

# *The Brethren of the Rosy Cross*

**By Alexander Wilder, M.D., Vice-President of the Theosophical Society**

*Professor of Physiology and Psychological Medicine in the United States Medical College, Secretary of the National Eclectic Medical Association of the United States, Honorary Member of the Eclectic Medical Societies of Illinois, Michigan, Connecticut and Pennsylvania, etc., Honorary Fellow of the Anthropological Society of Liverpool, Eng., etc.*

First published in *The Theosophist*, Vol. I., No. 5, February 1880, pp. 108-11.

Were there Rosicrucians or were there not? This question agitated Europe two centuries ago, as Luther before that, and Savonarola, and Markion had each in his own time and way shaken the Church to its very foundations. All this was because a little book had appeared in the country of Wurtemberg purporting to unfold the existence of a secret fraternity possessing arcane and scientific knowledge, and devoted to the amelioration of human suffering, and the enlightenment of mankind.

The religionists of the seventeenth century could see only blasphemy and iniquity in such a proposition. They invoked fire from heaven upon the Brotherhood, and threatened them with death by breaking on the wheel. A few years before, Bruno had been burned at the stake by order of the Holy Office for teaching the Copernican system and the Pythagorean philosophy; and now Lutherans were emulating Romanists in their frenzy to get human blood to shed. A few years later these vultures were sated to the full. In 1618 began the thirty years' war between Catholic and Protestant Germany, which sucked all Europe into its bloody vortex, and continued till whole districts were depopulated, and the wild beasts of the forest succeeded to the abodes of more ferocious humankind. After the war came pestilence. Small-pox broke out spontaneously, and the Black Death accompanied. Europe was a prodigious charnel.

The tale of the Brotherhood was modest enough. Christian Rosenkrenz had been a traveller in the East, where he had received instruction into the profoundest lore, — magian, rabbinic, theurgic, and alchemic. Among other acquirements, were the knowledge of the philosopher's stone, the art of transmuting metals, and the elixir of life. Returning to Germany, he established a little fraternity of eight disciples, obligating them to keep the doctrine secret for the space of one hundred and twenty years after his death. This occurred in 1484; and accordingly in 1604 there appeared *The Discovery of the Brotherhood of the Honorable Order of the Rosy Cross*. It appealed to all who desired to co-operate with them to make public their names. The Rosicrucians, it declared, were genuine Protestants. They were engaged in no movement or conspiracy against the ruling powers. Their aim was the diminishing of human wretchedness, the spread of education, the advancement of learning, science, universal enlightenment, and love. They possessed profound and occult knowledge, such as the alchemists, Arabian thaumaturgists, Egyptian and Chaldean wise men had brought forth; but all that was of little account. Their one high purpose was to benefit their fellow-creatures, body and soul.



A fire-brand of more destructive nature could not have been hurled into the combustible pyre of Europe. The Pope, the Emperor, the Christian and Catholic kings, the Protestant monarchs of the Baltic and North seas, exploded with terrible concussion. Not till thirty years of war and massacre had passed by, could the boiling caldron become quiet. Universal love and enlightenment, even now, if duly proclaimed, would imperil every throne in Europe from that of Alexander to the royal seat of Victoria; and even the political factions of the United States, blatant in their professions of freedom and democracy, would crumble to their primeval atoms.

Nevertheless, they tell us that there were no Rosicrucians. The Brotherhood was all a fond dream, written out by a Lutheran mystic divine named Andreae, on purpose to rouse the philanthropic minds of oppressed Europe to concerted action. A confederacy of such men, he believed, would renovate the world. But no great convention was held for the purpose. The reporters and daily newspapers of the time had no sensational articles unfolding the plans of the Grand Alliance for the Amelioration of Human Calamity. It may be added that there was no country in Europe where such a convention could have met, except in secret. They would have needed that extraordinary Temple of the Holy Ghost under ground, if they had ventured upon their World's conference. As the matter stands, nobody can intelligently declare that they did not so assemble.

Learned men have made but a very indifferent handling of the matter. Des Cartes advertised all through Germany for men who belonged to the Rosicrucian Fraternity, or knew of it. He received letters from every sort of adventurer, but nothing affording the least light upon the subject of his enquiry. It was finally his opinion that there was no such association in existence. It is plain enough that if there were Rosicrucians, the knowledge concerning them had been "hid from the wise and prudent but was revealed to babes."

Andreae declared that the Rosicrucians had symbols and occult means of communication similar to those of the Alchemists and Astrologists. Indeed the Red Cross had been the badge of the templars. That Order had been suppressed in 1307, yet Francis I. had burned four members alive, a short time previous. He had also exterminated the Albigenses of Province, a Gnostic brotherhood, with secret rites and symbols, dating from the earlier Christian centuries. The Rosicrucian Brotherhood then had usages in common with both.

Ignorance has always been the mother of unquestioning orthodoxy. Nobody is so hostile to the general dissemination of knowledge as a priest. Greater cruelty has never been perpetrated among mankind than that authorised and commanded by the ministers of religions. From Theodosius down, the record of the Christian religion has been the autobiography of the seven-headed bloody red Dragon.

The Persian conquest of Asia Minor had led to the establishment of the religion of Mithras in that country. After the destruction of the Empire of Alexandria, the kingdom of Pontus was established, having Mithraism for its ruling faith. When Pompey conquered the country, the religion was carried thence to every part of the Roman Empire. The father of Jesus it is said was a "soldier of Mithras." It flourished as a secret worship till its suppression by Theodosius; and even then, the *pagani* or coun-



try-people kept up the observance away down into the Mediaeval period. The Popes and Bishops denounced the rites as magic, witchcraft and commerce with the Powers of Darkness. Probably the Witchcraft of the Middle Ages was a relic of the old Magian worship.

In the seventh century, Sylvanus, a native of Samasata, established the fraternity of Paulicians, including in it the various Gnostic communes, the Manichenians of Armenicus, and the Mithraites of Pontus. Their doctrines were an amalgamation of the Pauline and the Zoroastrian but they denounced the Ebionite religionists of Judea. They were fiercely persecuted by all the Christian Emperors, Arian as well as Athanasian. For near two centuries they maintained an independent government in the Caucasus. One of the emperors colonised a part of them in France, whence they spread into Bulgaria. Being employed in the Roman armies, they were transferred to various countries of Europe; Italy and France abounded with proselytes. Among these were the Albigenses.

Other believers in the *Gnosis* or arcane knowledge had been removed into Persia. They were denominated *Sophi* or sages, the worshipers of Sophia or Heavenly wisdom. Their converts were known as *Sufis*, and long constituted the learned class of the country. They were expert in medicine and astronomy, and adepts in secret doctrines. They believed in a grand universal creed which could be secretly held under any profession of an outward faith; and in fact, took a similar view of religious systems to that entertained by the ancient philosophers. A mystic union with the Divinity, theurgic powers and a tendency to ascetism, characterised them.

Thus the Rosicrucian Brotherhood possessed a heritage of all the arcane systems and religions of the earlier world. Hargrave Jennings, their latest chronicler imputes to them the symbols, traditions and learning of the principal mystic fraternities. The Hermetic philosophy of Egypt, the fire-theosophy of Persia, Druid-worship, Gnosticism, the Kabala, the Ancient Mysteries and Orders of Knighthood, Magic, Alchemy, Hindu beliefs, etc., all are treated by him in this connection. His style is curiously complicated; he tells little where he seems to be telling much, and with an obscurity of expression which seems to show little real knowledge or understanding of his subject. Yet he reveals the secret when to the non-expert he apparently hides it closest.

Could they change metals into gold? "Nature herself," said Mejnour to Glyndon, "is a laboratory in which metals and all elements are for ever at change. Easy to make gold — easier, more commodious, and cheaper still, to make the pearl, the diamond and the ruby." Raymond Lulli, a Franciscan monk, born in 1234, a rare expert in medicine and alchemy, is said by one writer to have supplied Edward I. with six millions of money to enable him to carry on war against the Turks in Palestine. Another writer affirms that he made gold for Edward III. in the Tower of London, for an entire coinage of gold nobles. He endeavoured to unite the European countries in a project to Christianise Asia and Africa; but failing in this, set out alone. He made several converts; but was finally stoned to death by the Moslems in 1314.



Thomas Vaughan (Eugenius Philalethes) lived in the reigns of the first James and Charles, who were rather famous for persecutions of “witches.”<sup>1</sup> He relates that he endeavoured once to sell 1,200 marks’ worth of gold to a goldsmith. The man told him at first sight that that gold never came out of the mines, but had been produced by artificial means, not being of the standard of any known kingdom. He hurried away, leaving his gold behind.

Indeed, if a single element lies at the foundation of nature, as Dr. Thomas R. Frazer of Halifax, N.S., has demonstrated, an opinion in which he is followed by S. Pancoast of Philadelphia and J. Norman Lockyer, to whom the credit is given — then the transmutation of metals is a matter perhaps in reach.

Is there an Elixir capable of prolonging life? Thomas Vaughan was born about the year 1612. A writer in 1749 remarks: “He is believed by those of his fraternity to be living even now; and a person of great credit at Nuremberg in Germany affirms that he conversed with him but a year or two ago. Nay, it is further asserted that this very individual is the president of the illuminated in Europe, and that he sits as such in all their annual meetings.”

Artephius, who lived 750 years ago wrote a book entitled *On the Art of Prolonging Human Life*, in which he asserted that he had already attained the age of 1025 years. Several asserted that he was the personage whose life was written by Philostratus under the name of Apollonius of Tyana. He wrote a book on the philosopher’s stone, which was published at Paris in 1612.

“All that we profess to do is this” said Mejnour to Glyndon; “to find out the secrets of the human frame, to know why the parts ossify and the blood stagnates, and to apply continual preventives to the effects of time. This is not magic; it is the art of Medicine rightly understood. In our order we hold most noble — first, that knowledge which elevates the intellect; secondly, that which preserves the body.”

The late Major-General Ethan A. Hitchcock was like his grandfather the noted Ethan Allen of Ticonderoga fame, addicted to curious study. In his treatise *Alchemy and the Alchemists*, he deduces an allegorical interpretation for the philosopher’s stone, the transmutation of metals, and the elixir of life. “The genuine adepts,” says he, “were searchers after truth in the highest sense of this word.” The philosopher’s stone, he adds, “can be found in no other thing in the universe but the nature of man, made in the image of God.” The Elixir, under this interpretation, would signify spirituality — “eternal life.” Sallust the Neo-Platonic philosopher has instructed us that “that which in a literal sense is manifestly absurd and impossible, must be understood in some other sense.”

Lord Bulwer-Lytton has forcibly depicted the careers of Zanoni and Mejnour, living through the ages from the period when the Chaldean Akkads ruled in Babylonia. He has shown that the boon of life is not desirable, though he represents it with none of the horrors which characterise the story of the Wandering Jew, forgotten by death. Mr. Jennings, following in a similar vein remarks that Rosicrucians evade the idea that they possess any extraordinary or separate knowledge, they live simply as mere

---

<sup>1</sup> Which is precisely the English word for *Gnostikos*. The Gnostics were accused of Sorcery.



spectators in the world, and they desire to make no disciples, converts nor confidants. They submit to the obligation of life, and to relationships — enjoying the fellowship of none, admiring none, following none, but themselves. They obey all codes, are excellent citizens, and only preserve silence in regard to their own private convictions, giving the world the benefit of their acquirements up to a certain point; seeking only sympathy at some angles of their multiform character, but shutting out curiosity wholly when they do not wish its imperative eyes.

This is the reason that the Rosicrucians passed through the world mostly unnoticed, and that people generally disbelieve that if there ever were such persons; or believe that if there were, their pretensions are an imposition.

It is not generally known that the Rosicrucians bound themselves to obligations of comparative poverty but absolute chastity in the world, with certain dispensations and remissions that fully answered their purpose; for they were not necessarily solitary people: on the contrary they were frequently gregarious, and mixed freely with all classes, though privately admitting no law but their own. Their notions of poverty, or comparative poverty, were different from those that usually prevail. They felt that neither monarchs nor the wealth of monarchs could endow or aggrandise those who already esteemed themselves the superiors of all men; and therefore, though declining riches, they were voluntary in the renunciation of them. They held to chastity, entertaining some very peculiar notions about the real position of the female sex in the creation, the Enlightened or Illuminated brothers held the monastic state to be infinitely more consonant with the intentions of Providence.

Mr. Jennings refuses to explain these views more at length. “We have drawn to ourselves a certain frontier of reticence,” says he, “up to which margin we may freely comment; and the limit is quite extended enough for the present popular purpose — though we absolutely refuse to overpass it with too distinct explanations or to enlarge further on the strange persuasions of the Rosicrucians.”

They held that all things visible and invisible were produced by the contention of light with darkness. The grossness and denseness in matter is due to its containing little of the divine light. But every object contains also in it a possible deposit of light, which will eventually and inevitably be liberated from the dark, dead substance. Unseen and unsuspected, there is shut up there an inner magnetism, an ethereal spirit, a divine aura, a possible eager fire. All minerals, in this spark of light, have the rudimentary possibility of plants and growing organisms; all vegetables have rudimentary sensitivities which may eventually enable them to change into locomotive creatures, of meaner or nobler function.

The Rosicrucians claim to be able to pass into the next world, to work in it, and to bring back from it gold and the *elixir vitae*. This last was only to be won in the audacity of God-aided alchemic explorations, and was independent of those mastered elements, or nutritions, necessary to ordinary common life. The daily necessary food taken for the sustenance of the body was the means of dissolution.

Man’s interior natural law is contained in God’s exterior magical law. It follows that man has a secondary nature, he is a ruin, so to speak, and lives in the ruins or dregs of a higher creation. Woman entered the great scheme as its negative or obverse. She



is of the natural order, and represents nature. She had therefore no part in the earliest, spiritual, supernal world; but pertains to material existence, — to the “fall into generation.” The yielding to her fascination is the losing of man’s place in the scheme of the Immortal World, and the receiving of Death instead. He forsakes the *numina* for the *nomina*, the *noumena* for the *phenomena*, the divine, interior life for external manifestations and delights. Yet when the Ineffable Light at the beginning entered into the embrace of the Primeval Darkness, it did a similar act.

Much has been written of the magic power of virginity. Little has been known. Creation is generation; and in generation, God is active. Virginity is therefore God’s Rest, — the Sabbath of the Universe. Hence it has been always regarded as Sacred — as Holy Silence. We may note the contradiction; Virginity is the key of Heaven, yet without its infraction there could be no heaven. Solve this whoever may.

Robert Flood (or Floyd) speaks of those who cannot conceive the powers of arcane knowledge to be philosophers, unless they put their knowledge to some ordinary worldly use. It is an incomprehensible puzzle to the common worldly-wise man, that persons who live in the mental atmosphere, have so little ambition to become gold-makers and wealth-producers for the greedy. But their security is inherent in this very indifference. Wars, pauperism, and all manner of calamity, are the outcome of the policy, mode of living, the canonised and popularised greed of the world.

The existence of the Brotherhood is yet in dispute — and probably always will be. “There is scarcely one who thinks about us,” Flood says, “who does not believe that our Society has no existence; because, as he truly declares, he never met any of us. And he concludes that there is no such brotherhood because, in his vanity, we seek not him to be our fellow.”

Certainly, so long as men believe in no such mysterious fraternity, its members are safe from persecution, and interruption in their hallowed pursuits. They may carry their secrets with them safely, — secrets possessed during all the ages of human existence, and yet sacredly preserved from far-off time till now. De Quincey has aptly and admiringly remarked of these Mejnours and Zanonis: “To be hidden amidst crowds is sublime. To come down hidden amongst crowds from distant generations is doubly sublime.”

The Magians and Chaldean theurgists were massacred and driven into exile by Darius Hystaspes. Diokletian destroyed the sacred books of Egypt. Theodosius Justinian and the fanatic Moslems extirpated all whom they could find possessed of mystical learning. The hordes of Scythian banditti who ravaged all the East — China, India, Persia, Western Asia and even Europe — destroyed every shrine and crypt of which they discovered the existence. Even the Catholic Church, King James I. of England, the Royal Council of Sweden, and the Colonial Legislatures of the United States, made the possession of occult knowledge a capital offence.

Yet they all missed the Rosicrucian Brotherhood. When Cagliostro-Balsamo was immured in a Roman dungeon, to be tortured and murdered, it was fondly imagined that the Golden Secret would be disclosed. The hope was illusory. It could be communicated to none except those who were able to comprehend it. A preparatory discipline was necessary for this purpose; and whoever accomplished that successfully,



would certainly never betray it. If such a one could entertain the impossible idea of doing such a thing, the treasure would certainly be found not to be in his possession.

So the Rosicrucian philosophers have lived in every age. They have jostled others in the church or at the market place, yet without being recognised. They are numerous enough now, to constitute the salt of the earth. They always have maintained their existence, and each of the Brotherhood knows infallibly every member of the fraternity. Their existence may be a myth, yet it is not. The parable is for those who can comprehend it. "None of the wicked will understand, but the wise will understand," said the prophet Daniel.

