. They falsely imagine themselves to be that to which they have aspired.