

THE GOLDEN DAWN SCRAPBOOK



**The Rise and Fall
of a Magical Order**

R. A. Gilbert

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Introduction

When I first took up the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn 25 years ago, it was decidedly a minority interest. Today it is a very different animal: the dead rituals live again, and the system of esoteric knowledge that underpinned them is taught by a multitude of self-styled adepts to myriads of would-be magicians who rush headlong, like the Gadarene swine, over the cliffs of self-delusion. But it need not be so.

I am not a magician and I have no desire to be a Chief, secret or otherwise, of any magical Order, but I am well aware that the warring bands of magicians who variously claim to be the heirs of the Golden Dawn do not represent its true legacy. There are adepts, possessed of the necessary dedication and integrity to revive the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and restore it to the role intended by its Victorian founders: that of a teaching body that unfolds the psycho-spiritual nature of the Self by way of ceremonial practices based on the symbolism of the Western Mystery Tradition.

Aspiring magicians will not be led to a working temple through the pages of this book; it is not designed to be a manual or practical instruction. Equally, it is not intended to be a documentary history of the Order: that may be found in Ellic Howe's history, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn* (1972), and, on a more modest scale, in my own *Golden Dawn Companion* (1986).

This book is intended simply to provide an overview of the Order, and to tell its story through the lives and actions (or inactions) of its members. If it seems that I have concentrated on their follies and misdeeds, this is because the story of the Order *is* largely a story of follies and misdeeds.

Recent research into collections of Golden Dawn archives has produced an almost complete prehistory of the Order. In a much abbreviated outline, the story runs like this:

William Wynn Westcott (1848–1925), physician, coroner and magician, listed among his recreations ‘Freemasonry’ – by which he meant not the mainstream craft, but the many odd Rites and Orders that flourished in late Victorian Britain. Westcott was active in most of them, including the Swedenborgian Rite of Freemasonry, of which Kenneth MacKenzie was the Grand Secretary. When MacKenzie died in 1886, Westcott took up his post and collected from MacKenzie’s widow all the papers relevant to the Rite, together with some ‘loose papers’. These were nothing other than the Cipher Manuscript.

For Westcott, who, like MacKenzie, had access to Trithemius’ *Polygraphiae* (1561) which contained the cipher, translating the Manuscript was easy. And once Westcott knew what he had, he knew also what he would do with it. In Westcott’s day, almost every occultist (if a man) was also a freemason and a member of the Masonic Rosicrucian Society, the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia*. But that was essentially a study society with a series of simple graded ceremonies and Westcott dreamed of something else. For those who wanted work and not play, there was another society that was, in MacKenzie’s words, ‘practical and not visionary’. It was, however, severely limited, as its title – The Society of Eight – indicates. Westcott became one of the Eight and thus increased the store of occult knowledge that he would later feed to his budding magicians. He intended MacKenzie’s rituals, however, for yet another Order.

The Society of Eight could never grow and, being purely masonic, it could never admit women. To Westcott the admission of women was essential, for by the time he had obtained the Cipher Manuscript he was enraptured by the work of Anna Kingsford, whose Hermetic Society supplied all the theoretical occultism that one could wish for – but without a hint of the practical. There was, however, one avenue still open to him in the form of the Royal Oriental Order of Sikha (Apex) and the Sat B’hai, a quasi-masonic Order supposedly imported

from India in 1872 that admitted women to its lower grades. In 1886 it was controlled by John Yarker, the great creator and collector of Rites and Orders, who offered its members a detailed programme of esoteric studies to supplement a set of rather uninspiring rituals.

MacKenzie had long been a member of the Sat B'hai and saw the need to improve the rituals, but his death prevented the completion of his work, the probable outlines of which are contained in the Cipher Manuscript. (Which was enciphered simply to keep it from his wife and his masonic colleagues, none of whom were members of the Order!) The Sat B'hai was inactive to the point of paralysis, but Yarker was very much alive and had no intention of giving it up. Thus in order for Westcott to satisfy his desire to provide a working esoteric Order that offered ritual as well as instruction to both men and women, he must create something entirely new. In March 1888 Westcott finally gave birth to that creation: the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

Such a brief outline must inevitably leave out much evidence and detail, but I should point out that the evidence presented is not circumstantial but entirely documentary. Those sceptics and cynics who doubt the reality of the archives of the Golden Dawn will find an account of them in the bibliography to this book. Other, more trusting, readers may prefer simply to enjoy the story of the Golden Dawn and its curious members.

‘Religion or Lust?’, the Order in the Dock

By October 1901, the Boer War was drawing tortuously to its close; the minor skirmishes to which it had degenerated no longer drew public attention. Newspaper editors in London were anxiously seeking new headlines. What dropped into their laps in the course of that month must thus have seemed nothing short of heaven-sent.

‘Religion or Lust?’ screamed *The Sun*, easily outdoing *The News of the World*’s ‘Sensational Evidence’ and *The Daily News*’s ‘Hissing the Prisoners’. The event in question was the Committal Proceedings of an American couple, Frank and Editha Jackson, alias Theo and Laura Horos. They had been arrested on 20 September and were charged with conspiring to cheat and defraud a young woman, Vera Croysdale, of both money and jewellery. On 10 October, further charges were laid against them of the alleged ‘procurement for immoral purposes’ of three young women – Vera Croysdale, Olga Rowson and Daisy Adams. Theo Horos was also charged with the rape of the sixteen-year-old Miss Adams.

To add to the drama, the stories included the contrast between the inadequate Theo and his dominating wife. They were involved in a spurious occult body, The Order of Theocratic Unity, which had been set up by the couple. Laura Horos was known in the organisation as ‘The Swami Viva Ananda’. For two months a prurient public was regaled with lurid accounts of the misdoings of the pair and their ‘revolting and abominable conduct’, in the words of the bench. These accounts were repeated during their trial in December at the



Laura Horos (alias The Swami Viva Ananda, Mrs Diss Debar and Angel Anna) as seen by a staff artist of Famous Crimes, at the time of her trial in 1901 for swindling and for aiding and abetting rape by her husband Frank Jackson (alias Theo Horos). Her colourful life had a prosaic beginning. She was born Editba Salomon in Harrodsburg, Kentucky, 1849.

Central Criminal Court. Both were found guilty and both were gaoled, Theo Horos for 15 years and The Swami for seven. But while most members of the public had revelled in the histrionics and extraordinary dress of the gross and flamboyant Swami who conducted her own defence, there were others who had viewed the proceedings with dismay and alarm.

On 11 October, under the heading 'The Order of the Golden Dawn. Miss Croysdale tells the story of how she was duped', the *Evening News* began its report on the Horos Case with the text of the Obligation that Vera Croysdale had been persuaded to sign before she had been admitted to the Theocratic Unity. It read as follows:

I, Vera Croysdale, in the presence of the Lord of the Universe and in the Hall of the Neophytes of the Order of the G.D. in the Outer, regularly assembled under Warrant from the G.H. Chiefs of the Second Order, do of my own free will and

The Swami's court appearances were dramatic. Between October and December 1901 the public flocked to the committal proceedings at Marylebone Police Court and to the trial at the Central Criminal Court – partly to listen to Madame Horos conduct her own defence. They expected a theatrical performance and were not disappointed.



accord hereby and hereon most solemnly pledge myself to keep secret this Order, its name, the names of its members, and the proceedings which take place at its meetings, from all and every person in the whole world, who is outside the pale of the Order, and not even to discuss these with initiates, unless he or they are in possession of the password for the time being, nor yet with any member who has resigned, demitted, or been expelled; and I undertake to maintain a kindly and benevolent relation with all the Fratres and Sorores of the Order.

I furthermore promise and swear that I will keep secret any information relating to this Order which may have become known to me prior to the completion of the ceremony of my admission; and I also pledge myself to divulge nothing whatsoever concerning this Order to the outside world, in case either of my resignation, demission or expulsion. I will not seek to obtain any writings or ritual pertaining to the Order of the G.D. in the Outer without due authorisation