

## Theosophy and the Golden Dawn

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[\*Note: all italics in the quoted portions of this article are as in the original sources.]

The second object of the Theosophical Society is “To encourage the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy and Science.” The following article is presented in order to contrast the chronological development of the Order of the Golden Dawn with pertinent events from the annals of the Theosophical Society. It is hoped that this will provide a basis for comparison of the aims and methods of the two different organizations.

The Theosophical Society was officially founded on November 17, 1875. On May 1, 1887, H.P. Blavatsky moved to London, where the Blavatsky Lodge was formed on May 19. On September 15, the first issue of the magazine, *Lucifer*, the “Light-Bringer,” designed to “bring to light the hidden things of darkness,” appeared; its co-editors being H.P. Blavatsky and Mabel Collins.

On March 1, 1888, a charter of warrant was drawn up for the Isis-Urania Temple of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, in London, which was the official founding of this Order. William Wynn Westcott, Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, and Dr. William Robert Woodman were its three chiefs. According to Westcott, it was a society devoted to the study of “Occult science and the magic of Hermes,” and was similar in aim to the Theosophical Society, though differing in mode of teaching and in language.<sup>1</sup> All members had code names; Westcott was Sapere Aude (Dare To Be Wise), and Non Omnis Moriar (I Shall Not Wholly Die); Mathers was Deo Duce Comite Ferro (With God as My Leader and the Sword as My Companion and 'S Rioghail Mo Dhream (Gaelic for Royal is My Race); Woodman was Vincit Omnia Veritas (Truth Conquers All).

Mathers composed a series of rituals for use in the various grades of the Order from rough notes and diagrams in a cypher manuscript, which had come into the possession of Rev. A. F. A. Woodford. The various grades included five stages in the outer order, three stages in the second order (to which the three above-mentioned chiefs belonged), and three stages in the third order (to which the secret chiefs who existed on the inner planes belonged). The second order later became the secret R. R. et A. C. (the Rosae Rubeae et Aureae Crucis) under Mathers' direction, by authority of the secret chiefs. However, there was more than one set of secret chiefs. Westcott received six letters from a secret chief of the second order, living in Germany, named Fraulein Sprengel, between November 1887 and December 1889. A letter dated August 23, 1890, in different handwriting, announced her death and said there would be no further communications. Mathers came into contact with other secret chiefs in Paris beginning in 1891. Under their influence, he took a different approach than Westcott had taken. They and Mathers stressed the practice of ritual and magic, in contradistinction to Westcott's emphasis on the theory and philosophy.

As a result of correspondence from people looking for practical instruction of occultism, H. P. Blavatsky wrote an article, "Practical Occultism," which was printed in the April, 1888, issue of *Lucifer*. In it she states "(a) The essential difference between theoretical and practical Occultism; or what is generally known as Theosophy on the one hand, and Occult science on the other, and:—(b) The nature of the difficulties involved in the study of the latter." She then gives twelve extracts from among some seventy-three "private rules" concerning the conditions necessary for the study of practical occultism.<sup>2</sup>

In the next month's (May) issue she wrote another article, "Occultism versus the Occult Arts"; also as a result of correspondence, which led her to two conclusions: "(a) There are more well-educated and thoughtful men who believe in the existence of Occultism and Magic (the two differing vastly) than the modern materialist dreams of; and—(b) That most of the believers (comprising many theosophists) have no definite idea of the nature of Occultism and confuse it with the Occult sciences in general, the 'Black art' included." She therefore enumerates four kinds of esoteric knowledge or Science:

(1) *Yajna-Vidya*, knowledge of the occult powers awakened in Nature by the performance of certain religious ceremonies and rites. (2) *Maha-vidya*, the 'great knowledge,' the magic of the Kabalists and of the *Tantrika* worship, often Sorcery of the worst description. (3) *Guhya-Vidya*, knowledge of the mystic powers residing in Sound (Ether), hence in the Mantras (chanted prayers or incantations) and depending on the rhythm and melody used; in other words, a magical performance based on Knowledge of the forces of Nature and their correlation; and (4) *ATMA-VIDYA*, a term which is translated simply 'Knowledge of the Soul', *true Wisdom* by the Orientalists, but which means far more. This last is the only kind of Occultism that any theosophist who admires *Light on the Path*, and who would be wise and unselfish, ought to strive after.<sup>3</sup>

The two above-mentioned articles have been reprinted extensively, and are available in the following books: *Raja-Yoga, or Occultism* (Theosophy Company); *Studies in Occultism* (Theosophical University Press); *Practical Occultism*; and *Collected Writings*, Vol. IX; (both: Theosophical Publishing House).

The October, 1888, issue of *Lucifer* begins with an article, "Lodges of Magic," also by H. P. Blavatsky. In it she says she received a letter asking why the Theosophical Society does not form working Lodges of practical occultism. Her reply included the Eastern maxim, "When the pupil is ready, the teacher will be found waiting," and stated further that the masters do not have to hunt up recruits in special lodges, nor drill them through mystical non-commissioned officers: that time and space are not barriers for Them.<sup>4</sup>

On the last page of that issue (Oct.) of *Lucifer* an announcement appeared containing the following:

Owing to the fact that a large number of Fellows of the Society have felt the necessity for the formation of a body of Esoteric students, to be organized

on the ORIGINAL LINES devised by the *real* founders of the T. S., the following order has been issued by the President-Founder: — I. To promote the esoteric interests of the Theosophical Society by the deeper study of esoteric philosophy, there is here-by organized a body, to be known as the ‘Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society’.<sup>5</sup>

In the December issue of *Lucifer* a correspondent asks, “Is not the ‘Esoteric Section’ of the T. S. likely to run counter to the views of your Editorial on Lodges of Magic?” Blavatsky replies, “No, it does not run counter, because it *is not* a lodge of *magic*, but of *training*”; further stating that esoteric philosophy is more than sufficient for students.<sup>6</sup> It will be remembered here that even the great Occultist, Eliphas Levi, was not a practicing ritual magician; being actually present at a magical ceremony on only three occasions in his life.<sup>7</sup>

Another letter appeared in the January, 1889 issue, part of which concerned the dangers of theosophists wanting to form a lodge of magic. To this Blavatsky added a note: “It is to preserve theosophists from *such dangers* that the ‘Esoteric Section’ of the T. S. has been founded.”<sup>8</sup>

William Butler Yeats, who had just previously moved to London, joined the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society in June, 1887. Around Christmas, 1888, he joined the newly formed Esoteric Section (E. S.). A year later, on December 20, 1889, he proposed a scheme for organization of occult research at an E. S. meeting. It was referred to Blavatsky, who was not present (she rarely, if ever, attended, due to failing health and other pressing work<sup>9</sup>), and accepted by her. Yeats was then appointed secretary of the research committee by the other members. Several occult experiments followed, which were evidently not what Blavatsky had intended. In August, 1890, a T. S. secretary asked Yeats to resign. He regretfully complied. Five months earlier, on March 7, 1890, Yeats was initiated into the Order of the Golden Dawn at Isis-Urania Temple in London. His code name was *Demon Est Deus Inversus* (The Devil is God Inverse).<sup>10</sup>

In the June, 1889, issue of *Lucifer*, the following letter from members of the Golden Dawn was printed:

*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 be exhibition of pretended powers and Rosicrucian dignities lead students away from the Higher Paths of Mysticism, into Goetic 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.<sup>11</sup>

On May 8, 1891, H. P. Blavatsky died in London. Annie Besant and William Q. Judge then became the joint heads of the E. S., while Col. Henry S. Olcott remained international president of the Theosophical Society. In December of that year, Dr. Robert Woodman, one of the three chiefs of the Golden Dawn, died, and no one was appointed to take his place.

In early 1892, Mathers implemented a radical reorganization of the Golden Dawn, thereby largely supplanting Westcott (the other one of the three original chiefs). Mathers announced that during a visit to Paris, he had contact with the secret chiefs of the Golden Dawn; and had been authorized by them to establish a secret second order (R. R. et A. C.), with himself as sole chief. Whereas the outer order dealt with theory and philosophy, this second order would deal with the actual practice of magic, requiring its initiates to make their own magical instruments: the Rose Croix lamens; the lotus wand; the magical sword; and four elemental weapons, the wand for fire, the cup for water, the dagger for air, and the pentacle for earth.<sup>12</sup>

On May 21, 1892, Mathers moved permanently to Paris, where he founded the Aathoor Temple. He developed a new ritual for admission to the second order which required a setting of a vault complete with altar and coffin. He rented a theater in Paris for some of the rituals.

Mathers then started translating a manuscript he found at the Library of the Arsenal, in Paris, entitled, *The Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin the Mage*. While translating this manuscript, he repeatedly had bicycle accidents on his way to and from the Library; and even lost most of his translation in a Paris suburban railway train. He warned the man backing this project financially, Frederick Leigh Gardner, that even physical possession of the manuscript was dangerous because of certain magical drawings in it which were “endowed with a species of automatic intelligent vitality.” It was finally published in February 1898, after many problems including major disagreements with Gardner over financial matters, resulting in his (Gardner’s) resignation from the Order.<sup>13</sup>

In March, Col. Olcott reviewed this book. In his *Old Diary Leaves*, Sixth Series, he says:

Mr. Mathers’ author, Abra-Melin, the seventeenth century Abraham, the translation of whose book by Mr. Mathers has provoked the foregoing comments, like the majority of these commercial traders in occult secrets, makes his excuses quite after the fatalistic fashion. He excuses himself for giving out these secrets on the ground that God is the Supreme Ruler of all, and that harm can only be done by the misuse of these magical formulae if it is His sovereign pleasure: a neat way, it would seem, of shifting the responsibility for the evil consequences of his own indiscretion upon the shoulders of a personal God who, of course, would not have allowed the publication of either the Hebrew original of his work, or the seventeenth century French translation, or Mr. Mathers’ clever rendering of it into most readable English, if he had not been willing that it should have been done! Truly, a soothing salve to a rebuking conscience. <sup>14</sup>

On October 29, 1896, after hearing of some discontentment in London, Mathers sent all members of the second order a manifesto demanding that they each send him “a written statement of voluntary submission in all points regarding the G. D. in the Outer and the R. R. et A. C.”<sup>15</sup> He further stated:

As to the Secret Chiefs of the Order, to whom I make reference and from whom I have received the wisdom of the Second Order, which I have communicated to you, I can tell you *nothing*. I know not even their earthly names, and I have rarely seen them in their physical bodies. . . . My encounters with them have shown me how difficult it is for a mortal, however advanced, to support their presence. . . . I do not mean that during my rare meetings with them I experienced the same feelings of intense physical depression that accompanies the loss of magnetism, on the contrary, the sensation was that of being in contact with so terrible a force that I can only compare it to the continued effect of that which is usually experienced by any person close to whom a flash of lightning passes during a violent storm; coupled with a difficulty of respiration similar to the half strangling effect produced by ether. As tested as I have been in occult work, I cannot conceive a much less advanced Initiate being able to support such a strain, even for five minutes without death ensuing. . . . the nervous prostration after each meeting being terrible and accompanied by cold sweats and bleeding from the nose, mouth and ears.<sup>16</sup>

Mathers didn't seem to mind these effects, as shown by the following, from Yeats Autobiography: "Every Sunday he gave to the evocation of Spirits, and I noted that upon that day he would spit blood. That did not matter, he said, because it came from his head, not his lungs; What ailed him I do not know, but I think that he lived under some great strain, and presently I noted that he was drinking too much neat brandy, though not to drunkenness ."<sup>17</sup>

In March, 1897, Westcott resigned all his offices in the Golden Dawn, and henceforth avoided most of his former colleagues.

Aleister Crowley was initiated into the Order of the Golden Dawn in London, on November 18, 1898. His code name was Brother Perdurabo (One Who Endures to the End.). Admission into the second order was possible after a year in the outer, and by invitation. Realizing he wouldn't be invited in London, Crowley went to Paris to see Mathers, who initiated him into the second order at his home. The members of the Order in London did not recognize this initiation. Mathers, feeling he was being usurped, wrote to the London Order on April 2, 1900, excerpts of which follow:

And I tell you plainly that were it *possible* to remove me from my place as the Visible Head of our Order (the which *cannot* be without my own consent, because of certain magical links) you would find nothing but disruption and trouble fall upon you all until you had expiated so severe a Karma as that of opposing a current sent at the end of a century to regenerate a Planet. And for the first time since I have been connected with the Order, I shall formulate my request to the Highest Chiefs for the Punitive Current to be prepared, to be directed against those who rebel; should they consider it (after examination of the Status of the London Order) advisable. <sup>18</sup>

Later that month, he sent Crowley back to take possession of the second order's private rooms in London. Yeats, who played an active part in what followed, wrote in his letters to Lady Gregory: "I told you that I was putting MacGregor out of the Kabbala. Well last week he sent a mad person—whom we had refused to initiate—to take possession of the rooms and papers of the Society." Crowley "seized the rooms and on being ejected attempted to retake possession wearing a black mask and in full highland costume and with a gilt dagger by his side."<sup>19</sup> This was stopped by Yeats and a couple of others.

This episode ended with the expulsion of Mathers and Crowley and a few others from the Order on April 19, 1900. Crowley then went on and developed the Order of the Silver Star (Argenteum Astrum; A. . A. .), founded the Abbey of Thelema in Sicily, and because of his teaching of sex magic, was offered and accepted high rank in the Ordo Templi Orientis (O. T. O.).

As an interesting sideline here, Crowley was born in 1875, the same year the Theosophical Society was founded. He considered this to be highly significant, since he believed that he, and H. P. Blavatsky had, in certain respects, similar missions. He believed that he, too, was a channel of communication with superhuman intelligences and powers. He often stated that he was the Beast, whose number is 666 (He also stated that he was one of England's two greatest poets, noting that we mustn't forget Shakespeare.).

After the expulsion of Mathers, Yeats became imperator of the Isis-Urania Temple, and was very active in trying to reorganize the Order. He finally resigned his post as imperator in February, 1901, unsuccessfully opposing the adoption of a resolution whereby the Order would, among other things, officially sanction the formation of small private groups within the Order for the purpose of practicing magic, astral projection, etc.; but without being subject to the Order. Some quotations from his communications to the Council concerning this are:

Sometimes the sphere of an individual man is broken, and a form comes into the broken place and offers him knowledge and power if he will but give it of his life. If he give it of his life it will form a swirl there and draw other forms about it, and his sphere will be broken more and more, and his will subdued by alien wills. It seems to me that such a swirl has been formed in the sphere of this Order, by powers, that though not evil in themselves are evil in relation to this Order."; "It is by sorrow and labour, by love of all living things, and by a heart that humbles itself before the Ancestral Light, and by a mind its power and beauty and quiet flow through without end, that men come to Adeptship, and not by the multiplication of petty formulae."; "Surely Adeptship must come more easily in an order that 'reaches up to the throne of God himself, and has among its members angels and archangels', than in a 'group' governed by an Egyptian spirit found, it may be, by accident in a statue."; "The soul that separates itself from others, that says 'I will seek power and knowledge for my own sake, and not for the world's sake', separates itself from that path and becomes dark and empty."<sup>20</sup>

The Golden Dawn then split into factions including the Morgenrothe and the Order of the Stella

Matutina, of which Yeats remained a member until about 1923. Another faction, the Alpha et Omega Temple, remained loyal to Mathers.

In 1903, Arthur Edward Waite, who never did agree with Mathers, became imperator of the Isis-Urania Temple. He rewrote the rituals in what he considered to be a more Rosicrucian, or mystical Christian, spirit, since the Golden Dawn does trace its origins to Rosicrucian Societies. He and his followers were more concerned with that path than with ritual magic. In his book, *The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross*, he gives the Order of the Golden Dawn as an example of a school of “astral workings, activities and fruits of the magical paths in their distinction from the Higher Magia.”<sup>21</sup>

In 1919, Violet Mary Firth, better known as Dion Fortune (from her codename: Dio non Fortuna), joined the Alpha et Omega Temple of the Stella Matutina. This was the one which remained loyal to Mathers, Mrs. Mathers having become head of it. When Dion Fortune joined, it was being operated by J. W. Brodie Innes, from whom she learned much. In 1924 she founded the Fraternity of the Inner Light, which she operated until her premature death in 1946. In her later life she was in contact with Aleister Crowley, possibly concerning their mutual interest in sex magic, about which she wrote several novels. Her most well-known book, *Psychic Self-Defence*, (1930) was written as a result of having gained experience in dealing with “psychic attacks” against herself. She alleged that Mrs. Mathers had launched one of them, and had actually succeeded in killing one errant member.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, according to the first edition of Yeats’ Autobiography, MacGregor Mathers had died, in 1918, overcome by powerful magical currents emanating from Crowley. They had been waging psychic warfare since shortly after the turn of the century. In subsequent editions this statement does not appear. However, in a note at the end, Yeats says that Mrs. Mathers was shocked at his account of her husband in the first edition, but that “apart from one or two errors of fact I have omitted nothing of it.”<sup>23</sup>

In any case, no theosophist can doubt that such things are possible. In *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, K. H. writes:

My friend, this is treading upon dangerous ground. In our mountains here, the Duggas lay at dangerous points, in paths frequented by our Chelas, bits of old rag, and other articles best calculated to attract the attention of the unwary, which have been impregnated with their evil magnetism. If one be stepped upon a tremendous psychic shock may be communicated to the wayfarer, so that he may lose his footing and fall down the precipice before he can recover himself. Friend, beware of Pride and Egoism, two of the worst snares for the feet of him who aspires to climb the high paths of Knowledge and Spirituality. You have opened a joint of your armour for the Duggas—do not complain if they have found it out and wounded you there.<sup>24</sup>

That he is not speaking here symbolically only is shown by Blavatsky’s letter to Sinnett, where she gives more details:

The poor *Disinherited* is very sick. He fell down a cud and nearly broke both his legs. Had it not been for another chela with him who had time and the presence of mind of doing what was needed to *arrest him in the fall* he would have broken himself to pieces down an abyss of 2,800 feet—a *pic!* M. says it is a fiendish “Red Cap” who did it; who caught the boy off his guard for an instant and positively took advantage of it in a wink; that he roamed for weeks around the house where there is no adept now but only three *chelas* and a woman.<sup>25</sup>

Morya says further:

Bide your time, the *record book is well kept*. Only, look out sharp; the *Dugpas* and the *Gelukpas* are not fighting but in Tibet alone, see their vile work in England among the ‘Occultists and *seers*’! Hear—your acquaintance Wallace preaching like a true ‘Hierophant’ of the ‘left hand’ the marriage of ‘soul with the spirit’ and getting the true definition topsy-turvy, seek to prove that every *practising Hierophant* must at least be *spiritually* married—if for some reasons he cannot do so *physically*—there being otherwise a great danger of Adulteration of God and Devil! I tell you the Shammars are there already and their pernicious work is everywhere in our way. Do not regard this as metaphorical but as a real fact, which may be demonstrated to you some day.<sup>26</sup>

In 1934, Francis Israel Regardie joined the Stella Matutina. In 1928 he had become Crowley’s secretary and companion, but later broke away. Between 1937-40 he published the rituals of the Order of the Golden Dawn in four volumes. These were the originals, which Mathers had composed, rather than those rewritten by A. E. Waite. Many people believed this to herald the end of the Golden Dawn and thereby the end of ritual magic in England. However, in 1953, Gerald Brosseau Gardner published *Witchcraft Today*, which brought about renewed interest in what he termed “white witchcraft”—curing the sick, performing ceremonies to assure good crops, etc., yet having a heavy sexual emphasis. Gardner’s rites included ritual scourging and sexual intercourse between the high priest and priestess. The “Gardner coven” which now meets in the cottage he lived in before his death in 1964 performs a sex rite known as “the sacred marriage” once every five years, and claims that their witchcraft (*Wicca*) is basically the worship of the mother goddess, the earth.<sup>27</sup> What connection any of these things may have to the term “white” I leave to the reader to decide.

To sum up, it is clear that Mathers, and what he stood for, was the guiding force behind the Golden Dawn, just as H. P. Blavatsky, and what she stood for, was the guiding force behind the Theosophical Movement. They each provided a powerful initial impulse that colored the whole evolution of their respective movements. The basic difference between these two initial impulses indicates the basic difference between the two movements.

At the present time, we are in the midst of a widespread revival of interest in all areas of the occult. This comes as no surprise to theosophists, who expect this in the last quarter of each

century. It is also apparent that the renewed interest in occultism is matched by renewed interest in the occult arts. It is therefore in the best interests of all, that we learn to distinguish between the two.

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