

THE ROSICRUCIANS: PAST AND PRESENT, AT HOME AND ABROAD

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It is well at certain times to consider our status as Rosicrucians, and to remind ourselves of the origin of the Society to which we belong, to notice how far we moderns have strayed from the original paths laid down by our Founder, C.R., and to take a note of the kindred Societies of Rosicrucians which are now in being, so far as we know of them.

With regard to past history we must not be surprised that extant published records are very scanty, for the purpose of the Rosicrucians was to be unknown to the people among whom they lived. Some few notable persons only appear to have had the right to function as recognized members of the Rosicrucian Colleges, for instance, Michael Maier the German student of Alchemy who died in 1662, and Dr. Robert Fludd of London and Bearstead near Maidstone who died in 1637.

The Star of Rosicrucianism is now once more in the ascendant and our Society has made rapid strides in the past ten years. It is curious to note that waves of interest in occult and mystical subjects, seem to sweep over a nation at intervals; periods of Rosicrucian enlightenment alternate with other periods of materialistic dogmatism.

We must remember that Rosicrucianism itself was "no new thing" but only a revival of still earlier forms of Initiation, and was a lineal descendant of the Philosophies of the Chaldean Magi, of the Egyptian priests, of the Neo-Platonists, of the Hermetists of Alexandria of the Jewish Kabalists and of Christian Kabalists such as Raymond Lully and Pic de Mirandola.

The nominal Founder of our Society--Christian Rosencreuz, did not invent, at least in our modern sense of the word, the doctrines he promulgated, and which we should now study. It is narrated that he journeyed to Arabia, to Palestine, to Egypt and to Spain, and in the seats of learning in those countries he found and collected the mystic lore, which was made anew by him into a code of doctrine and knowledge. On his return from these foreign travels he settled in Germany, founded a Collegium, selected certain friends and transformed them into enthusiastic pupils, and giving his new Society his own name, he laid the foundation of that scheme of Mystical Philosophy, which we are now here to perpetuate and carry into practice: let us remember that he died in the year 1484, that is so far back as the reign of our King Richard the Third.

The fratres of the original Collegium, who met in the "Domus Sanctus Spiritus," or "House of the Holy Spirit," were learned men, earnest students and public benefactors. Their rules were: That none of the members should profess any art except to relieve the sick and that gratis; each one should wear the ordinary dress of the country, and should attend on Corpus Christi day at a general Convocation every year, whenever possible to do so; each one should seek a suitable pupil to succeed him: that the secret mark of each one should be C.R. or R.C., and that the Society should remain secret for 100 years.

As time went on the purposes and duties of the fratres became altered, the cure of the sick especially was taken over by the development of the medical profession.

About 1710, one Sigmund Richter, using the motto of "Sincerus Renatus," published at Breslau his work called "The perfect and true preparation of the Philosophical Stone according to the secret of the Brotherhoods of the Golden and Rosy Cross." In this volume we find a series of 52 rules for the

guidance of Rosicrucian members; these rules are such as were likely to lead to useful and orderly lives.

Again, about 1785, there was published at Altona in Germany a most important volume of coloured theosophical plates with elucidatory words and phrases and several essays on Rosicrucian subjects: its title was "Geheime Figuren der Rosenkreuzer"; it was in two portions. An English translation of some part of this work was published in 1888 by Franz Hartmann, a German Theosophist.

We catch a further glimpse of the purposes of the Rosicrucians at a later date, from a curious little tract relating to a French branch of the Society, which relates the Reception of Dr. Sigismund Bacstrom in the Mauritius--French colony--by the Comte de Chazal in 1794. I cannot say where the original MS. now is, but our copy was made by the secretary of the well-known Rosicrucian and crystal-gazer Frederick Hockley, who died in 1885. Bacstrom signed his pledge to fourteen promises;--to piety and sobriety, to keep the secrecy of his admission, to preserve the secret knowledge, to choose suitable successors, to carry on the great work, to give aid and charity privately, to share discoveries with his fellows, to avoid politics, to help strangers, and to show gratitude to those who had led to his reception, etc..

During a recent visit to East Africa I met in Natal a Mauritius born doctor whose wife was a Miss de Chazal, a native of Mauritius; among her ancestors about 1780-90 there was this M. de Chazal who was an eccentric genius and was considered to possess curious arts; he also became a notable Swedenborgian and held classes of mystical philosophy. The name is many times mentioned in a French history of Mauritius which was lent to me by Dr. Dumat of Durban. At the time of the French Revolution it would be natural for our count de Chazal to drop his title, as did many of the French nobility.

The aim of our own Society at the present day is to afford mutual aid and encouragement in working out the great problems of Life, and in discovering the Secrets of Nature; to facilitate the study of the system of Philosophy founded upon the Kabalah and the doctrines of Hermes Trismegistus, which was inculcated by the original Fratres Rosae Crucis of Germany, A.D. 1450; and to investigate the meaning and symbolism of all that now remains of the wisdom, art and literature of the Ancient World.

The Rosicrucian Societies of Anglia, Scotia and the United States, alike Masonic bodies, are by no means the only descendants of the original Collegium, for in Germany, and Austria there are other Rosicrucian Colleges of more direct descent than our own, which are not fettered by any of the limitations which Freemasonry has imposed upon us, and some of these, although not composed of many members, include students who understand many curious phenomena, which our Zelators have not studied. The German Rosicrucians keep their Colleges and membership entirely secret, they print no transactions nor even any notices, and it is almost impossible to identify any member.

The German groups of Rosicrucians now existing are much more immersed in mystic and occult lore than ourselves; they endeavour to extend the human faculties beyond the material toward the ethereal, astral and spiritual worlds: at the present time I understand that they use no formulated Ritual, but German Colleges have experienced a notable revival and the teachings of Rudolf Steiner are considered as giving an introduction of their system of occult Theosophy. Several of Steiner's volumes are now available in English translations, such as his "Initiation and its Results," "The Gates of Knowledge," and "Way of Initiation." They are well worthy of study.

The Societas Rosicruciana in Scotia, as well as the Societas Rosicruciana in the U.S.A. were branches from the same Rosicrucian source and sprang from a rejuvenation by Frater Robert Wentworth Little of that lapsed Rosicrucian College in England which is mentioned by Godfrey Higgins in his notable work "The Anacalypsis," or "An attempt to withdraw the Veil of the Isis of Sais," which was published in 1836; he remarks that he did not join the old College there referred to.

About fifty years earlier a certain eminent Jew named Falk, or Dr. Falcon, lived in London (a reference to whom will be found in the "Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry" by Kenneth Mackenzie) and was of high repute as a teacher of the kabalah and of other studies of a Rosicrucian character; he was indeed said to have magical powers. Falk could not have flatly affiliated to any Rosicrucian College because he was a strict Jew of the Jews, and the members of all true Rosicrucian Colleges have always been Christians, but perhaps not of an orthodox type, for there was a tendency in the teachings toward Gnostic ideals. Mackenzie classes Dr. Falk among the Rosicrucians of eminence, and certainly told me he had first hand evidence of his connection with the Society; many Christian students adopted a modification of the old Jewish kabalah, so perhaps some Jews have been allied to the Christian Rosicrucians.

Our own Magus Frater R. W. Little surrounded himself with several other notable Rosicrucian students, of whom I may mention the late Supreme Magus in Anglia, Dr. William Robert Woodman, a learned Kabalist and Hebrew scholar; W.J. Hughan, the great Masonic historian; William Carpenter, editor of Calmet's "Dictionary of the Bible"; Alphonse Constant, better known as "Eliphaz Levi," who gave Fratres Little and Kenneth Mackenzie much assistance, and was in return elected an honorary member of the Metropolitan College in 1873. Our Society unfortunately lost Frater Little at a very early age. Frater H. C. Levander, too, a Professor at University College, London, was a learned member; and took great interest in the mystic lore of the Society.

The late Lord Lytton, the author of "Zanoni" and "The Strange Story," who was in 1871 Grand Patron of our Society, took very great interest in this form of Philosophy, although he never reached the highest degree of knowledge; for public reasons he once made a disavowal of his membership of the Rosicrucians, but he had been admitted as a Frater of the German Rosicrucian College at Frankfort on the Main; that College was closed after 1850.

Among the Fratres who have recently been ornaments to our Colleges, I may draw attention to the lately deceased and quaintly cultured John Yarker of Didsbury; to our late Adept of York, T. B. Whytehead, who was famous as an antiquarian: to Frater Fendelow of the Newcastle College, who was the author of a learned and suggestive Rosicrucian Lecture: to Frater F. F. Schnitger, who made deep researches into the French and German Rosicrucian Treatises: to Samuel Liddell Mathers, the translator of portions of the Hebrew "Zohar," and to Frederick Holland, the author of "The Temple Rebuilt," and "The Shekinah Revealed." Another deceased Frater of eminence was Benjamin Cox of Weston-super-Mare, and with him I naturally couple the greater name of Frater Major F. G. Irwin, who, however has now also gone to a Temple far away.

Among the learned juniors of our Society, I may name Fratres Dr. Vaughan Bateson, Thomas Henry Pattinson, the Rev. C. E. Wright, Sir John A. Cockburn, W. J. Songhurst, Herbert Burrows, A. Cadbury Jones, W. Wonnacott, Dr. Wm. Hammond, Dr. B. J. Edwards, and Dr. W. C. Blaker.

Our Colleges need not languish for want of subjects of study; the narrative of the foundation of our Society is singularly suggestive of points for future investigation. The German "Fama Fraternitatis" of 1614, in an English translation by Thomas Vaughan of 1652, presents you with the History of Christian Rosenkreuz: its companion tract the "Confessio Fraternitatis" gives you a slight insight into the views of the Rosicrucians of a date a hundred years later. The "Chymische Hochzeit" or "Chemical Wedding" by C.R., and the "Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians" by F. Hartman, are tractates of Rosicrucian Allegory which will well repay, not only perusal, but deep study; while the elucidation of the whole set of Medieval Divinatory Sciences, Astrology, Geomancy, etc, are suitable themes for lectures in your College. For such as can understand medieval Latin a most interesting work is the "Oedipus Aegyptiacus" of Athanasius Kircher. It is desirable that our students should make themselves acquainted with the Ancient Mysteries of Egypt, of Greece and of Rome. The basis of the Western occultism of medieval Europe is the Kabalah of the medieval Hebrew Rabbis, to which I have published "An Introduction." This philosophy, although at first sight barbarous and crude, yet will be found, when one has grown familiar with the nomenclature, to be a concrete, coherent and far-reaching scheme of Theology, cosmology, ethics and metaphysics, serving to throw light on many obscure Biblical passages and to suggest original views of the meaning of most of the allegorical descriptions found in the Old Testament. A copy of a very curious old Kabalistic picture from a Syriac Gospel with a descriptive essay by Dr. Carnegie Dickson, a notable Scotch Rosicrucian Adept, has just been given to our Library.

The works of the great Rosicrucian Kabalist, Eliphaz Levi, are, to those who read French with ease, a mine of mystic lore, full of fine imagery, and replete with magical formulas. His "Histoire de la Magie" is a storehouse of information relating to the Secret Sciences and Secret Fraternities of all times and among many nations, while in English the two volumes of the new edition of Heckethorn's "Secret Societies" should be read as an introduction to deeper personal research.

The work of Franz Hartmann, named "Magic, White and Black," I can recommend to serious enquirers, for it elucidates the real aims of the Higher Magic, with which alone we are concerned, and it clears away many misconceptions which exist in the minds of the uninitiated.

To such as desire to follow more closely the Old Testament religious element, I should advise a perusal of the commentaries of Dr. Mien Barnes on "Daniel" and "The Book of Revelation," and the symbolical descriptions of the book of Ezekiel. On the Christian aspect I recommend "The Perfect Way," or "The Finding of Christ," by the late Dr. A. Kingsford; in this volume will be found worked out the broader scheme of Christian teaching which is so apt to be obscured by sectarian forms of worship. The tenets of this work are closely approximate to those of the earliest of the followers of Christian Rosenkreuz, whose name was probably a mystic title, motto or synonym, and not a family cognomen:- "Christian" referring to the general theological tendency, and "Rosenkreuz" to the Cross of Suffering whose explanation and key may need a Rose or secret explanation.

There is one doctrine for the learned, and a simpler formula for those who are unable to bear it yet, even as the new testament itself tells us, of the Great Master who taught his immediate disciples the true keys, but to others he spake only in parables,--"and without a parable spake he not unto them."

Such, my Fratres, are suitable subjects for the attention of your members, but there are many allied topics which might form suitable centres of interest and instruction, for example the whole range of church architecture as crystalised symbolism, the dogmas of the Gnostics, the several systems of

philosophy of the Hindoos, the parallelism between Rosicrucian doctrine and Eastern Theosophy, for which read Max Heindel's "Rosicrucian Cosmo Conception," and that enticing subject, the origin and meaning of the 22 Trumps or symbolic designs of the "Tarocchi" or pack of Tarot cards, which Eliphaz Levi says form a group of keys which will unlock every secret of Theology and Cosmology. For such as are interested in the Alchemy of the past I recommend a perusal of "A Suggestive Enquiry into the Hermetic Mystery" 1850, by an anonymous author, and E. A. Hitchcock's "Remarks on Alchemy and the Alchemists," 1857. And, lastly, we may make researches into that most interesting problem--Did Speculative Masonry arise from the Rosicrucians? I am to understand that the German Rosicrucians say that before the Masonic revival of 1717 these were identical in Europe.

Let us not forget; that not only as Rosicrucians, but even as Freemasons, we are pledged, not only to Brotherhood and Benevolence, but also to look below the surface of things, and to seek and to search out the hidden secrets of Nature and of Science. Let us be in mind that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, but that deeper study reveals the roots of knowledge, as well as increases our store of information. Let us not, with folded arms, float with the tide of indolence, but ever strive after increase of that true knowledge which is wisdom and remember that "to labour is to pray," or as the Latin motto has it, "Laborare est Orare," for the day.