

GOLDEN DAWN OR GOTTERDAMMERUNG ?

By Frater I.D.V.A

According to the *Fama Fraternitatis*, one of the inscriptions on the altar in the vault of Christian Rosencreutz read: *Nequaquam Vacuum* (a vacuum exists nowhere). If this is indeed so, then we may presume that the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn came into being to fill the vacuum that existed in English esotericism in the late nineteenth century. Or did it? Was the Golden Dawn truly heralding a new day in the history of western spirituality, or was it the culmination of a long series of private and secret Orders and Societies designed to preserve the Western Hermetic Tradition? Did it - does it - represent the dawn of a new day or the long twilight of a very old one?

As a first step towards finding an answer we must determine just what *was* the Golden Dawn. In essence it was a secret, magical Order, rigidly hierarchical in administration and with a progressive series of ceremonies based upon the stages - the *sephiroth* - of the kabbalistic Tree of Life. Its purpose was to teach the essential doctrines of what is known as the Western Hermetic Tradition, by way of lectures, examinations and the content of its initiatic ceremonies. These involved symbolic journeys, tests, trials, Obligations and complex pictorial imagery - all designed to impress new and unfamiliar ideas upon the initiate: unfamiliar, because what was being taught was a *secret* tradition, consisting of 'rejected knowledge' that was either unknown to, or considered of no value by both institutional Christianity and mechanistic science.

And what of the 'Western Hermetic Tradition' ? This is the whole body of accumulated non-empirical wisdom within Judaeo-Christian and classic Graeco-Egyptian spirituality, its component parts being drawn principally from Jewish and Christian mysticism, Gnosticism and Neoplatonism. It is concerned with a spiritual understanding of the origin, nature and destiny of the universe; the will and mind of the Creator; and Man's origin, nature and destiny, and his relationship to both the universe and its Creator. In addition to this theoretical knowledge it also encompasses practical work related to this: theurgy, alchemy, divination, and communion with spiritual beings, for example.

That the Golden Dawn was concerned with this Tradition does not, of itself, tell us anything about its prehistory. We know that the Order came into being early in 1888; that it was the brainchild of William Wynn Westcott; that the letters from a supposed German lady adept authorising its creation were spurious; and that the outline rituals written in cipher were of recent date, having been transcribed (or possibly composed) by Kenneth Mackenzie. We also know that the 'History' Westcott concocted for the Order was fictitious. But we do not know *why* Westcott founded the Order or to what extent - if any - he built it on pre-existing foundations. In the absence of documentary evidence we cannot hope to answer the first of these questions, but we can make an attempt on the second.

The ceremonial system of the Golden Dawn is two-fold. The five ceremonies, from neophyte to Philosophus, of the First, or Outer Order are based on an ascent of the kabbalistic Tree of Life. Those of the Second, or Inner Order - the *Rosae Rubrae et Aureae Crucis* - are based on the myth of the Rosicrucian vault. But in both divisions of the Order the doctrinal content is much more broadly based and can be traced back, *as a tradition*, to the high Middle Ages.

Jewish mysticism, specifically Zoharic kabbalism, appeared in Jewish communities in southern France early in the 13th century and may well have been known to the Cathars, and perhaps influenced by Cathar dualism. But the Cathars were systematically destroyed in the course of that century and left no organised institution behind. However, theirs was not the only heterodox spirituality of the time: their ideas and ideals were not destroyed and traces of Cathar and other Gnostic thought can be found in the work of the 'spiritual' Franciscans and in the writings of the Rhineland mystics - in Eckhart especially. At an earlier date the writings of some mystics, such as the *Mystical Theology* and *Celestial Hierarchies* of the pseudo-Dionysius, had helped to preserve neoplatonic thought within the prevailing Aristoteleanism of Scholastic Philosophy. A number of Greek alchemical texts, preserved in Arabic translations, had also made their way to the west and were translated into Latin. In this way the doctrinal elements of the Western Hermetic Tradition were preserved and transmitted - but there is no trace of any Order, society or organised body of any kind dedicated to such preservation and transmission. (Here I should add that there is not the slightest justification for claiming that the Knights Templar acted in such a role; their history is far too well known and has been subjected to far too close a scrutiny for any such activity to have remained hidden.) Indeed, it is hard to argue that a coherent tradition can be identified in Western Europe during the Middle Ages. Coherence came, inevitably, from the East.

When the Byzantine Empire collapsed with the fall of Constantinople in 1453, many refugees fled to the West bringing with them an enormous number of classical Greek and Graeco-Egyptian texts. The arrival of these texts coincided with the arrival of the means of distributing them - the invention of printing - and of the inquiring minds of the Italian Renaissance who wished to read them. Only then did the necessary elements for the creation of organised bodies of esotericists come together. In 1462 Marsilio Ficino's Florentine Academy was founded at Careggi and became a centre for the study of Platonic, Neoplatonic and Hermetic texts, many of them translated by Ficino himself, (Plato's *Dialogues* by 1469; the *Enneads* of Plotinus, and the *Pimander* in 1463). Ficino's disciple Pico della Mirandola introduced the proper study of kabbalistic texts. In addition, Ficino, Pico and others carried out magical practices - including the ritualised singing of the *Mystical Hymns of Orpheus*. The theory underlying these practices is derived from Plotinus, who argued that we can capture planetary influences by 'prayers either simple or sung with art'. Ficino elaborates on this:

Our spirit is consonant with the heavenly rays which, occult or manifest, penetrate everything. We can make it still more consonant, if we vehemently direct our affections towards the star from which we wish to receive a certain benefit ...

above all, if we apply the song, and light suitable to the astral deity and also the odour, as in the hymns of Orpheus addressed to cosmic deities.¹

The attitude of mind apparent in this approach is mirrored in that of the creators of the Golden Dawn.

The Renaissance - and its Platonism - was not confined to Italy. Erasmus in the Netherlands and John Colet in England were both enthusiasts for the Platonic Dialogues: and both were orthodox Christians. It is important to emphasise that nothing within the Western Hermetic Tradition was, or was perceived to be, contrary or inimical to Christianity (Ficino saw his priesthood as the most important part of his life). Nor did the tradition take shape only within Catholic states. The Reformation of religion in the early 16th century was a response to perceived abuses within the Church and was anti-papal rather than anti-Catholic in the strict sense of the word. Indeed, neither the Lutheran nor Anglican Churches (save when Puritan fanatics were in the ascendant) wished to abolish or significantly alter the existing liturgies. Ritual in Christian worship was still seen as both central and essential - just as it was in esoteric work.

There was also a recognition among those concerned with esoteric spiritual ideas and practices that political and confessional boundaries were unimportant. Thus the (nominally) catholic Giordano Bruno could bring his heterodox views to England in the late 16th century, while at the same time John Dee could take his alchemical knowledge, his cosmological symbolism (the *Monas Hieroglyphica*) and his conversations with angels (and thus his whole Enochian system) across catholic Europe. In general, however, the post-Tridentine catholic Church was more hostile to esoteric thought than was the Lutheran Church - perhaps a perpetuation of its Aristotelian world-view against the Renaissance (and thus Reformation) Platonic vision.

Such Lutheran tolerance - sympathy would be too strong a word - allowed the speculative theologian, Simon Studion to place an esoteric twist on the 'Militia Crucifera Evangelica', a religio-political protestant League set up at Luneberg in 1586 in apparent opposition to the Catholic League (which had been created to oppose the accession of Henri of Navarre to the throne of France). Studion's book, the *Naometria* (1604), was one of the sources for the Rosicrucian movement and it is reasonable to suppose that some kind of organised society, professing Lutheran Christianity and dedicated to esoteric learning, was created, or perhaps remodelled, by Studion and his associates - of whom Johann Valentin Andrea was the most significant. At which point we come to the myth of Christian Rosencreutz.

¹ D.P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic magic from Ficino to Campanella*. London, 1958 pp22-23. I am indebted to Bro. Alan Armstrong for drawing my attention to Ficino's ritual use of the Orphic hymns.

The Rosicrucian manifestoes appeared between 1614 and 1616, provoked a furious controversy that raged for some twenty years, and left posterity with the unanswered question as to whether a Rosicrucian community as described in the manifestoes ever existed in the material world. What is certain is that these curious texts inspired alchemists and hermeticists to create 'Rosicrucian' societies, Orders and communities of their own. We do not know precisely the emphasis that these societies placed on specific parts of the Western Hermetic Tradition but alchemy seems to have been important for all of them, and a cosmogony based on the work of the mystic Jacob Boehme. Both of these involved the use of symbolic pictorial drawings, often preserved as engravings, and the one constant feature of all subsequent esoteric Orders and societies has been the emphasis placed upon symbolic pictorial imagery.

In the most important of the Rosicrucian manifestoes, the *Fama Fraternitatis*, the central imagery is that of the vault in which the body of Christian Rosencreutz is preserved. There is no universally agreed interpretation of the CRC myth, but his supposed travels in the east match those of Christ, while his acquisition of learning from wise men of the east parallels the influx of knowledge to western Europe after the fall of Constantinople. The nature of that learning is made clear from the 'Book T' that is held in the hand of the uncorrupted body of CRC; the book 'which next unto the Bible is our greatest treasure, which ought to be delivered to the censure of the world'². It has been suggested that the 'T' refers to 'Torah', which makes no sense, as the Torah is simply the first five Books of the Bible. Nor can it refer to 'Tarot' as esoteric interpretations of the tarot cards did not appear until the late 18th century and there are no books on or of the tarot before that date. What is most probable is that it is the Platonic Dialogue, *Timaeus*, in which the Pythagorean philosopher, Timaeus, expounds the origin and structure of the universe. It has been described as:

An influential dialogue in late antiquity, influencing Neoplatonism with its anticipation of the latter's elaborate spiritual hierarchy; the demiurge was also easily seen by Christians as the Creator God of Genesis. The idea that the demiurge created the stars and other heavenly bodies with souls gave authority to astrology, which regarded them as divine.³

No better vehicle for transmitting the Western Hermetic Tradition could be imagined.

But is there any evidence that *any* of the Rosicrucian-inspired societies admitted members in a formal, ritualised manner; taught the essence of the Western Hermetic Tradition; and made use of initiatic ceremonies? Alas, there is not. All that we do know is that by 1646 Elias Ashmole, who had a hermetic teacher, William Backhouse, and who wrote knowledgeably and extensively on both alchemy and chivalry, was admitted into Freemasonry in a formal manner. This is not proof of an institutional connection between a known ritual and hermetic pursuits, but taken together with the evidence of a marked degree of enthusiasm in academic circles for alchemy, the kabbalah and Behmenist cosmology we can accept the possibility⁴.

² *The Fame and Confession of the Fraternity of R: C: ...* 1652, p[24]. The translation is by Thomas Vaughan, who refers to the 'parchment book, called I' This is a typographical error; Fra. F.N. Pryce, in his 1923 edition of the *Fama*, translates the original as 'A book called T, written in gold on parchment' (p[24], n*)

³ M.C. Howatson, *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*. O.U.P., 1989 2nd ed. p572

There was certainly a widespread sharing of alchemical and speculative hermetic manuscripts across Europe, which increased during the relatively calm period following the Thirty Years War and the English Civil Wars. At the very least we know there was a loose association of like-minded students concerned with the major aspects of the Western Hermetic Tradition.

There were some formal associations. In 1697 the recently formed Philadelphian Society published its *Theosophical Transactions*, edited by Francis Lee. This was essentially a society of Behmenist enthusiasts (John Pordage, Jane Lead et al.) but the *Transactions* include papers on the kabbalah and other hermetic subjects while the society met on a regular basis. But the meetings provided no more than a venue for teaching and for the exchange of ideas; there is no indication at all of any ceremonial or ritualised element. Similarly, these elements are absent from the work of the community of Lutheran pietists who settled on the Wissahickon river in Pennsylvania at the end of the 17th century. Their leader, Johannes Kelpius, seems to have offered his followers something close to Rosicrucian ideals but Kelpius died in 1708 and the manuscript version of the *Geheime Figuren* supposedly used by him, or by his immediate followers, dates from the mid-18th century. Again there is nothing to indicate any ceremonial work, although individual attempts at communication with angels by ceremonial means did occasionally take place - inspired on the one hand by Meric Casaubon's publication, in 1659, of John Dee's records of his dealings with 'spirits', and on the other by Thomas Heywood's *Hierarchy of the Blessed Angels* (1635), which presented the Celestial Hierarchies of the medieval pseudo-Dionysius in poetic form.

The first proven appearance of ritual forms with a Rosicrucian connection comes in 1710, with Sigmund Richter and his *Orden des Gulden und Rosen Kreuzes*. This had all the hallmarks of an initiatic Order: ceremonial admission of initiates, complete with an Obligation; set Rules for the Order; a hierarchical structure; and a body of doctrinal teaching (alchemical, and probably Behmenist also, given Richter's enthusiasm for Boehme). How long this German Order lasted is not clear but it, or its direct descendants, seem to have survived until the middle of the 18th century, and to have influenced the later, and more exotic masonic Rosicrucians. But it is difficult to see it as anything but a collateral ancestor of the Golden Dawn as it was active only in Germany; in England there is no trace of any initiatic Order with alchemical, Rosicrucian, neoplatonist or Behmenist elements. There is only Freemasonry.

In 1717 Freemasonry *as we know it* was first formally constituted as the Grand Lodge of England, but it had - as an institution - absolutely no esoteric content or hermetic connections of any kind. Those elements appear only when the *Hauts Grades* were instituted in France (and later in Germany) from 1740 onwards. That an esoteric stream then fed into the body of English Freemasonry is undeniable but we do not

⁴ Anthony a Wood records his involvement in an alchemical club at Oxford in 1663. The ten, or possibly more, members were instructed by the Lutheran Peter Sthael, a 'noted Chimist and Rosicrucian'. Newton was also actively involved in alchemy, while the Cambridge Platonists (Henry More especially) studied the kabbalah. The most notable Behmenists were John Sparrow and John Pordage.

know precisely when or how. Probably individual alchemists and hermeticists entered Freemasonry and discreetly encouraged an esoteric ethos among their immediate colleagues. The ritual structure, the symbolism and hierarchy of Freemasonry were all conducive to such activity, but there is no overt sign of the results. What we do find are small groups of enthusiasts exchanging alchemical, Behmenist and kabbalistic knowledge and doctrines, and utilising symbolic pictorial imagery appropriate to their pursuits. As yet, if we except John Byrom and some of his associates, we do not know who they were: one of them, however, copied Behmenist diagrams and translations from the *Zohar* into a copy of an alchemical work, von Schwartzfuss' *Brunnen der Weisheit* (1706) Some, in the Byrom circle, were certainly freemasons also.⁵

Even at the end of the 18th century there was nothing within English Freemasonry remotely equivalent to the exotic *Hauts Grades* (High Grades) found in continental Europe. The masonic Golden and Rosy Cross (*Gold- und Rosenkreuz*) is fully known from 1777 and came into existence in Germany at least ten years before that date. It possessed a far more elaborate ritual structure than Richter's earlier Order - indeed, it provided the names of the grades used subsequently in both the Golden Dawn and our own Society - but there is no evidence at all that it had operative links with England. The famous 'Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians' (*Geheime Figuren der Rosenkreuzer*) of 1784/85 appeared under its aegis, and English manuscript versions of that remarkable pictorial anthology are known from the early 1800s but there is nothing to link them with any masonic circle⁶. There is also good reason to look beyond the confines of Freemasonry for signs of an initiatic Order.

One significant characteristic of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn is that it admitted both men and women on equal terms, and this is a common feature of esoteric bodies down the centuries. The first Rosicrucians, according to the manifestoes, admitted only men, but there were many female alchemists and in the Behmenist movement - in England at least - women were prominent if not dominant. Women were also crucial to William Law's religious Community at King's Cliffe in Northamptonshire, in which Boehme's doctrines were studied. This should not surprise us, for women taught in classical Neoplatonic academies (Hypatia, d A.D. 415, is the obvious example) and have provided us down the ages with unsurpassed accounts of spiritual experiences. And in the 18th century they were accepted as fully worthy of admission into Rosicrucian societies. When the Comte de Chazal initiated Sigismund Bacstrom into his 'Society of Rosa Cruix' on the island of Mauritius, in 1794, he told him that 'our Society does not exclude a worthy woman from being initiated'. Indeed, Chazal stated that Leona Constantia, Abbess of Clermont, was 'actually received as a practical member and Master into Our Society in the year 1736'.⁷ But in England there was still nothing.

⁵ The book is now in the library of the Supreme Council for England and Wales. For Byrom and his associates, see Joy Hancox, *The Byrom Collection*. 1992

⁶ The 'Secret Symbols' was circulating in manuscript form much earlier in the 18th century (from c 1750) and copies exist in both French and German. No English version from the 18th century is known to exist.

⁷ Quoted from a manuscript transcript, entitled *A Journal of a Rosicrucian Philos[opher]*, made by Frederick Hockley from Bacstrom's original in 1833. In the possession of the author.

In 1801 Francis Barrett announced the setting up of a 'School (which will consist of no greater number than Twelve Students)' in which he would teach 'the choicest operations of Natural Philosophy, Natural Magic, the Cabala, Chemistry, the Talismanic Art, Hermetic Philosophy, Astrology, Physiognomy &c.'⁸. He was not the first to attempt this: Ebenezer Sibly had also taught astrology, herbalism and Magic in the 1780s, but both ventures were purely commercial and neither offered anything by way of ceremonial initiation. They did set out the processes of ritual magic (rightly hedged about with dire warnings as to its danger), but this was for the individual student. Other than masonic initiation, which at that time was of a very pedestrian nature, the only serious study in England of the initiatic experience was purely theoretical, and it was being carried out by a reclusive non-mason and non-Christian: Thomas Taylor, the Platonist.⁹

More than anyone since the time of Ficino, Thomas Taylor treated the work of Plato, Plotinus and the Neo-platonists as spiritual philosophy with an eternal value. His insights into the essence of Neo-platonism are remarkably acute and foreshadow many of the doctrinal concerns of the Golden Dawn. His earliest, and one of his most important works is his translation of *The Mystical Hymns of Orpheus* (1787), in which he compares - following Ficino - the nine Muses to the nine planets. He analyses these in detail and demonstrates his awareness of the doctrine of correspondences. In his paper, 'On the Theology of the Greeks' (1820), he quotes with approval the doctrine of reincarnation: 'That the human soul on its departure from the present life, will, if not properly purified, pass into other terrene bodies'. Even more important, in terms of its later influence, are his comments on Theurgy:

Though the Theurgical art is unfortunately lost, by means of which we might obtain the best method of purifying the phantastic spirit; yet we must not suppose that it is utterly impossible to accomplish this desirable end, without its assistance. Indeed, nothing can so effectually contribute to separate the phantasy from this terrene body, as a continual intellectual illumination. Now this can only be acquired by long habits as meditation, accompanied with a vehement thirst after truth, which gradually withdraw the soul from sensible perturbations, produce the contemplative virtues, and dispel the darkness of corporeal imaginations.¹⁰

But how did Taylor, or rather his work, enter the world of initiatic Orders? It entered by way of another opponent of institutional Christianity: Frederick Augustus, Duke of Sussex and Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England.

⁸ Francis Barrett, *The Magus, or Celestial Intelligencer*, 1801 Part Two, p140.

⁹ For Thomas Taylor's life (1758 - 1835) and work, see Kathleen Raine & George Mills Harper, *Thomas Taylor the Platonist*. Selected Writings. Edited, with Introductions. London, 1969. Most of Taylor's works are currently available through the Prometheus Trust at Frome, Somerset.

¹⁰ Thomas Taylor, 'The History of the Restoration of the Platonic Theology by the latter Platonists'. Printed in *Oracles & Mysteries*, Vol. 7 of the Prometheus Trust edition of Taylor's works. See p203

Sussex was determined that the new United Grand Lodge, and the Craft as a whole, should be truly Universalist. To this end he ensured that he became head of all the higher degrees so that he could suppress all those that were specifically Christian. He was greatly interested in Neoplatonism, perhaps because of his own deistic beliefs, and had copies of most of Taylor's works in his immense library - many of them the fine and large-paper copies that were printed in very small quantities. Whether Sussex himself had a hand in the de-Christianisation of the Craft and Royal Arch rituals after the Union is not known, but a careful analysis - especially of the Royal Arch ritual - will show a number of close textual parallels with some of Taylor's translations. (It would, however, be inappropriate to discuss these in the present paper).

But let us suppose that Sussex had another motive for holding down the higher degrees. If he was actively, but privately pursuing the option of establishing a non-masonic esoteric Order that embodied both Neoplatonic and Rosicrucian ideals he would not have wished to see them debased, as, in his terms, would have been the inevitable consequence of incorporating them in masonic Rites. We know of his deep interest in Neoplatonism but the question of his Rosicrucian involvement, even at a theoretical level, is not so easily answered. One way of determining the answer would be by a careful analysis of the contents of his library. He had many books on esoteric subjects but far fewer relating to Freemasonry; what we cannot tell - in the absence of examining them for his annotations - is the extent to which he *read* his esoteric books. Even so, the possibility is there.

Whether with or without the involvement of the Duke of Sussex, some sort of group work that might loosely be termed 'Rosicrucian' *did* take place in the first half of the 19th century. The supposed reference to Rosicrucians in Higgins's *Anacalypsis* (1833-36) is a red-herring (he was referring to the masonic Rose-Croix degree), but Frederick Hockley was actively producing beautiful, fully coloured Magical and Rosicrucian manuscripts from the 1820s onwards - manuscripts for which his employer, the bookseller, John Denley, had a thriving market. The purchasers cannot be shown to have formed an integrated group, but their correspondence shows them to have been enthusiasts for esoteric subjects. They also formed the basis for the fictional Rosicrucians of Bulwer Lytton's *Zanoni* (1841), just as Denley was the model for his occult bookseller.

It is reasonable to suppose that from such anonymous enthusiasts came the Rosicrucian Society of 1857 to which Walter Spencer referred in the paper he presented to Wentworth Little. That Spencer's source was genuine cannot be doubted as Anthony O'Neal Haye, who presided over the Scottish Society from which our own derives, persistently maintained that his society was the offspring of an English Rosicrucian Order that did *not* require its members to be freemasons. About the membership, location and dates of that Society or Order we know absolutely nothing, but perhaps we can speculate. Given the strong alchemical bias of all Rosicrucian bodies it is reasonable to suppose that 19th century alchemists at least knew of the existence of their Rosicrucian contemporaries and may have worked with them. Thus we can create the scenario of Thomas South and his daughter, later Mrs. Atwood, writing their *Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery* (1850) for the benefit of Rosicrucian initiates. The book - which combines the Greek Mysteries, Neoplatonism

and alchemy - was withdrawn immediately after publication because the authors felt that it was unfit for the *public*; initiates were another matter.

And so we are back to loose associations of like minds rather than formally organised societies and Orders. All the elements of the Western Hermetic Tradition are present, and both sexes are represented. Why, then, would a secret, initiatic Order be needed? Perhaps because changes in society threatened the preservation and transmission of that Tradition and only a formal organisation could ensure its perpetuation. That someone, or some specific group, had determined to create an initiatic structure to teach new generations of hermeticists the doctrines that they had so carefully preserved is certain. *Someone* created the cipher manuscripts and Mackenzie, who at least transcribed them if he was not their author, had wished to see them take on material form. He may not have approved of Westcott being the agent for their transmutation but he could not have found anyone better suited to create a magical Order. Devious he may have been, but Westcott was also discreet and he believed fervently in the spiritual value of what he built and what he taught. Like his predecessors he appreciated the need for sexual polarity in the working of the Order and opened it to both men and women - acknowledging the stimulus he had received from Anna Kingsford (herself a disciple of Eliphas Levi) by casting her in the role of the mythical German adept, Anna Sprengel.¹¹ He also ensured that every part of the Western Hermetic Tradition had its place in the teachings of the Golden Dawn, and in its public face also, for alchemy, magic, Rosicrucianism, the kabbalah and Neoplatonism are all included in the titles published in his *Collectanea Hermetica* series.¹²

This, however, is well known, as are the endless speculations on the immediate origins of the Golden Dawn. It is time to return to our original question: was the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn a new departure or the culmination of a long, active tradition? The answer, of course, is that the Golden Dawn was both. Without the many societies, Orders and other institutions that preceded it down the centuries there could have been no Golden Dawn, and without the changes in society that permitted an avowedly magical Order, and an Order open to both sexes, even to exist, let alone to flourish, it could never have come into being.

What should be of greater concern to us is what will follow the Golden Dawn? Is there still a need for restricted initiatic Orders or do the continuing changes in society and the frightening speed with which electronic communication develops render them irrelevant? Perhaps the question could be expressed not so much as 'Golden Dawn or Gotterdammerung?' but as 'Golden Dawn or Window on Silicon Valley?' Either way, the real question is more simply put in this way, How can we best preserve the Western Hermetic Tradition for the future? I truly believe that initiatic Orders analogous to the Golden Dawn are still needed and that their role is crucial in preserving our specifically western esoteric spirituality. We must also recognise that the Tradition which represents that spirituality faces real threats, both from the growth

¹¹ It may be noted that the motto used by 'Anna Sprengel', *Sapiens Dominabitur Astris*, appears on the title page of one of Anna Kingsford's last works, an edition of Weigel's *Astrology Theologised* (1886)

¹² The whole series has recently been reprinted in one volume by Samuel Weiser Inc. of York Beach, Maine.

of religious indifference and from the determined efforts of its spiritual enemies to capitalise on such indifference, and to undermine the tradition by perverting its ethos and substituting darker and avowedly anti-Christian goals. If we are true to our Rosicrucian principles then we must recognise and strive against those threats.

Today I have attempted to set the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in its historical and spiritual context. How we should respond to the sombre problem I have posed in my conclusion must be left for another occasion - but it must not be left for long.