

*Rosicrucians emerged as an
antidote to the material
side of alchemy*



Abstract and train of thoughts

Rosicrucians emerged in Europe as an antidote to the material side of alchemy and to stem the tide of the folly. From this point of view, the Rosicrucians are group of Reformers.	3
The spiritual side of man must be awakened and utilised, before the Philosopher's Stone, or the Elixir of Life, can be discovered.	4
Wonder-seekers then, as now, craving for power and wealth, did not appreciate that higher ethics and a virtuous life are prerequisite to real wisdom.	5
The Rosicrucians were alchemists in the spiritual sense and professors of divine magic, which is devoid of selfishness, love of power, ambition, and lucre.	6
Most divergent are the lines of thought between Christian and Occultist.	8



Rosicrucians emerged in Europe as an antidote to the material side of alchemy and to stem the tide of the folly. From this point of view, the Rosicrucians are group of Reformers.

First published in *Lucifer*, Vol. I (3), November 1887, pp. 231-36. Republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE REAL HISTORY OF THE ROSICRUCIANS)¹ VIII pp. 253-62.

Mr. Waite's new book will be welcomed by that large class of readers who regard occultism, alchemy, and all like studies with antagonism and suspicion. Secret societies supposed to deal with such subjects are, from their point of view, better exposed and ridiculed than treated with respect or taken seriously. The author of the present volume does not, however, cast disrespect on occult science, nor does he discuss the Rosicrucians in a spirit of levity or disdain. He recognises that there may be, and probably is, a grand spiritual and moral philosophy [254] in the higher aspects of true alchemy, but in these pages he treats the subject of the society from the historical, and not at all from the mystical side, and confines himself to tracing its recorded history, its rise, fall, and *raison d'être*. The conscientious study of these records relating to the Brotherhood has brought Mr. Waite to the conclusion that they do not support the traditions which up to the present have surrounded the society with a veil of unknown antiquity and have endowed its members with a halo of marvellous wisdom. It is these conclusions that will charm the incredulous, and may probably blind them to the indications of an undercurrent of belief in the reality of occult science, *per se*, which the author has evidently not desired to suppress. To investigate and disentangle the network of facts, theories, and traditions which must necessarily envelop a society that up to the commencement of the seventeenth century had not been heard of by the general public is no easy task, and Mr. Waite may be congratulated upon the calm and judicial spirit with which he has treated his subject, as well as upon the moderation with which he advances his own views. To be able to gather from these open records how far the members of such a society may have held in their keeping some of the inner secrets of Nature is of course impossible to ordinary humanity. The real character and aims of such an association can be known only to passed Initiates. In his preface Mr. Waite says:

I claim that I have performed my task in a sympathetic but impartial manner, purged from the bias of any particular theory, and above all uncontaminated by the pretension to superior knowledge, which claimants have never been able to substantiate.²

This statement is fully justified in the pages of the book under review. Its value does not lie so much in any new presentation of the facts or theories pertaining to the Rosicrucians, and which are so frequently distorted by ignorant commentators, as in the compact and systematic arrangement of some of the principal writings available.

¹ Arthur Edward Waite, *The Real History of the Rosicrucians. Founded on their own Manifestoes, and on Facts and Documents collected from the Writings of Initiated Brethren*. With Illustrations. London: George Redway, 1887, viii, 446pp.

[A.E. Waite, 1857–1942, was an American-born British poet and scholarly mystic who wrote extensively on occult and esoteric matters. He was the co-creator of the Rider-Waite tarot deck (also called the Rider-Waite-Smith or Waite-Smith deck). His biographer, R.A. Gilbert, described him as follows: "Waite's name has survived because he was the first to attempt a systematic study of the history of western occultism — viewed as a spiritual tradition rather than as aspects of proto-science or as the pathology of religion."]

² [p. 4]

He has brought together not only the leading works of the various writers known, or supposed to be Rosicrucians, but he has also collected [255] the criticisms and conjectures on these current at the time of their appearance in Germany, together with others of a much more recent date. Consequently the reader has before him almost all the information of this description he could require, and which he could not obtain for himself except by the expenditure of time and trouble that very few are either able or willing to give.

The spiritual side of man must be awakened and utilised, before the Philosopher's Stone, or the Elixir of Life, can be discovered.

It is not surprising that Mr. Waite should have satisfied himself that the Rosicrucians have no sort of claim to the reverence and admiration in which scholars and mystics have held them up to the present time. But these conclusions will form only one more of other proofs to students of esotericism, that the task of writing a true and real history of a secret occult society from its records, where such exist, is an impossibility. For even when such societies left reliable information of their pursuits, aspirations, and beliefs — the language employed has always been of such a character as to baffle entirely the ordinary exoteric reader, whether he were historian, litterateur, or scientist. Such literature can be interesting only to the student on the track of esoteric knowledge, or to one who has in a great measure acquired the meaning conveyed for himself in other ways. This method of giving to the world, as it were, the proceeds, of life-long research in the realms of unseen Nature, has been adopted by alchemists, magicians, priests, and hierophants from all ages. None but those who were sufficiently steadfast in the cause of truth could read and understand what was thus written. The numerous and minute directions for the working of spells and cures, etc., left by Paracelsus, and which are apparently as straightforward and practicable as the receipts in a modern cookery book, would turn out probably much less successful in the hands of an amateur, no matter how highly educated on the physical plane, than the more delicate dishes taken from such receipts manipulated by an entirely inexperienced servant. For these elaborate instructions are given in terms that appeal simply to the material senses of those who are in search of power rather than wisdom, whereas the real effort to produce the result has to take place on [256] the Astral plane of nature. The spiritual or soul side of man, must be awakened and utilised, before the Philosopher's stone, or the elixir of life, can be discovered.

The comprehension of the potentialities of the human body, their nurture and eventual utilisation for purely unselfish ends and spiritual, *i.e.*, real wisdom, is, or ought to be, the work of all secret occult societies. But to return to Mr. Waite's book. The popular notion that this Brotherhood is of great, almost incredible antiquity, is utterly condemned by him. He fails to find any documentary evidence to show that it existed before the early part of the seventeenth century, and argues that the well-known antiquity of the Rose and Cross in symbolism is no proof of the antiquity of a society using them "at a period subsequent to the Renaissance."¹ Granting that the device of the Rose and Cross, as emblems of a particular order or brotherhood, does

¹ [p. 210]

not guarantee its equal antiquity with them, still it must be admitted that these symbols bearing as they do a profoundly esoteric interpretation, and being adopted by a society of a distinctly occult character, is an argument in support of the theory that the founder or originator of this order had some reason other than fancy for thus labelling his fraternity. Elsewhere he says,

I have shown indisputably that there was no novelty in the Rosicrucian pretensions, and no originality in their views. They appear before us as Lutheran disciples of Paracelsus.¹

The author here seems to be not entirely logical in his deductions. When he states that he has not met in his search with either letters, records, or papers that mention or suggest the existence of such a society before the seventeenth century, he is of course, as a historian, safely ensconced from attack. In this capacity as an impartial seeker after facts, it is outside the area of his work in the absence of data to theorise on probabilities. When, however, in dealing with the manifestoes of the seventeenth century, he finds therein evidence that shows him the Brotherhood has no back history or ancestry, his conclusions are open to criticism. The very fact of the want [257] of originality and novelty in the views, aims and aspirations set forth in the *Fama*, and *Confessio* surely gives strength to the theory that holds to the antiquity of the society, rather than to its being the outcome of a spontaneous effort.² All true students of mysticism have good reason to believe, even when they do not absolutely know, that the various schools of occultism considered from their highest or most spiritual and abstract teaching, lead to the same goal. They may be called by different names, and their methods in minor details may not be the same, but the wisdom *au fond*³ is identical. Therefore when Mr. Waite casts discredit upon the Rosicrucians for not advertising novelties in their manifesto, in the mystical line of thought, he reminds us of a man who in making up his mind on the value of a violin, decides that it cannot be of great age, because it emits only the same set of sounds that such musical instruments have been accustomed to give forth from time immemorial. [258]

Wonder-seekers then, as now, craving for power and wealth, did not appreciate that higher ethics and a virtuous life are prerequisite to real wisdom.

As far as can be ascertained by studying the state of thought and society at the period when the Rosicrucians were first heard of in Europe, this particular order manifested itself as an antidote to the general tendency towards the material side of al-

¹ [p. 209]

² [Reference is here made to the two earliest manifestoes anonymously issued at the beginning of the 17th century in Western Europe. One of them was the *Fama Fraternitatis* (Cassel, 1614 or 1615) which was preceded in the first traceable printed edition by a tract longer than itself and entitled *Allgemeine und General Reformation der ganzen weiten Welt* (Universal Reformation of the Whole Wide World); the other was the *Confessio Fraternitatis* (Cassel and Frankfurt, 1615). They first appeared in German, Dutch and Latin, being translated into other languages later on. The theologian Johann Valentin Andreae (1586–1654) acknowledged in his autobiography to have been the author of both the *Fama* and the *Confessio*, the appearance of which caused immense excitement throughout Europe. The name of Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam, has also been associated with these documents.

Interesting information concerning the early Rosicrucian movement may be found in the following two essays: "The Rosicrucians," by Karl Kisewetter, *The Theosophist*, Vol. VII, April 1886, pp. 451-61; and "Christian Rosencreutz and the Rosicrucians," by W. Wynn Westcott, *The Theosophist*, Vol. XV, March 1894, pp. 365-77.

Vide *infra* bio-bibliography of Johann Valentin Andreae <on page 7 of this study>. — Boris de Zirkoff.]

³ [in essence]

chemy, which honey-combed the educated classes of Germany. Wonder-seekers then, as now, did not apprehend that ethics, both social and spiritual, are the fundamental basis of real wisdom, consequently the great cry was for power, no matter of what description, for the accumulation of wealth. The craving for arcane knowledge, so widely diffused, and which alchemists were truly known to possess, had gradually degenerated into a purely selfish desire for the secret of transmuting metals. To supply this eager demand, charlatans of every description rushed to the front professing to teach all who joined their standards, *i.e.*, who could pay the necessary fee, how to turn common metal into pure gold. The craze for this power was so universal, the motive of it so unspiritual, that in order to stem the tide of the folly, and to checkmate the impostors who were bringing discredit on the *Sacred Art*, the *Fama* was issued by a body of people who took as their symbols the Rose and Cross. From this point of view the Rosicrucians historically come before the world in the light of a group of Reformers.

The Rosicrucians were alchemists in the spiritual sense and professors of divine magic, which is devoid of selfishness, love of power, ambition, and lucre.

Different people interpret in different ways the two manifestoes — the *Fama* and *Confessio*. Mr. Waite appears to place great importance on the adherence to Christian dogmas observable in the wording of these papers. But in taking the documents literally, he seems to overlook the necessity that all writers were under, in those troubled times, of pandering to the narrow and prejudiced minds of the leaders of the so-called Christian Church, by apparently adhering to the Ritual. Naturally, the author of the *Fama* worded it in such a manner as to avoid persecution or suspicion of heresy. Those to whom it was really addressed would not be misled by its tone of orthodoxy, and the general public and the church would pass it by as harmless. Moreover, as Mr. Waite remarks further on,¹ “the philosophical and scientific [259] opinions and pretensions of the Rosicrucian Society have more claim on our notice” than their theology. Speaking again of the school of thought current at the time this organisation was floated, and which he tells us the Rosicrucians followed, he says:

Mystics in an age of scientific and religious materialism, they were connected by an unbroken chain with the theurgists of the first Christian centuries; they were alchemists in the spiritual sense and the professors of a divine magic. Their disciples, the Rosicrucians, followed closely in their footsteps, and the claims of the *Fama* and *Confessio* must be reviewed in the light of the great elder claims of alchemy and magic.²

In spite of this, Mr. Waite judges the Society, it would appear, by what he admits to be the minor and less important side of its object, for he speaks of it eventually, as a body of “pre-eminently learned men and a Christian Sect.”³ We will not stop to consider the probability or possibility of a body of “pre-eminently learned men,” being at the same time a “Christian Sect.”

¹ [pp. 200-1]

² [p. 201]

³ [p. 216]

Having thus deprived the Rosicrucians of the dignity, reverence and romance, that cling round great antiquity; having saddled them with the tenets and dogmas of conventional mediæval Christianity, Mr. Waite next proceeds to demolish their emblems, or at all events, to deny that they attached any esoteric interpretation to them.

He says:

The whole question of the significance of the Crucified Rose, in its connection with the society, is one of pure conjecture, that no Rosicrucian manifestoes, and no acknowledged Brother have ever given any explanation concerning it, and that no presumption is afforded by the fact of its adoption for the antiquity of the society or for its connection with universal symbolism.¹

Allowing for the necessity in writing a history of a mystical society of taking the documents as they stand, Mr. Waite rather ignores the fact that the evidence for the statement above is of a negative character. That in their manifestoes and records there appears no explanation of their emblems, hardly justifies the conclusion that they were incapable of giving any. [260] It would indeed have been a new departure in the annals of Secret Societies if the founders of this particular order had left behind the explanation of their signs and symbols. The study and interpretation of symbolology forms a most important element in the education of occult disciples, and therefore to assume that the projectors of this organisation should be unaware of the mystic reading of the Rose and Cross, is a hypothesis that no student of mysticism could accept.

It is, on the whole, generally assumed by those who have taken any pains to investigate the evidence, that Johann Valentin Andreæ² was the author of the *Fama*, the

¹ [p. 24]

² [Bio-bibliography of Johann Valentin Andreæ (Andreäs or Andreä) by Boris de Zirkoff, from *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, Vol. VIII, pp. 417-18.

Johann Valentin Andreæ was German theologian and writer, born at Herrenberg, Württemberg, August 17th, 1586; died at Adelsberg, June 27th, 1654. After completing academic courses at Tübingen, travelled for some years as tutor in noble families. Became, in 1614, deacon at Vaihingen, Württemberg, where he labored zealously for six years as preacher and writer. Superintendent at Calw, 1620–1639. When city was sacked, in 1634, he lost his library and barely escaped alive; worked tirelessly as physician, minister, grave-digger. Removed, in 1639, to Stuttgart, as court preacher, with seat in the Consistorium; active in the reorganization of the Church system and schools after the ruin of the Thirty Years' war. His life was based on practical Christian ethics, and he mourned the frivolous learning and the pedantry of his times. Adopted wit and satire as his weapons, and planned to combat with these the idols of the day in literature and religion. Prolific writer who is said to have written about one hundred works. The best known are: *Menippus*, 1618, directed against orthodoxy and worldly folly; *Alethea Exul*, against abuses in mystical thought; *Die Christen burg*, 1612, an epic allegory dealing with the struggles and ultimate triumph of the Christian soul; *Turbo*, 1616, a satire on pedantry; *Reipublicæ christianopolitanæ descriptio*, 1619, an account of an ideal Christian State, similar to Campanella's *City of the Sun*; *Theophilus*, 1622 (publ. in 1649), which expresses his ideas on the public regulation of private morals, and contains a dissertation on the education of the young; this work entitles him to serious consideration as predecessor of the renowned Pestalozzi.

Andreæ was an outstanding linguist, perfecting himself in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, Spanish, Italian and English; he was a profound student of mathematics, having studied with Maslin, the teacher of Kepler. In 1614, he published a series of lectures on mathematics. Having been for some years Spiritual Counsel of the Landgrave of Hesse, he became later Prelate of Adelberg, and Almoner of the Duke of Württemberg, and died respected by all men.

Andreæ's *Autobiography* was published in German by D.C. Seybold, in 1799, and in the original Latin by F.H. Rheinwald, Berlin, in 1849.

Consult the following sources: Hassbach, *Andreä and sein Zeitalter*, Berlin, 1819; A. Landenberger, *J.V. Andreä*, Barman, 1886; P. Wurm, *J.V. Andreä*, Calw, 1887.

No attempt is being made here to deal with the controversial evidence concerning Andreæ's role in the launching of the early Rosicrucian movement.]

Confessio Fraternitatis, and also of the *Chymical Marriage* of Christian Rosencreutz, and to that extent he must be looked upon exoterically as the founder of the Rosicrucian Society, as first known to history. He was deeply versed in mystic studies and alchemy, and had besides a widespread reputation as a scholar and learned man. His *Chymical Marriage*,¹ to anyone with even a slight acquaintance with alchemical literature, reveals him as one who had penetrated deeply into some of the mysteries of nature. Consequently, he must have been well aware that the Rose and Cross bore a profoundly occult signification. Considering the man himself, the character of his studies, and his well-known devotion to alchemy and mysticism, it is certainly more reasonable to suppose that he took those emblems (presuming he had any choice in the matter) for his society, not as some suggest, because they happened to form a part of his own armorial bearings, or that the Rose and Cross on a Heart was used by Martin Luther, but because he recognized their full value and importance as symbols of cosmic evolution.

Mr. Waite seems, on the whole, to agree with the idea that Andreae was the author of the *Fama* and *Confessio*, and regards the *Chymical Marriage* as undoubtedly his production. He also allows that the latter pamphlet can only have been the work of a man deeply imbued with [261] alchemical speculations, a mystic and follower of Paracelsus. How then can he ask us to believe that the Society formed under such auspices was *au fond*, nothing but a Christian sect based on the teachings of Martin Luther! To the public at large these theories may perhaps appear sufficiently plausible in face of the wording of those parts of the manifestoes that touch on theology. To students of esotericism, however, such conclusions will be absolutely unacceptable, and we cannot allow to pass without comment Mr. Waite's hypothesis that the Rosicrucian Society, as it first came before the world, was simply a society for the propagation of the deteriorated Christianity of the middle ages. No mystic, whether calling himself Rosicrucian, Kabbalist, Theosophist, Christian, or Buddhist, would either intellectually or spiritually accept the narrow dogmas and intolerant views of the Christian church, even when to some extent cleansed of many of its grosser abuses by the energy of Martin Luther's Reform.

Most divergent are the lines of thought between Christian and Occultist.

The two lines of thought are essentially different.

- 1 In the case of the Christian, no matter of what denomination, his thoughts are bound down and paralysed within the rigid circle drawn by the materialistic reading of Christ's birth, life, and death.

¹ [An allegoric romance divided into Seven Days, or Seven Journeys, like *Genesis*, and recounts how Christian Rosenkreuz was invited to go to a wonderful castle full of miracles, in order to assist the Chymical Wedding of the king and the queen, that is, the husband and the bride. This manifesto has been a source of inspiration for poets, alchemists (chymical is an old form of chemical, and refers to alchemy — for which the "Sacred Marriage" was the goal) and dreamers, through the force of its initiation ritual with processions of tests, purifications, death, resurrection, and ascension and also by its symbolism found since the beginning with the invitation to Rosenkreuz to assist this Royal Wedding. The invitation to the royal wedding includes the Monas Hieroglyphica symbol associated with John Dee.

Note to Students: consult "Blavatsky on Marriage, Divorce, and Celibacy," in our Blavatsky Speaks Series, and "Proposition 3 - Marriage made in Heaven," in our Secret Doctrine's Third Proposition Series. — ED. PHIL.]

- 2 The true Occultist takes those episodes spiritually or allegorically, finding their correspondences within himself as well as in the universe.

To say that a human being can at one and the same time be an occultist, and a sectarian Christian, is as impossible as to speak of a Christian Jew. A true Christian, *i.e.*, one who understood and followed absolutely the teachings of Jesus, would be also a true Rosicrucian. Membership of particular churches or societies does not unfortunately endow the individual immediately with the virtue, knowledge or power, that is the theoretical goal of his initial action. Such membership is, or may be, a step in the direction of Divine Wisdom, but one step does not carry him to the summit of the path. Men do not become either Rosicrucians, Christians, or Theosophists merely by joining the Societies working under those particular names. But certain tendencies in their temperaments [262] urge them into the special Society where the mode of thought seems best fitted to help them, to realise the magnitude and glory of the possibilities inherent in their own souls.

Between the humanity of today, and the development of a sixth sense, which will enable it to perceive what now is imperceptible, there is but a thin veil of obstructing matter, metaphorically speaking. This veil is even now being continually pierced by psychics, first in one direction, then in another, letting in through these tiny openings glimpses of the invisible world around. In a little while the veil will be worn away entirely, and the humanity of that future time will doubtless wonder how the humanity of this age, which we find so enlightened, could have been so unintuitive and blind to the most important side of their natures. Until the race however has by soul evolution attained to this sixth sense, real histories of Mystical Societies can hardly be hoped for. Members of such Societies, who by study and training have attained some degree of knowledge *may* not disclose the secrets, non-members cannot get at them. The reading-classes of today may, after reading Mr. Waite's book, think they have learnt something of the body of people called Rosicrucians, and until now supposed to have some claim to arcane knowledge. The students of occultism will know that the vital part of the subject is and must remain ever impregnable, excepting from its esoteric side.

