

# The Alchemist of the Golden Dawn

The Letters of the Revd W. A. Ayton to  
F. C. Gardner and Others 1886-1905

Edited by Ellic Howe



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**Complacency serves the old gods.**

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# The Alchemist of the Golden Dawn

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The Letters of the Revd W. A. Ayton to  
F. C. Gardner and Others 1886-1905

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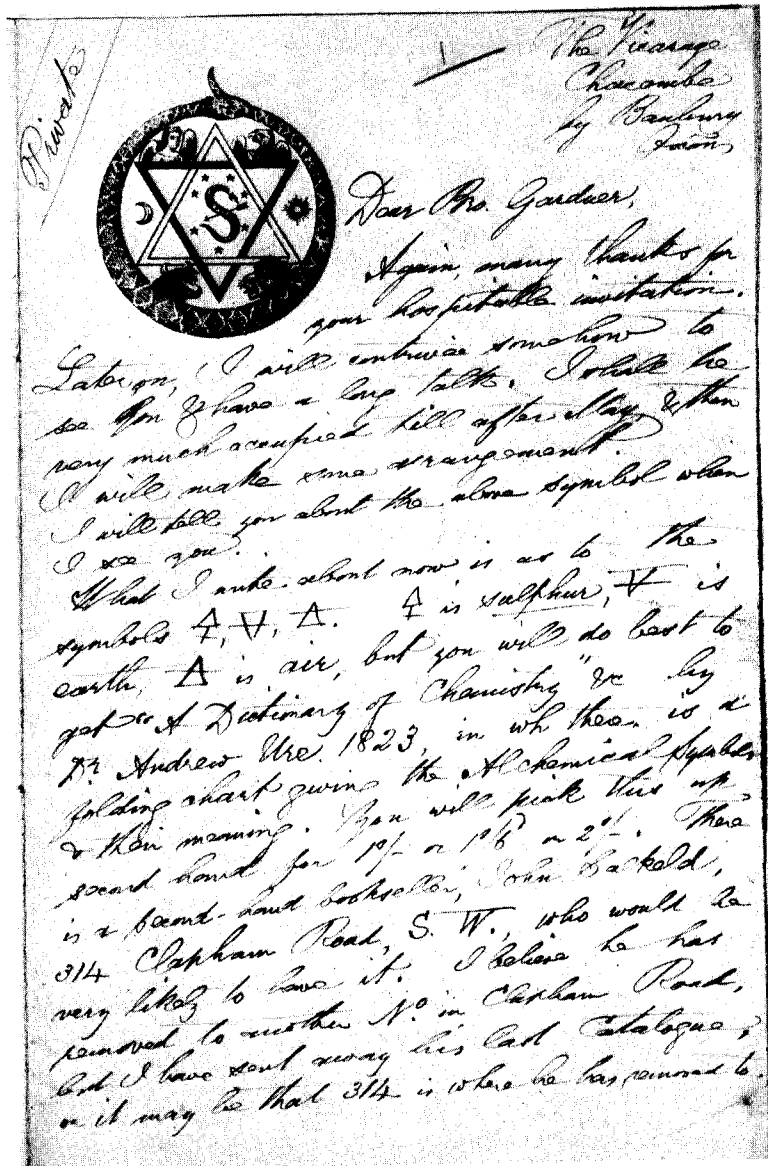
Edited with an Introduction by  
Ellic Howe



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## INTRODUCTION

THE REVD WILLIAM ALEXANDER AYTON and his wife both joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (hereafter, the G.D.) in July 1888, about four months after Dr William Wynn Westcott, a London coroner, founded the Order. Ayton was, in fact, Westcott's twentieth recruit. W. B. Yeats, who first encountered him not long after he himself became a member of the Order in March 1890, described him (although without identifying him by name) in his autobiographical *The Trembling of the Veil* (1922, p. 70) as a white-haired old clergyman who was 'the most panic-stricken person' he had ever known. Samuel Liddell Mathers (who later called himself Count de Glenstrae or Count MacGregor), with Westcott a co-founder of the G.D., presented him to Yeats with the words: 'He unites us to the great adepts of the past.' Yeats continued:

This old man took me aside that he might say - 'I hope you never invoke spirits - that is a very dangerous thing to do. I am told that even the planetary spirits turn upon us in the end.' I said, 'Have you ever seen an apparition?' 'Oh yes, once', he said. 'I have my alchemical laboratory in a cellar under my house where the Bishop cannot see it. One day I was walking up and down there when I heard another footstep walking up and down beside me. I turned and saw a girl I had been in love with when I was a young man, but she died long ago. She wanted me to kiss her. Oh no, I would not do that.' 'Why not?' I said. 'Oh she might have got power over me'. 'Has your alchemical research had any success?'

I said. 'Yes, I once made the elixir of life. A French alchemist said it had the right smell and the right colour' (the alchemist may have been Eliphas Levi, who visited England in the 'sixties, and would have said anything).

Ayton's letters indicate that he had a formidable knowledge of alchemical and occult literature, which he could read in the original Latin texts, also that he experimented with alchemical procedures. They appear, too, to reflect a feeling of guilt that a beneficed clergyman of the Church of England should engage himself in such unconventional pursuits: he was afraid, as Yeats mentioned, that his bishop would discover what was going on in his cellar.

As we will discover, Ayton – *Frater Virtute Orta Occident Rarius* ('Those that rise by virtue rarely fall') in the G.D.; his wife was *Soror Quam Potero Adjutabo* ('I will help as much as I can') – had many bees in his clerical bonnet, including an obsessive fear of the machinations of 'the B.B.', i.e., the Black Brethren (Jesuits!), and a trusting belief in the authenticity of Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky's Mahatmas, her and the Theosophical Society's invisible Secret Chiefs. He believed, too, in Elementals (nature spirits) and the dangerous territory inhabited by 'the gnomes'. By any standard of assessment the Vicar of Chacombe, a small village (population *c.* 450) close to Banbury in the county and diocese of Oxford, was a strange and remarkable man.

W. A. Ayton, the son of William Capon Ayton, was born in the Bloomsbury district of London on 28 April 1816, and was therefore in his 73rd year when he joined the G.D. in 1888. (Westcott was then forty and Mathers thirty-four.) He was educated at Charterhouse School in the City of London (long before it moved to more salubrious surroundings in Surrey in 1872) and matriculated at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, in 1837 (Scholar, Latin Prize Essay 1838–9, BA 1841). He was ordained deacon in the latter year and priest in 1843. He served in various rural parishes in the north Midlands before he was appointed Vicar of Chacombe in 1873 (*aet.* 57). Whether or not he had any particular vocation for the priesthood is a matter for conjecture,

but it at least provided him with a modest stipend (£300 per annum at Chacombe) and sufficient leisure for his strictly private interests. In the Victorian era the Church of England offered a refuge for many young men who had no aptitude for commerce and a passage in one of Ayton's letters suggests that he was already preoccupied with alchemy and occultism at about the time he left Cambridge.

He was initiated as a Freemason in St John's Lodge No. 601 at Wellington, Shropshire, shortly before his fiftieth birthday in 1866, when he was Perpetual Curate at Oakengates, a nearby village. However, when he moved to Edingale, yet another village not far from Tamworth in Staffordshire in 1868, he did not bother to join the local lodge (Marmion No. 1060 at Tamworth) until 1871. Again, when he arrived at Chacombe in 1873 two years passed before he joined Cherwell Lodge No. 599 at Banbury in 1875. He was its Master in 1878 but ceased to attend meetings after April 1881, although he remained at Chacombe for another thirteen years. Evidently his interest in conventional Freemasonry was not very great, although at one time or another he was a member of Churchill Lodge No. 478 at Oxford (joined 1871) and Westminster and Keystone Lodge No. 10 (London) in 1872.

Working the United Grand Lodge of England's more or less standard Emulation Ritual cannot have been very exciting for someone who had actually manufactured the elixir of life. 'A French alchemist said it had the right smell and the right colour . . .,' he told W. B. Yeats, 'but the first effect of the elixir is that your nails fall out and your hair falls off. I was afraid that I might have made a mistake and that nothing else might happen, so I put it away on a shelf. I meant to drink it when I was an old man, but when I got it down the other day it had all dried up.'

After his retirement (on a minute pension) in 1894 he and his wife moved to a village in the East Grinstead, Sussex, district. After her death (*c.* July 1898) he lived briefly in the vicinity of Dartford, Kent, and was for a time in the Shepherd's Bush area in London (1900) before finally moving to Saffron Walden, Hertfordshire, where he died on 1 January 1909 (*aet.* 92).

With a very few exceptions Ayton's surviving letters (about

seventy in all) were written to the much younger Frederick Leigh Gardner (his junior by forty years) between March 1889 and November 1905. They are worthy of publication, I believe, because they throw additional light upon the notable expansion of interest in occultism which began when the mysterious Madame Blavatsky settled permanently in London early in 1887. Together with Colonel Henry Olcott and William Q. Judge she had founded the Theosophical Society in New York City in 1875. A London branch was formed three years later but there was little public interest in Great Britain until 1881 when H. P. Sinnett, who had been one of Madame Blavatsky's converts in India, published his *Occult World*. Sixty years later A. E. Waite recalled its 'remarkable account of strange phenomena and yet stranger claims': 'I remember very well the strange crew that filled Sinnett's drawing room at Theosophical gatherings,' he continued, 'the astrologers, the mesmerists, the readers of hands, and a few, very few only, of the motley spiritualist groups.'<sup>1</sup>

When Westcott founded the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in 1888 he intended it to be a secret and highly-exclusive alternative to the Theosophical Society; in fact a school of occultism based on the Western hermetic-Qabalistic tradition, and hence without any Hindu or Buddhist elements. The Theosophical Society was open to all who wished to join it, but the door that led to the G.D. was closely guarded.

The majority of the early male members of the G.D. (up to c.1892) were recruited from Westcott's friends in the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, known to the initiated as the Soc. Ros., which was exclusively Masonic. The S.R.I.A., of which Westcott was Secretary General, although he became its Supreme Magus in 1892, was not a Masonic lodge but, during the 1880s, an increasingly esoteric equivalent of a learned society. There were Colleges (i.e., branches) in the provinces – e.g., at Bristol, York and Newcastle upon Tyne. After 1887 a good many of its members also joined the Theosophical Society. Ayton was never in the Soc. Ros., probably because he found it inconvenient to

<sup>1</sup> A. E. Waite, *Shadows of Life and Thought* (1938), p. 87.

travel to London for the Metropolitan College's quarterly meetings. W. B. Yeats was also not a member because he lacked the necessary Masonic qualification and left the Theosophical Society when he joined the G.D. in March 1890.

Frederick Leigh Gardner, to whom Ayton's surviving letters were mainly written, was born in 1857 at Highbury in north London and was the son of an accountant. The family had moved to the recently-developed Gunnersbury area of Chiswick by the 1870s because Gardner *filis* was educated at the Godolphin School at Hammersmith. His first employment was as a clerk in a stockbroker's office (c.1875–86) and in the latter year founded his own small stockbroking firm. He married in c.1885.

His parents were both addicted to spiritualism and he made a record of seances held at their home in 1878–9 when a certain Joseph was the medium.<sup>2</sup> On one occasion 'F.L.G. was slightly controlled by Silver Star' – the latter was no doubt one of the countless Red Indians who manifested themselves as 'spirit guides' – 'and tried all he could to expel the influence by making passes over the medium'. He was one of many who joined the Theosophical Society when Madame Blavatsky arrived in London. He preserved two sheets of paper with an automatic script message scribbled in an unidentified handwriting. It begins: 'Mr Gardner's Mahatma is Koot Hoomi – and we wish him to know it. We have not told you this before. If Mr Gardner will now use the Mahatmas's own name, he will strengthen the rapport, but he must not tell any one.'

He was active in the Theosophical Society milieu, knew Madame Blavatsky personally, belonged to her well-known Blavatsky Lodge in 1890 and attended her cremation at Woking when she died in 1891. In 1902, however, he was reported in the *Chiswick Times* as having 'latterly taken less interest in the movement owing to his lack of sympathy with the present

<sup>2</sup> Notebook in the possession of the late Gerald Yorke. I found a few details about Gardner's family background in the *Chiswick Times*, 25 July 1902.

management', which meant that he did not have much use for Mrs Annie Besant and her colleagues. According to the same source: 'He has been a journalist, and whilst that journal was under the editorship of Miss Mabel Collins . . . he contributed a series of articles to *The Lady*. He was at one time offered, but declined, the City editorship of *Vanity Fair* and was a regular correspondent to *Lucifer*.<sup>3</sup>

Gardner's masonic career was brief. He was initiated in Montefiore Lodge No. 1017 (whose membership was almost entirely Jewish) in October 1886 (*aet.* 29) but resigned in June 1889, three months after he began to correspond with Ayton. It is possible that Freemasonry did not satisfy his desire for further knowledge of 'the hidden mysteries of Nature and Science' – the phrase is Masonic – and supposed that alchemy and Theosophy à la Blavatsky would provide a better guide to the territory that interested him. In 1902 he claimed to possess a library of over 10,000 books on alchemy and occultism, including 'a fine set of the works of Thomas Taylor, the Platonist'. He found his way to the G.D. in 1894 but resigned from the Isis Urania Temple in London in the autumn of 1897 after a spectacular row with MacGregor Mathers, a co-Chief of the Order with Dr Westcott. I have described his brief but by no means uneventful career in the G.D. at some length in *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, and need say no more here. When he broke with the G.D. Gardner remained on friendly terms with Dr Westcott, who had been obliged to retire into the background, but for different reasons, some months earlier (see p. 86 below). However, the

<sup>3</sup> Mabel Collins had been co-editor with H.P.B. of *Lucifer*, a heavily-subsidised Theosophical periodical, but was 'thrown out' in May 1888 after a row with Madame Blavatsky 'because of her behaviour with two young men'. She became Mrs Keningdale Cook after her departure and sued H.P.B. for libel in 1890, although the suit was dropped just before it was to be heard in court. See A. H. Nethercott, *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant* (1961), p. 330. Mabel Collins was the author of *Light on the Path* (1885), which was widely read in Theosophical circles. There were many reprints, including a Russian translation (Geneva, 1925).

latter remained Supreme Magus of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia until he went to live in Durban, South Africa, in 1920. Indeed, he was still corresponding with Gardner in 1924, a year before his death on 30 June 1925.

Gardner's early connection with the Soc. Ros. remains obscure – for example, why he joined the Bristol College on 12 April 1894 rather than the London Metropolitan College. According to the latter's *Transactions* for 1897–8, on 13 January 1898 'V[ery] W[orshipful] Frederick Leigh Gardner, having placed at the disposal of the High Council, at a nominal rental, a most desirable room for use as a Library and Office, and having undertaken the important duties of Librarian, has been raised to the Honorary 8° and will act as Substitute Secretary General.' Since the Soc. Ros. liked impressive titles Gardner was also Librarian General. He was its Secretary General 1901–5 but I have no information about his later connection (if any) with the Masonic 'Rosicrucians'.

In 1903 he published (privately) a *Catalogue Raisonné of Rosicrucian Books* in an edition of 500 copies. Dr Westcott contributed an Introduction. A second edition appeared in the same year. This was followed in 1911 by *Astrological Books*, which contains information about certainly early nineteenth-century publications that is not available elsewhere, and finally in 1912 *Freemasonry: A Catalogue of Lodge Histories*, which was merely a pamphlet. Dr Westcott also supplied brief contributions for these. The Preface to *Lodge Histories* announced a forthcoming bibliography of alchemical works, but this never appeared.

He retired from active membership of the Stock Exchange in March 1903 and henceforth operated as an antiquarian bookseller from his home in Chiswick. He regularly advertised his catalogues in the *Occult Review* between 1912 and 1925. The text never changed: 'A Private Collector is disposing of his Valuable Library of Occult Books (upwards of 10,000 volumes), on account of failing health. Catalogue free on application. Prices moderate. "Author", 14 Marlborough Road, Gunnersbury, London, W.' Judging by the local Chiswick directories he probably died in 1930.

Luckily Gardner was an inveterate hoarder and preserved the letters he received from Ayton, Westcott, MacGregor Mathers and other members of the G.D. Unfortunately his Theosophical Society correspondence, which must have been extensive, did not reach the ultimate destination of his G.D. papers, namely the late Mr Gerald Yorke, a patrician Gloucestershire landowner whom I first came to know well during the 1960s. Yorke acquired them after Gardner's death from the late Michael Houghton (i.e., Hurwitz) during the 1930s. Houghton was the founder and proprietor of the Atlantis Bookshop, then in Bury Street close to the British Museum. I used to visit it occasionally before the war, not to see Houghton but, rather, a German refugee bookseller whom Houghton allowed to occupy a corner of the ramshackle premises and who, much to Houghton's irritation, regularly sold me books that had no connection with occultism. At that time my lack of interest in arcane knowledge was total; indeed, it still is except in relation to the history of ideas or, if one likes, the study of 'intellectual underworlds' or sub-cultures.

My preoccupation with the latter began in 1960 when I commenced the research for *Urania's Children: The Strange World of the Astrologers*,<sup>†</sup> which was eventually published in 1967. In the course of investigating the extraordinary expansion of interest in astrology that began in Great Britain during the 1890s I discovered A. E. Waite's *Shadows of Life and Thought* (1938), and read his tantalizingly obscure account of the origins of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and his own experiences in the Order. Bewildered by Waite's obfuscations I decided to try to solve 'The Mystery of the G.D.' and *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn: A Documentary History of a Magical Order, 1887-1923* appeared in 1972 (to be reissued by the Aquarian Press).

When I began to work on the G.D. problem in 1970 there was only one possible point of departure, namely F. L. Gardner's papers, which Gerald Yorke had purchased from Houghton.

<sup>†</sup> Republished as *Astrology and the Third Reich* (Aquarian Press, 1984).

Apart from Ayton's letters, which form the substance of this book, they included a mass of correspondence relating to Gardner's membership of the G.D. (1892-7) and his enduring relationship with Dr William Wynn Westcott. Gerald Yorke, that most generous of mortals, kindly lent me the complete collection. The story of the G.D.'s early years (1887-92) remained totally obscure until I unexpectedly discovered an important cache of papers for which the occultists had been vainly searching for at least forty years. The story of this *trouvaille* will be found in *The Magicians*. In any event, the volume now in the reader's hands represents an extensive 'footnote' to my previous work on the G.D.

I must return, if only briefly, to Michael Houghton and introduce his friend the late Gerard Heym. I rediscovered Houghton in more commodious premises in Museum Street after the war. He was a mildly cantankerous 'occultist' who did a little writing and publishing on the side. The curious are referred to his *The White Brother, An Occult Autobiography* (1927), and poetry in slim volumes: *Shoot - and be Damned* (1935), and *Many Brightnesses* (1954). He regularly announced his intention of founding an occult Order, but nothing ever came of the plan. He died in c.1961 and after a brief interval his bookselling business was acquired by the friendly members of the Collins family, who continue to specialise in 'occult' literature.

It was Heym who advised the late F. L. Gardner's sister to sell her deceased brother's papers to Houghton. The latter introduced me to Heym, but that was some years before I became involved with the G.D. problem in 1968 or I would have questioned him on the subject of Gardner. Heym was a knowledgeable and energetic collector of rare alchemical literature - so knowledgeable and energetic, indeed, that some London (and possibly also Parisian) antiquarian booksellers suspected that some small and easily portable items found their way to his vast and secret (!) library in Chelsea by a process of telekinesis. He used to invite me to take tea with him at the Devonshire Club where he spoke in whispers (literally) about secret plans and connections. I last saw him in Paris in September 1962 but speedily made my escape when he



broached the subject of an investment in an inevitably risky alchemical publishing venture. After all, alchemists should know how to make their own gold. The curious are referred to his articles in *Ambix* (Journal for the Study of Alchemy and Early Chemistry, I,i, 1937). I was delighted when I discovered a copy of Aleister Crowley's *Equinox* (3,i) with an inscription in Heym's handwriting to the effect that he was '10° = 1°. Supreme Magus of the R+C. Paris, 1931'. The late Gerard Heym was the Supreme Magus of precisely nothing. However, we owe it to him that the Ayton Papers eventually reached the irascible Mr Houghton and proceeded thence to Gerald Yorke.

I have preferred to omit any annotation for the many old alchemical books to which Ayton referred in his letters to Gardner. In any case there was often more than one edition and Ayton hardly ever provided dates for the copies in his possession. For detailed biographical and bibliographical information the reader is referred to John Ferguson, *Bibliotheca chemica* (Glasgow, 1906) and [Denis I. Duveen], *Bibliotheca alchemica et chemica* (London, 1949). However, I have included footnote references to contemporary publications, personalities and events, and have indicated the location of the very few letters that were not in Gerald Yorke's collection. All the letters are to Gardner unless otherwise indicated.

Finally, I must record my thanks to Mr R. A. Gilbert, a learned antiquarian bookseller at Bristol (4 Julius Road, Bishopston, Bristol), whose catalogues have provided both accurate information and occasional gusts of laughter; to Mr John Hamill, Librarian of the United Grand Lodge of England; to the staffs of the London Library (as so often during the past forty years), the Chiswick Public Library and the Library of the Theosophical Society of England.

## THE LETTERS



Device used by Ayton on his writing paper

THE EARLIEST of Ayton's surviving letters was written in 1886 to Captain Francis George Irwin (1828–93), of Bristol. A. E. Waite described him in *The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross* (1924, pp.568 ff.) as 'a believer in the occult arts within the measure of a thinking and reading person of his particular mental class . . . for the rest [he] was satisfied apparently with the pursuits of spiritualism, to the truth of which his circle bears witness in unpublished writings'. Waite mentioned, too, that Irwin 'was a zealous and amiable Mason, with a passion for Rites and an ambition to add to their number'. For Irwin's career (military, Masonic and pseudo-Masonic) see my 'Fringe Masonry in England, 1870–85' in *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, vol. 85 for 1972. Ayton's letter reached the library of the United Grand Lodge of England, together with about 150 others from various correspondents, a year after Irwin's death. I used them extensively for the *AQC* article mentioned above. The one which follows deals with various topics mentioned in a letter Ayton had recently received from Irwin.

The Vicarage, Chacombe  
by Banbury, Oxon  
20 May 1886

My dear Sir [i.e., F. G. Irwin, of Bristol],

I am very glad to have a letter from you. My time certainly is fully occupied, especially since the discovery that Burgoyne, was an alias for T. H. D'Alton, or Dalton, alias Seymour, a convicted felon.<sup>1</sup>

I too commenced with Spiritualism and worked it out, tho' from my earliest years I had been reading Cornelius Agrippa, Philalethes and others without being able to get any light. As to skepticism not suiting me, I am an Occultist first of all, & then anything else. I did not know, or had not realised that I was to be chief in the new Rite of Perfection in the Sat B'hai.<sup>2</sup> I have been too harassed with the H.B. of L. to attend to anything else. I will attend to it as soon as possible.

My own experience of Astrology and the Taro, is, that neither is of much use, unless you have developed the inner light so as to see spiritual correspondence of each Symbol as it turns up. If you have not read P. Christian's *Histoire de la Magie* you should do so. He gives an account of what Cagliostro did in the way of predictions by the Taro.<sup>3</sup> It and Astrology are closely interlinked. Unless one has undergone the training which Cagliostro had, we cannot do the same, tho' we may get some kind of approximation to events. Mesmerism is a part only of the Great Science, tho' a most important part, & Cagliostro was also proficient in that.

I do not think seances with Eglinton<sup>4</sup> will do any real good, and possibly harm. Spiritualism is part of the key to Occultism, but only a small part, and a new dangerous part taken by itself only.

I do not think P[eter] D[avidson] knew that T.H.B. was a convicted felon, but when he did know it, he still embarked with his family and this felon for America. He has not been over scrupulous and has been making use of Occultism for mere secular gain. I could tell you much of it if I were to see you personally.

I know about Thomas.<sup>5</sup> He is a Public Medium, and like all the rest, pays the penalty of being subject to the will of Elementaries, & losing control of himself. He has attained to some kind of spiritual insight into the Macrocosm, but others have done it so much better, that it is very little worth. His Paper advertises him, & he makes what's to him a living by it. Please excuse a short letter this time. In haste,

Yours fraternally, Wm. Alex<sup>r</sup>. Ayton

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Henry Dalton (*aet.* 27) described as a grocer, was sentenced to seven months imprisonment at Leeds Borough Sessions in January 1883 on a charge of conspiring to obtain money by false pretences. He and another were running a fraudulent 'National Employment Agency and Mercantile Assistants' Bureau' (see the *Leeds Mercury*, 10 January 1883). After his release from prison Dalton, who now used the pseudonym Burgoyne, became Secretary of a spurious 'Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor', which was founded by a so-called occultist called Peter Davidson. According to A. E. Waite (in *A New and Revised Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry*, new and revised [it was not!] edition, 1923, art. 'Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor') Ayton, whom he clearly identified, although not by name, was unwittingly involved to the extent that he not only joined the 'H.,B. of L.' but 'appears to have been unwisely active in securing subscribers among people of his own class and remitted their monies to Burgoyne'. There was a scandal, which greatly affected Ayton. Davidson and Dalton fled to the USA, where, according to Waite, Davidson continued to run the H.B. of L.

<sup>2</sup> I have described the Royal Oriental Order of the Sat B'hai as 'a comic pseudo-Masonic balloon, which rose a few feet into the air, wobbled briefly and then quietly collapsed without the average member of the Craft knowing that the thing had ever existed' ('Fringe Masonry in England, 1870-85', *AQC*, vol. 85, 1972). Nevertheless, it recruited a few Freemasons without much sense of discrimination during the period 1871-80. After the latter date it fell into the hands of John Yarker, a major collector of pseudo-Masonic 'nonsenses', who ingeniously amalgamated its Ceremony of Perfection with the ritual of a recent novelty called the Order of Light. The latter had been launched without any audible beating of drums by Maurice Vidal Portman in 1882. It had the same echoes of Hinduism as the Sat B'hai, but with a Qabalistic top-dressing. Ayton was among the first to be admitted to its 'secrets'. In what may be the holograph draft for a

Warrant, Portman described himself as 'Member of the Ninth degree of the August Order of Light . . . Grand Hierophant Presiding in the West, Grand Master of the Order of the Sacred Crown, Prince of Kether in the Circle of Adepts, Myajolah or Grand Master of the Andamanese, Arch Censor Indra, and Sponsor Ketu [?] in Hindostan of the Royal Oriental Order of Sikha and the Sat B'hai, Grand Representative of the Primitive and Original Rite of Phremasonry in Bengal, Madras and Burmah. Representative of the Antient and Primitive Rite of Phremasonry in all parts of the world where bodies of that Rite do not exist, and Grand Master of Light in the Indian Empire. Honorary IX° of the Dominion College of Rosicrucians of Canada and Supreme Magus of the Rosicrucians of India.' (The document is in the library of the United Grand Lodge of England.)

3 I have not seen the original French edition of Paul Christian (i.e., J.-B. Pitois), *Histoire de la Magie* (1870). The English translation by J. Kirkup and Julian Shand, edited and revised by Ross Nichols (1952), does not mention Cagliostro's Tarot predictions. The 'occult' Tarot theory was first developed by Eliphas Lévi in *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* (1856), but he did not provide any instructions for predictions. K. R. H. Mackenzie (see my 'Fringe Masonry in England, 1870-85', in *AQC* 85, 1972) wrote to F. G. Irwin on 6 November 1877 and mentioned that Ayton had asked him if Lévi 'left any exact instructions behind for the working of the Tarot'. He added: 'I have a fashion of working it myself but I work it with the aid of astrology which is a different process from that pursued by E. L.' For Mackenzie's attitude to Tarot divination see my *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn* (1972, pp.29-30). Instructions for divination were first published in Papus, *Le Tarot des bohémiens* (1889; English translation in 1892 by A. P. Morton; second edition, revised by A. E. Waite, 1910).

4 Irwin's son Herbert, a medical student at Bristol, had died of an overdose of laudanum in 1879 and Irwin made persistent efforts to contact him. William Eglinton (1857-1933) was a well-known 'materialization' and 'slate-writing' medium. A sealed slate would have a message written upon it during a seance even if the slate itself was supposedly inaccessible to human agents. Eglinton was acquainted with Madame Blavatsky and visited Adyar, near Madras, when H.P.B. was there during the early 1880s. He joined the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society during the early 1880s.

5 John Thomas, who lived in Cheshire, was a spiritualist medium and astrologer. The following transcription from the title-page of his

*Psychology of Botany* (1906), describes his arcane preoccupations. This unreadable but nevertheless fascinating book claimed to be 'A Treatise on Trees, Shrubs, and Plants, etc., for the cure of diseases and ailments, of the human system, (without medicine) by Sympathy (Positive and Negative) on the Soul Plane, by "Charubel" (The Great Seer), a Collegian who trained for the Gospel 60 years ago, gave his whole life up for the love of Nature and the Study of the Supernatural Elements, &c., &c. Author of The Zodiac Symbolised, The North Pole Star and Region, The Seer Critic, The Geozonic Spheres, The Occultist, Astrographical Revelations, Psychological Experiences, &c.'

2

Chacombe Vicarage  
14 March 1889

Dear Sir, & Bro. [i.e., F. L. Gardner],

Your letter by second post today. I can scarcely do more than acknowledge it today. I am absolutely harrassed by work &c. preparatory to going to London next week partly on Occult matters and partly on a private business.<sup>1</sup> I must ask you to be good enough to allow me to put off answering it in full till my return. I shall be so occupied next week that I am not sure we can get to No. 17.<sup>2</sup>

The account of Dr Price is positively in the "Annual Register" [underlined three times] for 1782.<sup>3</sup> A friend near here has it and I have never seen the "Gentleman's Magazine". I assure you I have made no mistake at all.

I enclose a small piece of Dhoop or Incense. There is enough for about twice burning. Roll it into shape of a pastille [small diagram] something like that.

Present my respectful remembrances to Mrs Gardner and believe me,

Yours fraternally,  
Wm. Alex Ayton

<sup>1</sup> 'Occult matters' probably refers to the G.D.'s Equinox meeting.

<sup>2</sup> Madame Blavatsky was then living at 17 Lansdowne Road at the Holland Park end of Ladbroke Grove. The house belonged to Bertram Keightley, a well-to-do young Theosophical neophyte.

3 See 'An account of some Experiments on Mercury and Silver, made at Guildford, in May 1778, in the Laboratory of J. Price, M.D., F.R.S.' in *The Annual Register*, 1782 (pp. 90-8, under 'Natural History'). The article describes the procedures for the manufacture of minute quantities of what was alleged to be gold.

THE FOLLOWING LETTER is one of the very few which Ayton wrote on notepaper bearing an occult device (see the illustration on p. 19). In the course of this communication Ayton mentioned a dozen ancient writers on alchemy with evident familiarity, turned to Theosophical publications and yoga and offered good advice about incense. It is inconceivable that the Protestant Vicar of Chacombe would have tolerated the use of incense in the parish church, but his cellar, where he performed his alchemical experiments, may have reeked of the stuff.

3

Chacombe Vicarage  
1st April 1889

Private

I brought Bronchitis home with me from London and have only had energy enough to get through what was absolutely required of me. As to Alchemical Books there are plenty of them, but all written with a view of concealing rather than revealing. There do exist MSS in which it is more plainly revealed, but by no means clear to those who have not some kind of an initiation. It is a tremendous study to enter upon, involving not only labour in reading first, but also the Chemical part requires a Laboratory, and a laborious and dangerous process to go through. From this labour I have always shrunk. It requires the whole man's undivided attention, and having a Profession, I cannot enter upon the practical part without interruption.

I do not recollect what books I mentioned to you. Were I quite at leisure and wishing to know more on this subject, I should

search out all there is in the Brit[ish] Mus[eum] in MS, but this would be a long task. The printed books which will help you most are Basil Valentine's "Last Will and Testament" and "Triumphing Chariot of Antimony". These are translated into English. Then there are two Commentators who have tried to enlighten his obscurity, who are Kerckringius and Johannes Fabre, but the latter is the best. Paracelsus has written much on it, and revealed much, but he has concealed as much as he has revealed. Cornelius Agrippa has been translated into English, for I have seen a copy which did belong to the poet Dryden. C[ornelius] A[grippa] writes of the whole of Occult Philosophy, and is of very little use for Alchemy in particular. You should read "The Golden Calf" of Helvetius in which he gives an account of the visit of Vieroont, the brass-founder, to him in 1666 and giving him a small portion of the powder of projection by which he did transmute Cad[?] into silver. This Vieroont was the Nephew of Elias the Artist, and must have learned of him, a fact not generally known. For the short process, Monte Snyder is one of the best teachers, but there are only 2 copies of him in Brit. Mus., and both are in German. Lamsprinck, also in German, teaches a great deal to those who have the clue. Flamel gives the usual symbolical teaching. Bernard Trevisan also teaches much, and rather more plainly. Eugenius Philalethes is very enigmatical. Alexis of Piedmont is more clear. You may read all these and yet fail to get a sufficient perception of what is meant. Even if you get a perception, then comes the great difficulty of the process, in the details of which you may err for ever. Labour and anxiety and disappointment and vexation are the general lot of those who enter this study. Of course, if a student can conquer entirely his lower nature, and develop his higher faculties, he is much more likely to get the full perception of the process. This again is a most difficult thing to enter upon, and all but impossible to those engaged in my business.

In the List of works sold by the T[heosophical] P[ublishing] S[ociety] are some on the Yoga Philosophy which will give you some idea of the process for gaining the higher spiritual powers. In the "Arya Magazine" there were advertisements of publications on it, such as "A Treatise of the Sublime Science -

the Yoga", reprinted from the Arya Magazine Nos. I & II. 3s. the two. There are also "Occult Science, the Science of Breath" and Sabhpty Swami on Vendatic Raj Yoga. These 2 together come to 3s. including postage.

The incense of Dhoop is	
Reserved class, per lb.	£2.os.od.
First class	12s.od.
Second class	8s.od.
Third class	4s.od.

These books and this Dhoop are all to be had of R. C. Bary, Esqre, Said Mithra Bazaar, Lahore, India. Send P.O. to him. There is a special form for Indian P.O.'s, by which they require you to give the name of father of native, tribe, &c., &c., &c., which no one ever can do. I just put "not a Native" and it has always acted. I forget whether I got the 12s. or the 8s. Dhoop. It takes many years to arrive at unmistakable lucidity by means of Yoga. There may be many hallucinations.

When in London I got ½ an hour in Brit. Mus. and looked in "Annual Register" for Dr. Price, and there it is sure enough. I almost think it was at p.96 for 1782. I also looked into "Gentleman's Magazine" and saw that Price had expended all his powder of projection in the experiments at Guildford, which favours my hypothesis that he was not a true Adept, but that *somehow* he became possessed of a small quantity.

Add to the above books "Sendwogin's New Light of Alchemy".

Many thanks for your kind offer of hospitality at Chiswick. I may be able to avail myself of it some time, but if I have business in London, as I had this last time, I am obliged to be nearer my base of operations. I also hesitate to inflict my Vegetarian habits on other people.

It is believed by many that Piazzi Smythe [*sic*]<sup>1</sup> made errors in his application of dimensions of Pyramid of Gizah &c.

Present my respectful remembrances to Mrs Gardner.

<sup>1</sup> Charles Piazzi Smyth was not an occultist but Professor of Practical Astronomy at the University of Edinburgh and Astronomer Royal for Scotland. His *Our Inheritance in the Great Pyramid* (1864), reached its fifth edition in 1890.

4

Chacombe Vicarage  
12 April 1889

I have just heard today that a chemist of Occult proclivities, a Theosophist, has just succeeded in making some incense, the formula for which was given him by H.P.B. He had not before been able to get the drugs, one of which was Verbena, which he had to get from Spain. I had given it up as he had not succeeded. I thought you might prefer not having to send so far. His name is:

Mr Thos. W. Wilson,<sup>1</sup> Chemist &c., York.

He is a most reliable man. He sent me a little and it is in powder. I cannot make it burn. It goes out directly, but I daresay he will be able to tell me how to do it. I inclose you a little just to try. In haste.

<sup>1</sup> T. W. Wilson, 'Sub Rosa' in the G.D., was at 63 Cross Street, Manchester, when he became a founder member of the Order's Horus Temple at Bradford in May 1888. He was also a member of the Soc. Ros.

5

Chacombe Vicarage  
16 April 1889

Thanks for Incense H.P.B. which I sent on to Bro. Wilson. I find it is exactly the same as his, only he powders his more, which makes it burn better. He is getting more of the Verbena from Spain. Wilson is going to get me a platinum cup for burning it in like what he has. Coal would be difficult for me to get at in the early morning. H.P.B. told him that any other metal would set free the elementals [Nature Spirits]. A spirit lamp is burned under it. One of our friends the Keightleys<sup>1</sup> has platinum and a spirit lamp for the purpose. In haste.

<sup>1</sup> There were two Keightleys, Bertram and Dr Archibald, both in their early thirties at the time this letter was written. Bertram was younger than Archibald but nevertheless the latter's uncle. They

joined H.P.B. during her early days in England. They were both deeply involved in Theosophical Society affairs and after H.P.B.'s death in 1891 the movement's politics. See Nethercott, op. cit., and for the politics, in particular, *The Theosophical Movement, 1875-1925: A History and a Survey* (New York, 1925). According to Nethercott the latter book was written by a committee of the United Lodge of Theosophists, which by 1925 had broken away from the parent society in the USA.

6

Chacombe Vicarage  
25 April 1889

I am glad you have obtained recipe, necessary ingredients and platinum retort [illustrated by a small diagram] except Verbena. This was the difficulty with Wilson, and as I knew he had been so long about it, I had given it up as hopeless, and so did not mention it to you. However, you will soon have them. Wilson gets them from Spain, where the plant grows in the hedge-rows. In England it can only be grown in a hot-house.

Thank you for your kind offer to help me in getting them. I had ordered Wilson to get me both the incense and the retort. He has sent me some of the former, and I hope soon to have the latter.

All the world and his wife will be going to Paris except ourselves. We are getting superannuated and do not care to stir. We wish you every possible enjoyment there and a safe return. We do not at this moment want anything from Paris, or we would have been glad to avail ourselves of your kind offer.

We are tolerably well, I am glad to say. Mrs Ayton joins me in kind regards.

7

Chacombe Vicarage  
[Undated]

Private

Again many thanks for your hospitable invitation. Later on, I

will contrive somehow to see you and have a long talk. I shall be very much occupied till after May, and then I will make some arrangement. I will tell you about the above symbol when I see you.

What I write about now is as to the symbols [for sulphur, earth and air]  $\triangleup$ ,  $\nabla$ ,  $\triangle$ . You will do best to get "A Dictionary of Chemistry" &c. by Dr Andrew Ure, 1823, in which there is a folding chart giving the Alchemical Symbols and their meaning. You will pick this up second hand for 1s., or 1s.6d. or 2s. There is a second-hand bookseller, Joseph Sakeld, 314 Clapham Road, SW., who would be very likely to have it. I believe he has removed to another No. in Clapham Road, but I have sent away his last catalogue, and it may be that 314 is where he has removed to.

There is also a folding chart of the same, but containing rather more in Basil Valentine's "Two Treatises" &c. to which the name Johannes Worlidge is signed. This is generally bound up with his "Last Will & Testament".

It seems to me that as you do not know these first principles, you would do well to belong to the so-called "Rosicrucian Society of England". In it all the first principles are taught in successive degrees. It is all from the Holy Qabalah. There is an examination for every degree, which is a very good discipline. They teach what the T[heosophical] S[ociety] never has done, and never will. You get all the Alchemical first principles, and they have most important MSS upon that great subject, the Taro. This would enable Mrs Gardner to exercise her powers of clairvoyance in a legitimate way without danger, for the Taro prevents the imagination from wandering.

A short time ago, an ukase was issued from the headquarters of the T.S., that members of the Esoteric Section should not belong to any other Occult Order. I at once wrote to say that I belonged to the Rosicrucian Society, but I was ordered to give it up, and I felt bound to do so at once without hesitation, and wrote to some of my Yorkshire chelas, who belonged to it and the T.S., to do the same. They were dismayed, and two of them went, as a Deputation, to H[elena] P[etrovna] B[lavatsky] to remonstrate against this decision. H.P.B. then began to see

she had made a mistake and she wrote to me for advice, which I gave, and the consequence was, she withdrew this ukase as regards this Rosicrucian Society. The result was that Dr Wynn Westcott, the head of this Rosicrucian Society, joined the Esoteric Section of the T.S. and with him some 20 others, and about 14 from Yorkshire. All is well that ends well!

There is now at Bradford a flourishing Lodge of this Rosicrucian Society and the Lodge is worked very well indeed by men who really know something. Dr Wynn Westcott is well known in Masonry, and MacGregor Mathers, the learned Qabbalist, is also in it. If you think of joining it, the address for all Members and others is:-

G. D. Secretary,  
c/o Sanitary Wood Wool Co,<sup>2</sup> 11 Hatton Garden, E.C.

Ladies are admitted. Mrs Ayton and I went through an examination this last time in London, Mrs A. passing without making one mistake. Upon request an MS is sent to you to copy, in which subject you have to be examined. Mrs A. learned the Hebrew letters so as to write them within the last year. We are well satisfied with it. Use my name if you do apply. This, if you do, will occupy you till I am less occupied, and then you will be better prepared for what I have to say.

H.P.B. is quite right as to Piazzi Smythe's [i.e., Smyth's] mistakes. He is, I think, not an Occultist, nor even a Freemason, and therefore he must fall into error [see footnote on p. 26 above]. As a Freemason, you would see the use of the Sarcophagus or Coffin, in which the Initiate would [symbolically] lay three days and 3 nights in darkness. I have ceased to trouble myself about Piazzi Smythe. No doubt a certain scale of measurement is used throughout, but it was mere assumption to make it the source of the British inch.

<sup>1</sup> Ayton's 'Yorkshire chelas' (i.e., pupils) were members of the Golden Dawn's Horus Temple at Bradford. By the end of 1888 it had about a dozen members, mainly recruited from the S.R.I.A., although there were a few women. The deputation to H.P.B. would have included T. H. Pattison, 8° *honoris causa* in the Soc. Ros. and Frater

Vota Vita Mea in the G.D. It is extraordinary that Ayton, who confidently informed Gardner that the G.D. taught 'what the T.S. has never done and never will', was nevertheless prepared to resign from the Golden Dawn at Madame Blavatsky's behest. He evidently supposed that she was an Adept of the highest class.

<sup>2</sup> Dr Westcott, who was a London coroner, had a financial interest in the Sanitary Wood Wool Company, suppliers of surgical dressings. At that time the G.D.'s inner circle met at its Hatton Garden premises.

8

Chacombe Vicarage  
29 May 1889

I could not answer your letter sooner, for I was turned out of my study for the Annual cleaning, and we had to betake ourselves to Leamington till it was over. We have not been to London, nor are we likely to be there just yet. Many thanks for your renewed invitation. As we cannot stir yet, we have been thinking how much better it would be if Mrs Gardner and yourself could run down here for a few days, so that we might have our talk at once. Mrs Ayton would be very pleased to see Mrs Gardner. Only it must not be till after Thursday in Whitsun week, as I have my Village Club Anniversary gathering on that day, and I have much to do to prepare for it. Banbury is just 84 miles from Paddington Gt. Western station, and it takes very little more than 2 hours. Chacombe is 3 miles from Banbury, and we would meet you there and drive you here.

I am glad you have obtained the dry Verbena leaves. Wilson of York sent me enough to last for some time. I have been using it every morning, and it is very nice, but for my own liking I must say, I prefer the Indian. Most likely this is more efficacious. Thanks all the same to you, but I shall not want any just yet.

I am glad you have escaped poisoning by the waters of the Seine, and the terrible dangers of the streets of Paris. These appear to be the worst part of it. We would not go on any account.

Thanks, we are as well as usual, and I very busy.

Perhaps, if you come, you will be able to tell us more of the

split between H.P.B. and M.B.,<sup>1</sup> and the defection of Harbottle, which grieved me exceedingly. In haste,

<sup>1</sup> I have not been able to identify M. B. T. Harbottle was President of the Blavatsky Lodge 1887-9. The latter was H.P.B.'s particular bailiwick. The older London Lodge was run by A. P. Sinnett.

9

Chacombe Vicarage  
3 June 1889

We are very glad you can come at that time – the 21st inst., which will suit us very well.

It now only remains for you to let us know the exact day and train by which you will arrive at Banbury. It occurs to us that it may be convenient for you to come by the late train. If so, we could not meet you so well with our dog-cart, (a 4-wheel), and perhaps you would not mind taking a Hansom Cab. Early in the day we could meet you easily. When it rains, we always let friends take a Cab as ours is only an outside conveyance. If you do take a Cab, ask at the station for Warren's, as we always go by him and he is very civil.

The next thing is – there is no occasion to bring more luggage than will go easily on a dog-cart, for, we do not dress, and have no society. Occultism makes us indifferent about all that.

Another thing – if you have gone as far as to become Vegetarians,<sup>1</sup> please let us know. We are quite used to friends of the carnivorous order, and provide for them accordingly. We shall very likely have one of these friends staying with us at that time. It makes no difference to us either way, if we know before-hand. I am myself strictly vegetarian.

Many thanks for your kind information about the split [i.e., between H.P.B. and Mabel Collins]. That is the only real knowledge we have had. The letters in *Religio-Phil.* I have seen,<sup>2</sup> and, from them, M.C. (i.e., Mabel Collins) most assuredly convicts herself, and in a very palpable way. We were very anxious to hear more.

Mrs Ayton joins me in kind regards to Mrs Gardner and yourself.

We are 3 miles from Banbury

<sup>1</sup> Vegetarianism – The Vegetarian Society was formed at Ramsgate in 1847. The Dietetic Reform Society was founded in London in 1875. Members abstained from alcohol and tobacco as well as meat.

<sup>2</sup> i.e., *The Religio-Philosophical Journal*, a spiritualist periodical published at Chicago. 'The letters' referred to the correspondence between Dr Elliott Coues and Mabel Collins. Coues was a prominent American Theosophist who was currently intriguing against William Q. Judge, the head of the American Section of the Theosophical Society. Mabel Collins had recently been ejected from the Blavatsky Lodge (see p. 32 above). The Coues-Collins letters and other communications published in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* made grave charges against H.P.B., e.g., that the so-called Mahatma Letters were faked. The publication of the Coues-Collins correspondence began in the issue of 11 May 1889 and continued in June. The fact that Ayton knew about the letters very early in June 1889 indicates (a) that rank and file members of the T.S. were greatly interested in what was afoot behind the scenes and (b) puzzled by the sudden disappearance of Mabel Collins. Gardner would have made it his business to pick up all the latest gossip.

10

Chacombe Vicarage  
18 June 1889

We shall be very glad to see you on Friday next the 21st inst. Will you kindly excuse me coming to meet you at Banbury at 6? We are just cutting grass for hay-making, and it might be a critical moment with us. My absence might be awkward, as things do not go on well in my absence, and taking the men off to get the horse ready might just make a failure. We will speak to Warren to have a Cab, and to be looking out for you at Great Western [railway station] at 6. You should be here about 6.30, but to make an allowance for possible delays, we will have dinner ready at 7. You do not say whether you are Vegetarians. We shall



assume therefore that you are not. We have another guest who is not Vegetarian, so it makes no difference.

It is quite convenient to us on Friday. After that time, we may be going out to pay visits ourselves.

Thanks – we are as well as usual.

11

Chacombe Vicarage  
28 June 1889

We are glad you reached home safely and have at once got rid of the Incubus. It is always best to be very prompt in such matters as we know from experience. We hope the new one will turn out well.

Your visit was all too short for what we had to talk about, but will do for the preamble, and we must go on to the 1st Chapter on a future occasion. You are an apt Chela and I shall be very glad to put all I can before you.

Schüssler, I believe, will do you good service. I have tried about every system of medicine, but have been more successful with Schüssler than with any.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, I think that more might be added to the number and certainly the American medicines are a very good help in conjunction with them. Mrs Gardner must avoid anything like mediumship for the present. It takes too much out of one.

Quantity is a sine qua non in making the quintessence of Balm, and I fear you must defer it till another year. Household slops continually put on a certain area of soil, and then dug well up, trenched and exposed to frost in winter, make a very good compost. Further digging up so as to mix it well will be necessary. You could get Balm in Covent Garden market I suppose, but it would not have been gathered in the Planetary hour. You must not overdo it with any manure. There is plenty of artificial manure in the market from which you might select. Even a little guano well mixed will do.

I think that as letters have originally been taken from the symbols of the Planets, there may be some kind of antagonism in them. This is taught by Mathers in our lectures of the

Rosicrucian Society.<sup>2</sup> I am not aware of any special book on it, i.e. in a direct way of teaching. I have another Religio: Phil: J., in which is another most disgusting article by the Editor against H.P.B., glorying in the members of the Esot[eric] Sec[ti]on<sup>3</sup> being at loggerheads, which looks very much like being the work of the B.B. [Black Brethren; Jesuits], for one of their maxims is to cause dissensions amongst those they consider their enemies, and to profit by it. H.P.B.'s Indian allies know beforehand what will happen, but there are special reasons for their not interfering with the law of Karma. I hear Col[onel] Olcott<sup>4</sup> is to be in Paris again soon, so, I suppose he will be in England and most likely he will have instructions what to do. I should not myself give up the Esot: Sec.

Thanks for your kind invitation. On Monday 15th July we go to Brighton for inside of a week, and on Monday 22nd July we go to visit friends near Cheltenham for some time. After that we have visitors here, and then we probably must visit Mrs A's brother in Suffolk. Our time is about disposed of, but we shall see further on. Mrs Ayton joins me in kind regards.

Got all hay up yesterday!

<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Heinrich Schüssler was a German author of books on homoeopathy. Ayton may have read C. Hering, *The Twelve Tissue Remedies of Dr Schüssler* (1874). Occultists were particularly identified with homoeopathic remedies at that time. During the 1890s the membership of the Golden Dawn included at least half a dozen qualified physicians who were homoeopaths. The Schüssler remedies are still available. See Dr G. W. Carey and I. E. Perry, *The Zodiac and the Salts of Salvation* (an American publication, 2nd revised edition 1948: the 'salts' were Schüssler's) and *The Biochemic Handbook*, revised by Colin B. Lessell (Thorsons Publishers Ltd, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> The 'Rosicrucian Society' was the Golden Dawn and not the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia. Ayton was not a member of the latter.

<sup>3</sup> The Esoteric Section was an Inner Group, almost a cult, within the Theosophical Society. It had already created a great deal of dissension and was to cause more. W. B. Yeats joined it in October 1889. He resigned in c. August 1890, having already become a member of the Golden Dawn on 7 March 1890.

4. Colonel Henry S. Olcott was a founder member of the Theosophical Society (with H.P.B. and William Q. Judge) in New York City in 1875.

'I SHOULD BE very doubtful about Mrs B. but will suspend judgment till I see her,' Ayton wrote on 25 July 1889. Mrs B. was none other than Annie Besant (1847-1933), the Theosophical Society's latest and almost unbelievably spectacular recruit. Arthur H. Nethercott described her road to the T.S. in the first chapter of his masterly *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant* (1961):

In 1885, before she was forty, Mrs Annie Besant was known all over the English-speaking world, and by many people on the Continent, as one of the most remarkable women of her day. She was a freethinker; a consorter with materialists like Charles Bradlaugh; an agitator in Radical political circles, again like Bradlaugh; a feminist; an early convert to Fabian Socialism, through the agency of Bernard Shaw; a teacher of science; an author-editor-publisher; the first prominent woman to fight openly for what is now called birth control; a social and educational reformer; and an orator whose power was so compelling and whose charm was so potent that Shaw was only one among thousands who extolled her as the greatest woman speaker of the century.

Shortly after 1885 she was to become still more notorious as a strike leader and union organiser – anathema to the conventional and conservative in both church and state. But by 1893 she had cut completely loose from her rebellious and sensational past and had embarked upon her even more rebellious and sensational future. She was to become the successor to the fantastic Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and the international president of the stormy and mystical Theosophical Society. Later, in India, she would be a conspicuous and idolised religious, educational, and political leader; one-time president of the Indian National Congress; and an admired older friend and example to Mohanadas Gandhi; whose eventual break with her over the best methods of achieving Indian independence led to his fame and martyrdom and her eclipse.

Mrs Besant's membership of the T.S. – she joined in June 1889 – created a sensation in Theosophical circles and was reported in the daily press.

12

At Henry Lay Esqre  
Staverton Court by Cheltenham  
25 July 1889

This is the only paper I can lay my hands on here, and I am only able to write to you now because it rains and we cannot drive out to a Garden party, as we intended.

I am glad that you have got some of Ragon's works, 'specially Maçonnerie Occulte, tho' Redway<sup>2</sup> has, as usual, made you pay quite enough for them. Alas! unfortunate Walter Moseley!<sup>1</sup>

It is not exactly true that *all* of Eliphas Lévi is from the Cabala. It is true that a great part of it is, but he has borrowed from all sorts of sources, as you will see. No treatise on Magic would be complete without a reference Black Magic. I got my Langlet du Fresnoy for less than that, and I think you may if you look out. I will tell you immediately if I see a copy anywhere.

I had a letter from the Countess [Wachtmeister]<sup>4</sup> telling me of movements of H.P.B. and herself. I should be very doubtful about Mrs B[esant], but will suspend judgement till I see her.

You are not the only Occultist impeded by the cares of business. I do not know one that is not. It is very right to look ahead to avoid coming evils, but it is also very good not to anticipate too much, and to meet difficulties when they come, especially when the future difficulties are beyond the ordinary power of man to foresee. No doubt the latter end of this century, as of the last, is a culminating point in human destiny. The T.S. itself is an outcome of this crisis, and the 2 things are intimately bound up together. After all, we had not half time enough to talk over things.

It is not impossible that Cowes may be mixed up with D'Alton but I do not think he is, so far as I have seen. It appears to me like a B.B. scheme, but I have not yet had sufficient evidence to decide.

Mrs Ayton and I are tolerably well. We were at Brighton last week and the bathing did me great good, so much so, that we are going there again next Monday to stay till the following Saturday week including Sunday. I do not yet know our exact address, but, if necessary a letter to 22 Goldstone Villas, West Brighton, would find us. We go home tomorrow. When we think of coming to London is for the week including the Equinox, 21st September, to attend the Society I told you of, but it would be so inconvenient to get back to Chiswick if our meeting is late at night, that I think we must just run up on purpose for that to our accustomed Hotel, and come to you before or after that time. I will write about that further on. We should like for H.P.B. and the Countess [Wachtmeister] to be at 17 [Lansdowne Road] when we come to visit you, that we might go there together.

We have visitors coming as soon as we return home from Brighton, and we should not be free till September.

You do not say whether Mrs Gardner's health is better yet. Mrs Ayton joins with me in kind regards to her and yourself.

Supposing, by chance, that Schüssler's medicines fail you, there is the immense power of Electricity to try. My friend here caught frightful rheumatism by being put into a damp bed when he was on a shooting expedition, and he was desperately ill and suffering. I recommended him to try Electricity. He bought Arnold & Sons apparatus for £10. It has quite cured him and he is as well as ever.

1 i.e., J.-M. Ragon (1781-1862), a prolific writer on French Freemasonry and rituals. His *Maçonnerie occulte* was published in 1853.

2 George Redway was a small London publisher who specialized in occult books and also sold them second-hand. He published A. E. Waite's digest of Eliphas Lévi's works, based upon *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie*, in 1886 and his *The Real History of the Rosicrucians* in 1887. The latter caused much annoyance among the adepts of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia. In 1897 he published S. L. MacGregor Mathers' *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, having bought the copyright for £35. (The eleventh impression appeared under the Routledge & Kegan Paul imprint in 1970!). For Redway's unsatisfactory dealings with Mathers (and indirectly with F. L. Gardner) in connection with the

former's *The Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin the Mage* (1898), see my *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn* (1972). Redway's business failed c. 1900.

3 Ayton was referring to the recent death of Walter Moseley, of Buildwas Hall, Shrewsbury. According to A. E. Waite (*The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross*, 1924, p. 569), his 'health had been seriously damaged by the use of drugs for occult purposes'. George Redway acquired his books on 'Occult Philosophy' and similar subjects, including a number of Hockley manuscripts. A copy of Redway's catalogue is in the library of the United Grand Lodge of England.

4 Countess Wachtmeister was one of the many titled early converts to Theosophy. She joined the T.S. in 1881 and became a close friend and associate of Madame Blavatsky. The 'nobility' included the Baroness de Pallandt who joined the Golden Dawn early in 1891 and resigned in April 1893. A note in a complete list of G.D. members 1887-97 described her as 'no good'.

13

Chacombe Vicarage  
29 August 1889

You asked me I think to tell you of any of Behmen's [Jakob Boehme's] works, wherefore I send you by this post a Cat: [catalogue] containing one at p.2, which I received this morning.

Also, it has just been intimated to me that the Churchwardens contemplate cleaning the Church, which will necessitate the closing it for one Sunday at least. I might probably be at liberty to leave home on Monday 9th September. This induces me to ask if you could equally conveniently receive me on or about that day. I am only asking you provisionally, as the plans are not quite matured. Mrs Ayton would not be able to accompany me, as on the 9th September, her Sister who has been staying in the North, will come here on her way home and stay a few days. Mrs Ayton would then accompany her to London and join me at rooms perhaps, or, at any rate, we should stay in London till the G[olden] D[awn] is over, and then, if I get a second Sunday, as is probable, she and I would go to her brother in Suffolk to stay for a few days.

Perhaps the great Strike will make it inconvenient to you to

receive a Visitor, tho' it appears likely it will terminate soon.

THE LETTER to Gardner printed next is undated but is probably in its more or less chronological position. The 'so-called Rosicrucian Society of England' was not the Masonic association which adopted that name when it was founded in 1866. It became the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia in 1885 when Dr William Wynn Westcott was appointed its Secretary General. Westcott succeeded Dr W. R. Woodford as the S.R.I.A.'s Supreme Magus when the latter died in 1891. When Ayton advised Gardner to join the Rosicrucian Society of England he was, in fact, referring to the G. D. Gardner, however, did not join it until 1894.

14

Chacombe Vicarage  
31 August 1889

Thanks for your letter received this morning. I happened to have preserved the *Freethinker*,<sup>1</sup> as I thought it important. Where it came from was a puzzle to me. I am much obliged to you for letting me know what is going on. I was very doubtful about Mrs Besant, and afraid she was to be another betrayer, but after reading her very able speech, I think much better of her. In fact she has stated the case of the T[heosophical] S[ociety] with the greatest perspicacity and truthfulness. I return it to you by this post, together with another small affair, which you need not return.

These few extraordinary warm days have made a great change in the views of our farmers, and this morning there was a special Meeting, and it was resolved that the Church cleaning &c. must begin this very next Monday, and that they must have the Harvest Thanksgiving Service on Sunday 22nd September for special reasons. Consequently that the Church must be closed on Sundays 8th and 15th, and that if I wanted my Holiday, that I must go next week. Therefore, if convenient to you, I should like to come to you next Thursday the 15th September, and if not

too long for you, I would stay over Sunday, as on that day you would be more at liberty for a long talk. Mrs Ayton will not be able to come with me, as her great friend, the Sister of Major Waterhouse, is staying at the Priory and they are seeing one another every day. Moreover, her Sister may come sooner, as she will be alone. If this happens to be inconvenient to you, I will go somewhere else for the time so as to be absent from here on the Sunday. If it be inconvenient to you, I shall be much obliged to you to give me instructions for changing at Paddington. I could come either by the early train which arrived at Paddington at 10.30 a.m., or by that which arrives at 1.50 p.m. or by that which arrives at 3.30 p.m. I should naturally come by the earliest, but that does not stop at Westbourne Park. Being a Thursday, we could go in the evening to No. 17 [Lansdowne Road]. If I come by the earliest, I should probably just deposit my portmanteau at No. 37 and then start for London again, and find you up and return with you, if I know where to find you.

I am driven in a corner by this sudden change in the weather and write in haste.

<sup>1</sup> *The Freethinker*, founded in 1881 by G. W. Foote, was a small ribald weekly which featured articles with titles such as 'Cracked for Christ' and 'On the Advantages of Going to Hell'. Ayton had no doubt read an article attacking (or mocking) Annie Besant's very recent conversion to the Theosophical cause.

15

Chacombe Vicarage  
10 September 1889

You would receive my Post Card this morning announcing arrival. I had no difficulty at all in doing it, all according to your instructions. The letter you posted to Mrs Ayton she received by *first* post on Saturday morning.

I put the flint arrow head thro' its facings with Mrs Ayton this morning, and on the other side, you have the result. I was in hopes she would have gone back to its manufacture, but she seems to have got upon the trace of the more civilised period, which obstructed the earlier view. I wrote it down just as she

uttered it [see below] in placing it successively to her forehead, 4 or 5 times. At last, she saw nothing shewing, I suppose, that the organ [i.e. her forehead] was tired. If she is to see at all, she sees it the moment she places it to her forehead.

It is very well that I came home, for, mischief would have accrued by my absence. I felt sure of that from Mrs Ayton's letters. We start again on Saturday. Mrs Ayton's Sister who was to have come to-day was stopped by not being very well and obliged to call in the Doctor. She talks of coming on Thursday, but I think she will not come at all now.

Mrs Ayton joins me in kind regards to Mrs Gardner and yourself, and many thanks for all your hospitality. I have been interrupted by callers since I began this and finish in haste.

[AYTON'S RECORD OF HIS WIFE'S 'VISION']

Broad iron gateway with high pillars and such lovely sunshine – apparently entrance to a Park.

Beautiful garden in front of a side-entrance to the House – broad gravel walks – irregular – large stone urn – looks a little like a fountain, not in play. Very quiet and isolated.

Supposing the first facing W., then N. of that, at right angles, a collonade of great length, with an urn or cupola in the front centre of the roof.

Small Summer House, which cannot connect with the other buildings and a dark straight path, leading from it about 5 ft. wide.

In front of that Summer House a small oblong table, rather massive in structure, and 3 quiet people sitting at it, all facing this dark path. All sit facing the same way at the 2 ends and back of the table. The one at back of table has his back to the entrance of the Summer-house, all without beards, and close caps on their heads, not very unlike Popish Priests.

16

Chacombe Vicarage  
4 November 1889

Private

Your letter received by second post, and I have only just time to answer, but I wish to lose no time. So far as I can make out, you are acting more from feeling than from judgment, and I would counsel you to be very prudent and not involve or make yourself liable in any way. I quite agree with you that H.P.B. is a most disinterested person, self-sacrificing &c., &c., but she never pretended to be business-like and great errors have been committed and I fear there will be more. I would myself give all the personal help I could, but I would not run any risk by making myself responsible for anything. I have no doubts about Mahatmas, and her wonderful knowledge, but the business part is quite another thing.<sup>1</sup> I do advise you to be very careful. We are quite ready to help to the best of our ability, but we do not incur any responsibility. Occultism is not a paying concern and never will be.

Hainau<sup>2</sup> is a Jewish Rabbi and hard up, and he has asked me to subscribe for his work. We took 3 copies, and as we thought you would appreciate it more than any one, we sent you a copy.

<sup>1</sup> *Lucifer*, Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical periodical, was in financial difficulties.

<sup>2</sup> I have not been able to identify either Rabbi Hainau or his publication.

17

Chacombe Vicarage  
26 November 1889

I am very glad you see this matter in the light I do. From the very first, no worldly wisdom, nor prudence have been shewn. We might ruin ourselves and become Paupers by making ourselves responsible, and then the T[hosophical] P[ublishing] S[ociety] would still be in just the same difficulties. I always saw that *Lucifer*, conducted as it was, and at such a price, was

fore-doomed to, at least, comparative failure. Had my opinion been asked beforehand, I should have said "Don't".

Somewhere about 30 years ago Eliphas Lévi in one of his works said, that Occultism could not be a worldly success, unless some Millionaire took it up. The T.S. has not arrived at that yet, nor do I think that E.L. has contemplated such a case as the T.S. My own opinion is that it is destined to survive, at least during the life-time of the Founders. Beyond that, I cannot see. It has survived a much worse crisis than the present, when it was placed under Dr A. K. [i.e. Archibald Keightley]. The whole of that was by trusting people who ought, by rights, not even to be admitted as Freemasons. Notwithstanding all these blunders, I now perceive that the very blunders committed by the Agents of the Mahatmas tend to carry out their intentions by bringing it before the Public. The T.S. is now most grossly assailed and slandered by all the Spiritist Journals here, and in America, with, in all probability, (unknown to themselves) the B.B. [Black Brethren; Jesuits] in the back-ground. This will probably end in clearing off all the unstable and useless Members, and forming a much stronger and effective, tho' smaller body. Had I only just the means of living quietly, in addition to £100,000, I would give the latter to help the T.S. As it is, I have only enough to live quietly. We give to it what we can afford, but nothing will induce us to risk any responsibility, for the mismanagement past, and which is sure to recur in the future. I have seen enough of all such affairs in my time, to get a tolerably accurate perception of the whole position, present and future. The appeal from India is most ill-judged and ill-timed. Harte is a very pleasant fellow and very zealous. Altho' he never uses Col. O[lcott]'s name, I doubt very much whether he would have approved of this appeal.<sup>1</sup>

My idea of the position is, that some tremendous crisis is at hand, which is foreseen by the Mahatmas, and which will probably necessitate their interference in a more open way, even as the Count St German [i.e. Saint-Germain] interfered in the first French Revolution. The T.S. by making known the "Secret Doctrine" &c. generally, altho' the minds of men are now far too much taken up with worldly gain, and worldly pleasures, will, in this great crisis, and the terrible sufferings and distress

attendant upon it, then turn to the Mahatmas and their pure Doctrines, instead of the spurious Xtianity which the B.B. [Jesuits] have foisted upon us, and *part* of which still adheres (without their being aware of it) even to the most Ultra-Protestant bodies. The T.S., as I take it, is only laying a foundation for future action when the fulness of time has come. There is a great deal of wisdom in biding your time, with patience and equanimity. Even supposing the T.S. to break up altogether, we can, as you say, still carry on its intentions by Conventions amongst ourselves, and this I should be most ready to do.

I am glad you like [Rabbi] Hainau. If you can make his book known, it might help him. It has, so far, brought him in a small sum, which relieves his present necessities.

Mrs Ayton joins me in kind regards to Mrs Gardner and yourself.

<sup>1</sup> Richard Harte, a New York journalist, was a friend of Colonel Olcott and had been a member of the Theosophical Society since 1878. He was involved in T.S. politics. See *The Theosophical Movement 1875-1925: A History and a Survey* (New York City, 1925), pp.233 ff.

18

Chacombe Vicarage  
21 December 1889

Please excuse me when I cannot answer your kind letters. Since receiving yours I have been harrassed, just when I was busy with philosophy, by perpetual petty interruptions, incidental to my position here. I am so much obliged to you for letting me know what is going on. It is well that *Lucifer* is to be supported. It looks as if the fates were propitious.

I have seen nothing about the Newcastle affair. I am too busy now and shall be for some months. Sinnett, of course, would take the first opportunity of shewing his spite to the Blavatsky Lodge.<sup>1</sup>

I have heard of Col. Olcott at Bradford and neighbourhood lecturing and giving great satisfaction there.

It is the more consolatory getting this help from America, as all the Spiritist Papers there as well as here, are abusing H.P.B., and the T.S.

I quite agree with you that India ought to help herself and not come upon England.

We are both as well as usual and as well as can be expected in this damp valley.

Mrs Ayton joins me in kind regards to Mrs Gardner and yourself, and we wish you a merry Xmas and a Happy New year, and success in business and Occultism too. In haste.

<sup>1</sup> A. P. Sinnett, editor of the Allahabad *Pioneer* and already a Spiritualist, met Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott soon after they landed in Bombay in 1879. His new Theosophical preoccupations led to his dismissal from his editorial employment and he returned to London to write about his communications with the Mahatmas in *The Occult World* (1881) and *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883). The British Theosophical Society now changed its name to the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society with Sinnett as its President. When Madame Blavatsky finally settled in London in 1887 she founded the Blavatsky Lodge, with the Esoteric Section as a cult within a cult. The London Lodge had no E.S. Madame Blavatsky found it convenient to ignore Sinnett, hence the 'spite' mentioned by Ayton.

19

Chacombe Vicarage  
28 January 1890

Glad to hear from you. Xmas brings all sorts of petty interruptions incidental to my position here, and I have been very busy.

It is satisfactory to hear that T.S. matters are going on well, tho' H.P.B.'s health breaking down is a grief.

We are glad to find you are put into offices to which we feel sure you will do justice and aid success.

The Brit: Mus: is a delightful place to me, and I am glad you are taking to it. I began there, I fear to say how many years ago, reading Corn[elius] Agrippa and "The [illegible] Palace of the King".

It would be rather awkward publishing only a *part* of "Lives of Alchemical Philosophers". It seems to me it should be the whole. [A. E.] Waite has forestalled us in publishing only part, and this makes it difficult to publish his leavings. Of course, he is only a hack writer, and does it for a living, and is obliged to do what suits Redway.<sup>1</sup> Such a number of Occult books have gone to America, that we ought to reprint them. Years ago, one bookseller told me he had sent £70 worth in one week to America. Higgins' Anacalypsis is an important work. Burns began a re-publication some years ago, and I have a few Nos. of it, but he could not carry it on.<sup>2</sup> The same remark applies as to former. I think it should be all, unless you could get a No. of copies of part I published in America, and add to this republication of part II.

Years ago I thought myself of translating E. L[évi]'s works and publishing, but, I reflected there would not be enough buyers to make it pay. Now, it might be different and especially under the auspices of the T[heosophical] S[ociety]. People would buy the whole thing sooner than Waite's abridgement.<sup>3</sup> You would have to get a pliable translator. Mathers could do it, but he too is bound hand and foot to Redway.

Another book of great importance should also be translated "Histoire de la Magie à travers les ages &c par P. Christian" [1870]. It is out of print but it is *possible* to get it in Paris. This is a most interesting and important work.

If I see any likely books in any catalogue, I will immediately send it on to you, but I think the best way will be to send a letter to the most likely asking them to send Cats. to you. They will be very glad to do so, and you will get it sooner which is our [?] object. It is very rarely that one sees an occult book in Cat: nowadays, and if there be, it is snapped [up] directly. They are all in America.

I should like to see your new Tarot<sup>4</sup> but I am too busy in another direction to attend to it now.

We are both tolerably well – thanks – and are glad you are.

<sup>1</sup> i.e., *Lives of the Alchemystical Philosophers, based upon material collected in 1815 and supplemented by recent Researches, &c.* (Redway,

1898). According to R. A. Gilbert, *A. E. Waite: A Bibliography* (1983): 'The original edition of the *Lives* was published anonymously in 1815 and its author remains unknown' (p. 88). He continued: 'Waite claims in his preface that his edition is "practically a new work under an old title", but although he revised many of the "Lives" and added a life of Cagliostro, the bibliography remained inaccurate and unsatisfactory, while he omitted altogether the most valuable part of the original text, "A Selection of the most celebrated Treatises on the Theory and Practice of the Hermetic Art".'

2 Godfrey Higgins (1773–1835), *Anacalypsis, an Attempt to draw aside the Veil of the Saltic Isis; or, an Inquiry into the Origins of Languages, Nations, and Religions, &c.* (2 vols., 1836). Ayton probably possessed some fascicles from the 1878 Glasgow reprint. Higgins also wrote *The Celtic Druids* (1829), a book which reflected his preoccupation with phallic worship. He built a house for pauper lunatics at Wakefield.

3 *The Mysteries of Magic: A Digest of the Writings of Eliphas Lévi with a biographical and critical essay by A. E. Waite* (Redway, 1886). This anthology was largely based upon Lévi's *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* (1856; revised edition 1861). Waite discussed the project with A. P. Sinnett, who introduced him to Redway.

4 Robert Fryar, a bookseller at Bath who published limited editions of books on occultism, was importing Tarot cards from France during the 1880s. It is possible that Gardner had acquired a pack from this source.

20

Chacombe Vicarage  
10 March 1890

Your letter by second post. I was going to write to you to say I shall be in London next week, being the Equinox, when the Members of the G[olden] D[awn] always meet. I am so busy preparing for leaving home, and am so harrassed by abominable business matters that I cannot properly answer your letter in full, and it is a subject on which I would rather speak than write. Our Hotel is not a propitious place for talking on Occult subjects, nor can we talk in Brit. Mus. I have just become a member of "Junior Conservative Club" 43 & 44 Albemarle Street, but as I

have not seen it yet, I do not know what conveniences there are for receiving a Visitor. I shall probably see it on Monday afternoon and then I will write. We shall be at Anderson's Hotel, 5 Harpur Street, Theobald's Road, W.C.

You certainly have arrived at some idea of the Great Work [i.e., Alchemy], but I had arrived at as much 30 perhaps 40 years ago, and yet I have not accomplished it, partly certainly, because I have not tried. When you come to the astral practice, then your difficulties begin. I will explain to you as to books and MSS, when I see you. As to the gift of God &c., that does not mean exactly what it says, any more than it does as to the very long time it takes to make the Stone of the Philosophers.

Mrs Ayton has not been at all well – congestion of the brain – but is nearly herself again, and will accompany me to London, but will not go about much. She joins me in kind regards to Mrs Gardner and yourself.

I do not know whether the time of the G.D. will not clash with the Thursday seance at No. 17 [Lansdowne Road]. We would go there if we could.

21

Chacombe Vicarage  
12 March 1890

We are so much obliged by your kind invitation to your hospitable house. Already, we have declined going to a friend's house, because Mrs Ayton has business in the neighbourhood of our Hotel, and it would upset her to be coming in by train every morning. She will move about as little as possible whilst we are there on account of her health. Please, therefore, excuse us not accepting your kind invitation, which otherwise we should have been very glad to do.

One of the books you should read at Brit. Mus., or possess if you could, is "Sir Kenelm Digby's Chemical Secrets". I am sorry to say I do not possess it. Such books are very difficult to get hold of now. Also, anything of the 3 Nortons, 3 generations of them, especially the last, Samuel Norton, who lived at Bristol, and Sir K.D. went to visit him there to learn of him. There was



also a Dr Edmund Dean of York, who wrote and commented on S. Norton. I think that is in Latin. I enclose you a ticket of one of S. Norton's which I do not want again. Kind regards. In haste.

22

Chacombe Vicarage  
27 March 1890

We are so sorry we could not see more of you whilst in London. We returned from Yorkshire last evening and Mrs Ayton is decidedly the better for the change, in fact as nearly as possible, herself again.

I meant to mention a book to you, but had not the opportunity. It is

	The Revd. — South	
1142.1.8	Hermetic Mystery. A Suggestive Inquiry into	London   1850   8°

I gave you the [British Museum] press mark &c., that you may get it at once. This was suppressed very soon after it came out and it is impossible now to get a copy. You will find much in it, and it will be as well to make a note of the several works referred to by him.<sup>1</sup>

There are 2 new works out, which might be of use to Alchemists. "Watts Dictionary of Chemistry", 2 guineas a vol. Thorpe's Dictionary of applied Chemistry 4 vols at 2 guineas each. "Hecksthorne's Secret Societies", 2 vols.

This last may be picked up occasionally.

I cannot say the travelling about suited me, but I have not very much to complain of.

<sup>1</sup> *A Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery with a Dissertation on the More Celebrated of the Alchemical Philosophers*, was published anonymously in 1850. It was not by Thomas South but by his daughter Mary Anne (later Atwood). In his *Hermetica* catalogue No. 25 (Summer 1981) Mr R. A. Gilbert described it as an attempt to 'explain alchemy as a science of the soul by which the adept sought Divine Union by way of Illumination gained in an exalted form of

Mesmeric trance'. South *père*, however, 'decided that the world was not ready for this great revelation . . . and suppressed his daughter's book when less than 100 copies had been distributed. The withdrawn copies were burnt and the authoress spent much time and money obtaining as many of the issued copies as she could, destroying most of these also.' The book was reissued in 1918 with the sanction of Isabelle de Steiger (formerly a member of the Horus and Amen-Ra Temples of the Golden Dawn at Bradford and Edinburgh) who had inherited both Mrs Atwood's papers and, according to Mr Gilbert, her prophetic mantle. 'Such a sanction', Mr Gilbert added, 'accords well with the complete lack of recognition given to the *Suggestive Inquiry* by more scholarly students of its subject matter.'

Isabelle de Steiger (1836–1927) was acquainted with many of the leading personalities in contemporary esoteric circles. Apart from Mrs Atwood she was particularly close to Dr Anna Bonus Kingsford (who requires a biographical study). Her relationship with Madame Blavatsky and Annie Besant was less cordial. Towards the end of her long life she was an enthusiastic admirer of Rudolf Steiner. See her rambling posthumous *Memorabilia* (1927), to which A. E. Waite contributed a preface.

23

Chacombe Vicarage  
10 April 1890

I meant fully to have answered your letter yesterday, but it seems as if a whole regiment of daemon obstructions were let loose to hinder me not only in my own particular endeavours, but also in everything else. We find the inside of a week in London all too short for what we want to do, and were obliged to forego seeing several friends. Mrs Ayton is very nearly herself again, but not quite. We both walked into Banbury this morning, and drove back, so there cannot be much wrong.

"Suggestive Inquiry" was really written by South, but I think a Lady had something to do with bringing it out and suppressing it, tho' here my memory fails me. I do not think it was suppressed on account of giving processes too clearly, but because it makes the truth of the whole things so very clear. You will do well to read it.

I think I have the "Hermetic Triumph" somewhere, but cannot lay my hands on it just now. Certainly I have read it some time. "The ancient wars of the Knights" I have in MS. It contains the secret, but put so obscurely that only Initiates can understand it.

I think it very doubtful about re-printing the "Hermetic Triumph" as a commercial success. There are many would-be seekers of the L[apis] P[hilosophorum], but the books are so numerous that the chances are too great against any one book selling well enough. I, from my stand-point, should deprecate the publication of Alchemical works by the T[heosophical] S[ociety]. It would lead many into nothing but misfortune and misery and wasted lives. Before I give a final decision on this point I would like to look into the book again.

You ask me about a process you have read lately &c. It is not usual to put anything clearly on paper, and I am constrained to keep to the old Rule. I have lately had a strange reminder in a mysterious way, that I am treading very close upon the regions of the Gnomes, and that if I reveal too much, there exists a power which can inflict sudden death. As I have only sought the Elixir of Life, this is the more strange, but it behoves me to be careful. I can say this much that you are certainly in the right road, but so I have been for this 50 years. I got no further because I was not physically prepared personally for it. All who have written upon it have derived their knowledge directly or indirectly from Basil Valentine. His works are all purposely enigmatical, and only intended to bring likely candidates to see the utter impossibility of understanding them without a Guru. Then they apply to the Authors, who, if they find them likely to advance, and possessed of the gift of Silence, initiate them, thereby securing their secrecy by the most tremendous penalties. All these Pre-Reformation writers were Monks. The Monasteries, under pretence of being Xtian Societies, were in reality Schools of Magic, and latterly almost entirely of Alchemy, at least, the greater part of them. The Post-Reformation writers copied them often without understanding them, with variations, to make the ignorant believe they were their own. These have not enlightened us much more, if any. One or two have revealed

rather too much, but their writings were soon suppressed or bought up, and are not to be had. If you were to try to put it into practise from what you know, you would find failure after failure in the details. There is the initial difficulty as to the furnaces. If you look into this part of the subject, you will see how difficult it is. All the old writers tell you "The regimen of the fire is the most important part." From my experience, I believe that without a personal preparation, it is in vain to attempt it. A friend of mine who is upon this line, was making experiments in a room next to that in which were his wife and children, and it did not succeed. He is also in communication with intelligences in or out of the flesh, and gets most extraordinary knowledge given him. One of these intelligences told him that the reason he did not succeed was because of the too great contiguity of his family. There are conditions necessary of which the generality of seekers have no idea. If I felt sure you were in right earnest in seeking the necessary personal conditions, I should be very glad to give you the benefit of my experience and practice, but I *dare* not do it in writing, nor except under the most inviolable secrecy [sic]. The difficulties in the practice are immense and inconceivable except to those who have made attempts at it.

24

Chacombe Vicarage  
12 April 1890

Just a line to congratulate you on your acquisition of books. It is always a good sign when an aspirant attracts to himself books on the one important subject.

Langlet Dufresnoy is most useful, one to whom I am always referring. If I see a book in a Catalogue, I refer to Dufresnoy and mostly can see whether it is worth while getting. Pernety is not mentioned by Dufresnoy, I think, but he is by Ragon, and is invaluable. Naudé is well worth reading. I do not possess these last 2, but have read Naudé. Macerus is mentioned by Dufresnoy, more than two dozen [times?], among which is the Viatorium, which you have. I have 3 of his not mentioned by Dufresnoy, one on Basil Valentine, one of Thos. Norton, and

one on Abbot Cremer, but I have not the Viatorium. All his are valuable. I have also Alexis Piedmontese, who gives some important processes, from which much may be learned. My "War of the Knights" is not that published in "Hermetical Triumphs". Dives sicut ardens S. is, if [I] recollect rightly, Saunier, not mentioned by Dufresnoy. The third stage as you have been informed, constitutes the difficulty, and in order to get over this, I have an idea you must first discover the Elixir vitae and restore your health, to enable you to pull thro', but this part is necessarily very obscure. I should like to put all these things to the test. I am so frightfully busy just now, I do not know how to arrange for seeing you.

We are sorry to hear of Mrs Gardner's illness. There is a new American medicine called "Radam's Microbe Killer", 111 Oxford St., W. of which great things are written and said. I am trying to find out about it, but cannot yet. It is 15s. a bottle and a bottle is a gallon. I do not like to venture upon it, without being more sure. Wilson of York is trying to find out. If I were very bad I would venture to try it.

Do you know of

Clef absolute de la Science Occulte  
Le Tarot des Bohemiens  
le plus ancien livre du monde  
A l'usage exclusive des initiés  
Par Papus  
Paris  
Georges Carré Editeur  
58 Rue St André-des-Arts  
1889 9 fr.

I have just got it, but have not yet read it. It seems to be worth having.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The theory that the twenty-two Tarot Trumps corresponded to the twenty-two Paths of the Qabalistic Tree of Life was first proposed by Eliphas Lévi and was therefore a recent, not to say synthetic, proposition. Papus (i.e., Dr Gérard Encausse, 1865-1916) *Le Tarot des bohémiens* (1889) was the first popular treatise which included

instructions for divinatory procedures. Oswald Wirth's *Le Livre de Thoth: Les 22 arcanes de Tarot dessinés à l'usage des initiés sur les indications de Stanislas de Guaita* (edition limited to 100 copies with the twenty-two Major Trumps, hand-coloured), in a slip-case, was also published in 1889. It is unlikely that this book was known in Great Britain. A prospectus for K. R. H. Mackenzie's *The Game of Tarot, Archaeologically and Symbolically Considered* - 'in preparation, in Small Quarto, with Illustrations in the Text, and Illustrations in a separate Case. Price One Guinea' - reached at least the proof stage. Mackenzie mentioned the book in a letter to Westcott dated 7 August 1879. If this publication had ever appeared it would have antedated Papus's *Le Tarot des bohémiens* by a number of years (see my *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, p. 30). A. P. Morton's translation of Papus's work was published in 1892. Waite's revised edition appeared in 1910.

25

Chacombe Vicarage  
29 April 1890

Your letter received. It would have been safer for you to stick to Schüssler's medicines for Mrs Gardner. I have known so many cases of deafness from Quinine. It also does other mischief. For a tonic and giving appetite, there is nothing like Cascara Sagrada in small doses, say 5 drops a day, and never does any harm.

It is impossible to talk of our subject [i.e., Alchemy] in writing. It causes nothing but mutual misunderstanding. If you and Mrs Gardner could come here for a day or two, we could have a further talk. I am perfectly willing to impart what little I know so far as it can be imparted. For the next month, I shall be most particularly occupied with a furnace I am building [for these?] Occult matters, besides having some visitors that we could hardly arrange for it till after this time, and I daresay you will be more at liberty as the Season advances. It is very uncertain when we may be in London again, and when we are, we have special business which makes it most difficult to enter upon these subjects in the short time we have.

I mentioned you to Johnson whom you may have seen at 17 [Lansdowne Road], as being able to give him information about

H.P.B.'s Incense.' I forgot to mention it to you. He is a very good sort of man.

<sup>1</sup> Probably Charles Johnston, of Dublin, who had been at school with W. B. Yeats. At the age of eighteen he read a paper on Theosophical theories of evolution at a meeting of the Dublin Hermetic Society. It was subsequently printed in the *Dublin University Review*. He helped to form a Dublin lodge of the T.S. in 1886. Yeats did not join it but became a member of the Blavatsky Lodge soon after he came to London in 1887 and was admitted to the Esoteric Section late in 1888. The Golden Dawn appeared to offer more interesting occult experiences and he was initiated in it on 7 March 1890. Charles Johnston married Madame Blavatsky's niece and would have been regarded as a member of the family circle at 17 Lansdowne Road.

26

Chacombe Vicarage  
17 May 1890

We are very grieved to hear of your misfortune. Such things must happen to every man I suppose, and are part of our experience and discipline. No wonder at your being upset. We wish you a speedy return of the favours of Fortune. In the mean time, there is nothing like bearing evils with equanimity and fortitude.

I do not think that you will make much out of "Mutus Liber". I believe I have seen it, but cannot recollect that I got anything out of it. Unless you have arrived at a certain condition, mere Symbolism is not much use. If you have arrived at a certain condition, it teaches everything.

I have just had a letter from my most learned friend [unidentified], saying that he is more and more convinced that one must first attain to *Spiritual Adeptship*, before you can get the Physical Adeptship of [alchemical] Transmutation. I think I have evidence to the contrary, but I should not like to set my opinion against that of a man who, in addition to a natural genius for the Occult, has been at it since childhood, has the best books and MSS, and knows the whole subject. With all these advantages, he has not succeeded, and is very dejected and

thinks the fates are against him. From this you may judge what a difficult task you are entering upon. I do not think you have yet realised the enormous difficulty.

We are glad Mrs Gardner is well again. Mrs Ayton has had another fortnight's serious illness, but is now recovering. I am up to my head and ears in a pool of mixed Parochial, Saecular, and Occult work and do not know which way to turn.

I will write again about your coming.

27

Chacombe Vicarage  
21 June 1890

We have been busy with having Miss Bergson here for the time required by Law for Publication of Banns of Marriage, which ended in Mr MacGregor Mathers coming down last Monday, marrying her in my Church and carrying her off.' This has somewhat delayed my asking you to come as arranged, but the weather has not been propitious as yet, and we may now hope it will be warmer and more pleasant. If it would be convenient to you to come the end of next week, say Friday or Saturday, 27th or 28th, and stay over Sunday, it would suit us best. We have Miss Simpson with us now, and early in July we have two female Cousins coming, which would make our bed-rooms scarce, and we could not give you so good a one as you had last time. Please let us know as soon as you conveniently can that we may be ready for you.

We will not talk now but reserve it till you come.

<sup>1</sup> I have not been able to discover what brought Mina – later she called herself Moina – Bergson, the sister of Henri Bergson, the French philosopher, to London. According to Annie Horniman: 'Early in October 1882 at the Slade School [of Art], University College, Gower Street, I made the acquaintance of Mina Bergson. In the beginning of 1888 she introduced Mr Mathers to me as an interesting man whom she did *not* want to marry.' For the Mathers *ménage* in London (1890–2) and subsequently in Paris see my *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*.

Chacombe Vicarage  
29 December 1890

Dear Sir and Brother [i.e., F. G. Irwin]<sup>1</sup>

It was very good you to think of me this Xmas-tide, and I am very much obliged by your fraternal card of greeting. Please excuse me not answering directly, for Xmas brings me such multifarious duties & interruptions that I am not my own master.

In your letter, I think there is a solution of continuity, in your having omitted one or two words necessary to the full understanding of your meaning. However, you allude to Davidson and Thomas. I assume you mean Peter Davidson of the H[ermetic] B[rotherhood] of L[uxor] & Thomas, of Frodsham, Cheshire, the Spiritualist and Medium. As you did not belong to the H.B. of L. and I did not send you the particulars of the smashing-up of the whole wretched affair [*sic*]. It came to my knowledge that Burgoyne, the Secretary, of whom I had always been suspicious, was no other than a man I had known previously under the name of D'Alton who made such a confession of Black Magic that I rejected him altogether as being impossible. Subsequently to that he committed a felony, and underwent many months of imprisonment for it in Armley Gaol, Leeds. I did not know him under the name of Burgoyne and he took care that I should never see him. When I told Davidson that his Secretary was a convicted felon, he made very light of it, so lightly, that I thought he must be as bad as Burgoyne. We got into communication with the detectives in Yorkshire, and it appears they were watching Burgoyne and the H.B. of L. all the time. They told us they knew all the time it was intended to be a very big swindle, and they were ready to come down upon it at the right moment. I saved them the trouble by blowing it out of the water as I could, as soon as I knew that Burgoyne was a convicted felon and that Davidson upheld him. We knew the whole history of Burgoyne, and that he had been a curse to every one who had employed him, a thorough deep-dyed scoundrel. We know all about him since he has been in America. He left a wife and family in England, but has married again there. The last I heard was that if he sees 2 or 3

men in the distance approaching his quarters he turns pale and trembles. It is supposed he has been guilty of something which puts him in mortal fear, and that he contemplates going off to Australia. It is too long a tale to tell you the whole of it.

If you know Thomas of Frodsham and mean him by your allusion, I can tell you about him. He has come entirely to grief and is sending begging letters to every one. He was a Medium in communication with the Colour Spirits with whom he appears to have had a Pact, but on two occasions nearly lost his life thro' them. The most apparently peaceable Elementals, if a storm happens to come on, will become very violent and uncontrollable. The conflict of the elements seems to excite them to fury, and woe to the mortal, not being an Adept, who encounters them. Thomas has gone the way of all Mediums. I have investigated the circumstances as to a good many, and I find they all go wrong, sooner or later. It is the one thing to avoid. I should have very much have liked to have had a long talk with you personally, as one cannot put all these things down on paper. I am very much occupied in practical Occultism and that and my Profession leave me but little time to spare.

This very bad weather has prevented us going to Banbury and we have no cards to send. I am therefore obliged to content myself with wishing you a very Happy New Year, and success in whatever Occult pursuits you may be engaged in. Believe me,

Yours fraternally,

<sup>1</sup> The letter is in the library of the United Grand Lodge of England.

Chacombe Vicarage  
3 February 1891

I must congratulate you on having obtained possession of so many important works. Mutus Liber is probably a copy of Hieroglyphics which existed on the walls of certain Monasteries, the interpretation of which was only made to *proved* Initiates, and most likely contains the whole Hermetic Art. The reading of it

may not do you a positive good, but even a negative good is of advantage as a mental discipline. Ripley's being written during Monkish times, as, like so many others, never intended to be understood by any but Initiates, and was a kind of advertisement that those who saw his MS, preceiving their utter inability to understand it, might apply to the Monasteries for Initiation. At the same time, the whole of Alchemy is there.

The same remarks apply to Raymond Lully. Very much has been made of the fact of the existence of certain Rose Nobles which he made for one of [our?] Edwards. I have seen one. It is said that they have been assayed, and that modern Science proved them not to be gold, but a metal so like it, as to pass for it in those days of ignorance. Still, he must have known the real thing, and perhaps purposely mixed it with some other metal.

There are several "Tractatus" or "Traitez" without Author's name, so that I cannot say anything about this.

"La T [illegible] des Philosophes" will always be useful for reference. "La Parole delaissé" of Bernard Trevisan, I do not know, except by name. He is one who gives some very broad hints to those who have advanced sufficiently.

Corneille Drebel, I only know by name. Something might be fished out of him, I daresay.

Arnold de Villeneuve was a voluminous writer, and I think the MS you mention is not given amongst his works. He is said to have learned of Raymond Lully. Something may be learned of it, but when these old writers pretend to tell you great secrets, then you may most suspect of them of mystifying. However, altogether you have made a valuable acquisition. It is one of the stages the aspirant has to go through, to have well impressed upon the Mystic and for the most part unintelligible jargon in which this Art is veiled.

You say you should like to see me to have a talk. As you seem so bent upon this, it would be as well, if you could, but I hardly see how it can be done just now. I like your tenacity and perseverance, and I would do all I could to help you. We *may* be in London somewhere about the 3rd week in March, but neither of us have been at all well. I may say I have been very ill. Mrs Ayton is still in the Dr's hands. Unless we are much better we

shall not come. Even if we do, it is very little use us having a long talk with you. From Monday to Saturday is very short for what we want to do. It is early in the season for you to come here. We may have another bout of extreme cold. This being the case, I will tell you the stage I have now arrived at from which you may learn something. Of course, you will always understand there are certain things I dare not put on paper.

30

Chacombe Vicarage  
7 February 1891

It will be quite convenient to us to receive you on Friday 13th till Monday 16th and we shall be very glad to see you. Mrs Ayton also will be glad to see Mrs Gardner with you if she does not mind this cold season. We have no horse now, and so cannot meet you. If you come alone, you would probably walk from Banbury, and if you will let me know what train, I will walk and meet you about ½ way. If you do not care to walk, recollect we always employ Warren for Cabs. If you decide beforehand to drive, we will tell Warren to look out for you. The distance is just 3 miles and we always pay 3s.

You will find it burdensome to bring so many books. I know pretty well about Ripley, Lulle, La Turbe, and some of the others. The Mutus Liber I have not seen tho' I know about it, and it would be as well to bring that. Arnold de Villeneuve is obscure and unsatisfactory, but possibly there may be something in this MS if it were quite convenient for you to bring it, but I would not bother to bring the others.

It would be impossible to get an idea of what Hampe is on a mere cursory examination. You are quite wrong about him. He goes on the true Paracelsian lines, only he writes much more clearly. If he were not an Adept for the L[apis] P[hilosophorum] he was for the medicine, and probably did not care to go further. Neither should I, if I could only make the Elixir.

The furnace you saw here is only of use for one thing. Nothing has given me more vexation and annoyance than that furnace. I have made another since you were here, which you

shall see. I perceive you have very much to learn of the practical part. When you have tried, as I have, and found everything fail for want of the proper furnace, and all the time lost, you will begin to open your eyes to the advantages of Becher's Portable Furnace.

31

Chacombe Vicarage  
18 February 1891

Ragon came yesterday and your letter this morning. It is very good of you to make me a present of Ragon – many thanks. I did not even know of this particular book and I am always glad to have anything of his.

We were anxious to know if you arrived safely, and are very glad that all went well.

I was very glad to have a talk with you, especially as you seem so much in earnest. Above all things, recollect the furnace is the first consideration. Fletcher's would be very good to melt or calcine, but it would do nothing more. The one I told you of is the thing. Get to understand all about furnaces for this purpose.

Three such glorious sunny days we have had. I fear we may suffer by a change the other way next month.

I have felt somewhat better yesterday and to-day, and Mrs Ayton is also better. It is still very uncertain whether we shall be in London for the [G.D.] Equinox [ceremony].

32

Chacombe Vicarage  
19 June 1891

It is very good of you to think of us and invite us to your hospitable home for this memorable Convention,<sup>1</sup> at which we had fully intended to be present, but, on looking at the programme, we were appalled at seeing it went over 2 days, and that it involved a lunch and dinner each day, and a late night. The lunch and dinner are to be by contract, which means, of course, nothing fit to eat for any one, and with our views of diet

and my peculiar susceptibility to certain articles, absolute poison. So, we have been in a state of great perturbation; on the one hand, an extreme desire to be present, and on the other a great fear of the mischief it might do me. We have both had Influenza tho' in a modified form, and I have only just recovered – could not do my Services on Sunday! I do not feel at all flourishing, and dread all locomotion. We had not absolutely decided, but as we must give an answer by the 25th inst., we shall probably write on the 24th to say we cannot come. If we did happen to come, it would be very delightful staying with you, but the having to return to Chiswick at night after these meetings seems to us prohibitory. You young people do not mind it. When you get to our age, you will think differently. So, please excuse us if we do not accept your very kind invitation, tho' I should very much like a long talk with you.

I have been much delayed in my experiments by illness. Thrice in 3 months in this year have I had gall-stone spasm, which left me very incapable, and now this confounded Influenza. Still, I have made some experiments with my furnace, which have at least opened my eyes to the extreme difficulty to what I am aiming at, and the almost certainty that I cannot complete it whilst my attention is divided and diverted by my position here. The very attempt to do it, and the failure teaches one something for the next attempt. The great difficulty is the graduated furnace. Gas would give much greater facility. In all probability we shall leave here next year. In the mean time I shall experimentalise all I can.

When here you mentioned Mattei's medicines.<sup>2</sup> Since then Bro. Wilson put some evidence before me that made me think it is possible that when I tried them some years ago, I was furnished with spurious medicines. So I tried them again, and corresponded directly with the Count at Bologna. Not only did his medicines do me no good, but they did positive harm as when I tried them before. Upon mentioning this to him, I had an answer from his (supposed) son, very polite and very short, just changing one of the medicines, which was equally useless to my case. There was in the letter a something which seemed to convey to me the impression: "I make money by the credulity of

mankind, and I suppose you to be one of them." My impression of them is confirmed by the experience of a Lady residing in France who tried them. She had a carbuncle on her leg, and Mattei's *alter ego*, the agent at Marseilles or Nice, I forget which, told her one of the remedies to apply to it. Instead of getting better, it got worse, till the appearance of it was so alarming, that she was obliged to call in the local Surgeon, who said that by neglect, gangrene had set in, and that he must cut it out immediately, or she would lose her leg. This shews the greatest ignorance on the part of Mattei. I have cured lots of cases of carbuncle, in the first stage, by applying either the old Balsam of Sulphur, or the more modern application of tannin, both of which cure it without cutting. This Lady's experience is just like mine. In a French paper sent me not long ago, I saw that a watch had been set upon him, and that no plants, as he pretends, ever entered his house, and various other things not at all to his credit. He may have discovered something, but upon this foundation he appears to me to have erected a super-structure of humbug which he finds very profitable. I shall not try him again. On the other hand, with Schüssler's I have made most extraordinary cures.

1 Ayton did not refer to Madame Blavatsky's death on 8 May 1891 in any of his surviving letters to F. L. Gardner. The prospectively 'memorable convention' of the European Section of the Theosophical Society was due to meet on 9 July. See *The Theosophical Movement 1875-1925 A History and a Survey* (New York, 1925), chapters 18-20 for an account of contemporary T.S. politics and personalities.

2 Count Caesar Mattei (b. Bologna, Italy, 1809; d. 3 April 1896) was the author of various works on 'electro-homoeopathy' such as *Spécifiques electro-homœopathiques du Comte Mattei avec les indications nécessaires pour la guérison de toutes les maladies et spécialement des maladies incurables* (7th edition, Valence, Combiér 1884). Biography in Saturnus, S. L., *Iatrochimie et Electro-Homœopathie; étude comparative sur la médecine du Moyen-Age et celle des temps-modernes*; translated from German (Paris, Chamuel, 1897), with portraits of Paracelsus and Mattei.

LETTER No. 33, of 22 June 1891, needs a brief commentary. W. T. Stead (1849-1912) was an outstandingly able and energetic journalist who became editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1883. He soon gave the newspaper a reputation for courageous investigative reporting. Thus in July 1885 an article headed 'The Maiden Tribute to Modern Babylon' exposed the traffic in young girls. To obtain the evidence he nominally procured one (i.e., Eliza Jones) and was prosecuted and sentenced to three months in prison. However, as a result of his campaign Parliament raised the age of consent to sixteen.

The story that W. E. Gladstone and his Liberal henchman Sir William Harcourt frequented a brothel in St John's Wood was nonsense and merely indicated that Ayton voted Conservative. It is unlikely that Ayton knew that Gladstone was privately interested in reforming prostitutes (see Joyce Marlow, *Mr and Mrs Gladstone: An Intimate Biography*, 1977).

When H. P. Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* was published in March 1889 Stead gave it to Annie Besant to review. He knew about her recent interest in Spiritualism and potentially occultism, although at this time she cannot have known much about the latter. Stead had met Madame Blavatsky but did not know her well. Fascinated by H.P.B.'s vast compendium of occult lore, Mrs Besant asked Stead for an introduction to her. When she first visited 17 Lansdowne Road in March 1889 she was accompanied by her younger friend Herbert Burrows. During the previous decade he had been prominent in a wide spectrum of radical groups (e.g., H. M. Hyndeman's pronouncedly Marxist Democratic Federation and the Fabian Society) and had recently helped Annie Besant to form a trade union for the underpaid girls who made matches. Both joined the Theosophical Society in May 1889.

Mrs Besant's 'conversion' attracted enormous publicity. She was by far H.P.B.'s most spectacular recruit, the more so since for many years she had been publicly associated with Charles Bradlaugh's National Secular Society, which preached agnosticism and birth control. It must be emphasized that Mrs Besant was a very public figure. Burrows was hardly known outside radical circles.



Annie Besant was soon deeply involved in Theosophical Society business and by the summer of 1889 was practically running the Blavatsky Lodge. She became co-editor (with H.P.B.) of *Lucifer* in September 1889. Burrows was also active in T.S. affairs. By 1891 they considered themselves sufficiently expert in Theosophical doctrines to appear as co-authors of *A Glossary of Theosophical Terms*. Annie Besant was clearly destined to be H.P.B.'s successor as Theosophy's leading figure in Great Britain and even internationally, and this in fact happened after Blavatsky's death. However, her meteoric career in the international Theosophical movement was to be accompanied by a succession of internecine quarrels which are outside the scope of these notes.

It is hardly surprising that Ayton knew little about Burrows or, indeed, that he informed Gardner that Annie Besant's manner to him was 'most ungracious and forbidding'. For many years past she had had minimal respect for Church of England clerics and was no doubt astonished to encounter one in Theosophical circles.

It has been supposed that Burrows was a member of the Golden Dawn. This was not the case. However, he became a Freemason in 1902 when he joined East Anglia Lodge No. 2920 and joined Dr Westcott's Metropolitan College of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia in July 1906. He was an Honorary 8° in the Soc. Ros. in 1921 and died in 1922.

33

Chacombe Vicarage  
22 June 1891

Private

I have only just seen in *Lucifer* p.299 that one Herbert Burrows and A.B. [i.e., Annie Besant] went for the first time 2 years ago to see H.P.B. with a letter from W. T. Stead, Editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. I daresay you recollect he was the hero in the Eliza Armstrong [i.e., Jones] case. As I understand it, the *P.M.G.* was on its last legs, and Stead in order to advertise it, and reinstate it in the good graces of the Public and increase its

circulation, got up this case which was really against W[illiam] E[wart] G[ladstone] and Sir Wm. Harcourt, who were notorious as frequenting a house of very ill fame in St John's Wood. Stead was unconsciously going to expose 2 of the greatest friends of the B.B. They must have plied their usual wiley arts upon Stead, for, all at once, the *P.M.G.* changed its tactics and became a supporter of W.E.G. and Stead has been coquetting with the Pope ever since. In my eyes, it appears suspicious for A.B. and Burrows to have been introduced by Stead. As a rule, a man is known by the company he keeps, but, of course, this may be an exception and the introduction only a matter of accident, meaning nothing but a piece of formality. You will think me very suspicious, but I had so much trouble and annoyance from Dr A[rchibald] K[eightly], an avowed Papist being made President, and her also openly avowed intention to destroy the T[heosophical] S[ociety] if she could, that I cannot help being suspicious. Do you know anything of the antecedents of this Herbert Burrows?

I am sure that one evening at No. 17 [Lansdowne Road], there was a young man, who, by his talk, must have been a Jesuit, and I was very nearly telling him so. Of course, the B.B. are doing their utmost to destroy the T.S., and are constantly sending spies there to pick up what they can. That Carter Blake is a most notorious B.B., and about 1880 got in, and was so evidently trying to give pernicious counsel to the T.S. that Colonel O[lcott] kicked him out, and yet now I perceive he is put down as one of the Members. They may be quite sure he is doing all the mischief he can. If I had evidence that A[nnie] B[esant] was going to play the same game as Dr A[rchibald] K[eightly] I would denounce her at once. My suspicions may be all moonshine, but do please, just keep your weather eye open, and your ears too that we may know if there be anything wrong. I do not mean to take any trouble, or inconvenience yourself, but, when opportunity presents itself just inquire who Herb: Burrows is. I wish to goodness I could have come to the Convention, but I am anything but well, and it would not be advisable for me to leave home yet. The only two occasions on which I saw A.B., her manner to me was most ungracious and

forbidding. It occurred to me then that she had been warned against me by some one. Then it occurred to me it cannot be any one but the B.B. with whom I have reason to believe I am in very bad odour. This seemed to me so extremely improbable that I dismissed the thought, and laid it all to her manner, and thought she most likely was the same to every one. Now, I revert to the same idea.

Most likely my suspicions are not worth a rap. Do not give yourself the trouble to answer this, but just bear in mind what I say, and take a quiet look-out. It does me good to let off steam when I get a suspicion into my head. In haste.

34

Chacombe Vicarage  
25 November 1891

When your letter came I was trying to finish copying a rare book which was lent me, and which the owner wants returned as soon as possible. I have finished to-day so I answer your letter.

Since talking to Johnson [i.e., Charles Johnston?] about my intention to resign this [Living], the position has altered very much, and I find it most difficult to carry out my intention. A Resignation Act was passed some years ago, allowing a Clergyman ill or old to resign with  $\frac{1}{3}$ d of the income. I sent for this Act as soon as it was printed and thought I had got the real thing. Before it was actually passed, the confounded Bps [i.e., Bishops] contrived to have it altered giving them the despotic power to ask all sorts of questions as to private income &c., &c., so as really to make the Act of none effect. I did not notice this at the time, and have been going upon the Act as it was first printed. My attention was drawn to the change by an unfortunate Clergyman, named John Ingle, Rector of St Olave's, Exeter, who, in a temporary illness, sent in to the Bp notice to resign under the Act. He got well, and then did not wish to resign, but the fact of his having sent in the Resignation Paper, gave the Bp power to declare the Rectory vacant, which the Bp did directly, and awarded him as retiring pension 10*d.* per day.

Now, there being an uncertainty about my getting a proper amount of retiring pension, if any, and the Bp having power to declare the Living vacant on my mere application to be allowed to retire, has made me hesitate for the present, as to giving up this house in this delightful country, and not having income enough to get one at all equal to it elsewhere. That is how the matter stands, but I am cudgelling my brain all ways to find a means of retiring, for we are too old for the cares and anxieties of this position.

When we do leave, we want a warmer climate, and Hastings is our ambition. We were at St Leonard's this Summer on purpose to make inquiries, but found house-rent very high. As to Chiswick, it is near the Thames, and subject, I imagine, to fogs equally with London. A fog there is death to me. Also you seemed to me a long way from the Station. At your time of life that may be of no consequence, but when you arrive at our age, you will find your views altered. It would be very nice to be near you and able to have long talks and perhaps do a little *work* [i.e., Alchemy] together, but if one of these infernal fogs finished me off, it would not be of much use. Of all things we must have a warmer climate and free from London fogs.

The books and MSS I have, give me [fully?] as much information as is necessary. The only thing is the practice. I am having made at Banbury by an Ironmonger there, Joachim Becher's portable furnace. The man is very stupid about it, and I am much afraid he will bungle it so as to make it useless, but I am determined to get it down [i.e., done] somehow. It gives me many a long walk to B. to put him right as he goes on, tho' it is now nearly finished, and I shall try it as soon as possible.

35

Chacombe Vicarage  
1 September 1892

Your letter this morning. I have often been thinking of you, and wondering what you were doing. I have been better in health of late, but bothered much in Parochial matters, which hinder me much in my experiments which I am working at every

opportunity. At this moment I have a B.M. going, which gives me a little leisure to write whilst it is going. We had hoped to have got out of this place, my successor having, at first, snapped at an arrangement I proposed to him but suddenly broke off and left me in the lurch. We are now quite at a loss what to do.

Iodine [?] is a most useful medicine. The alteration in his water was Iodine removing some mischief from Liver, which had to be carried off by kidneys. There is intimate connection between liver and kidneys. When I had obstruction of gall-duct by gall-stone and jaundiced bile passed thro' kidneys and bladder. There is reciprocal action between the 2 organs.

You must not confound David Becker with John Joachim Becher. The work which mentions his portable furnace is "Joh. Joach. Becheri, D., Opuscula Chymica rariora, . . . [edited by] Friderico Roth-Scholtzio, Siles. Norimbergae & Altorfii, . . . Anno M.DCCXIX." Becher was of the Jewish Nation, a man of the most extraordinary powers. This book is partly in Latin and partly in German.

I should be very glad to look at books that were [the late Walter] Moseley's. How to get up to your place is the difficulty. Locomotion has become very distasteful to me. I should like much to have a talk with you. We are intending to be in London on Monday 19th inst. to following Saturday morning, but our base of operations is in the W.C. district and we must be near it. You are only visible in evening, and then, there is the dreadful getting back at night. I must see you somehow, and then I will talk to you about head-quarters [of the T.S.?).

My Becher's furnace answers much better than I expected, and I have succeeded in one important process, and am now upon another. No one, who has not tried, can conceive the extreme difficulty and care required as to practical details. I am sure the proper way is to begin young, have a laboratory, and learn all the ways of subliming, precipitating, revivifying, &c &c &c. I know the theory now well enough, but the practical details bother me sorely with the many interruptions I have. Still, I might succeed at any time.

I forgot that not long since this very book of Becher's was offered me by Siegle, as you will see by card inclosed. Siegle

forgot that he had procured it for me some time since. I wrote to a friend and told him of it, but I doubt whether he would get it, and Siegle might be able still to get it for you, if you care to have it. It reveals more than any book I know.

There is a book sold by Philip Harris & Co., Nos. 144 & 146 Edmund St, Birmingham, Manufacturing Chemists, "Bloxam's Laboratory teaching, 4s. 6d." which, I think might give valuable practical hints and I wish I had got it sooner, and I think I shall do so now.

We are glad to hear that you are all well at home. Mrs Ayton has not been quite well since the Influenza but she is much better now.

If Cholera gets ahead in London we shall not come.

I perceive you are Theosophically active at Chiswick.<sup>1</sup> I am too busy with my own particular line to do much else.

<sup>1</sup> In its issue of February 1892 *The Vahan*, a Theosophical Society periodical, reported that the Chiswick Lodge of the T.S. had recently celebrated its first anniversary. F. L. Gardner was Hon. Secretary and Treasurer and the lodge met every Friday evening at 8 p.m. at his house at 37 Barrowgate Road. Gardner had resigned from these offices by 1894 and the lodge then met at Adyar Studio, 17 Flanders Road, Bedford Park. The Indian headquarters of the T.S. were at Adyar, near Madras.

36

Chacombe Vicarage  
24 September 1892

I left my hair-brush and comb in my bed-room at your house. Will you be so good as to do them up in a parcel, put the inclosed label on, and post them to me.

I had just time to go to the Brit. Mus. Rusenstein is there, but only in German, so that is of no use to me. I copied a Process out of Jo. Joachim Becher from his "Experimentum Chymicum Novum".

My cold got worse and has been very troublesome. In haste.

37

Chacombe Vicarage  
14 October 1892

By this post I return your Boerhaave's Chemistry or rather Harris'[s]. What there is in Boerhaave is a kind of negative testimony. Although so able a Chemist in the ordinary sense, he had not the Occult perception in his Karma, and so opposes Alchemy, merely because he was unable to attain to it. Something beyond ordinary intelligence and skill is required to achieve success in that, and above all things – Silence.

At p. 9 of Harris, there is a good description of the process of making ♀ sublimate, which might be useful.

Since my return I have been so occupied with Parochial and other matters, that I have not been able to find time to touch a [retort] or [crucible]. [Ayton drew small diagrams to illustrate the latter.]

38

Chacombe Vicarage  
28 December 1892

By this post I send you a copy of a Photograph of the Magnum Opus which I got from Vienna. I had some Photographs made of it, and, as you are one of the few who take an interest in the Divine art, be pleased to accept it. Take care as you undo it that you do not tear it. When the original came to me it was folded, and the mark of the folding has been reproduced in the Photograph. Wherefore, I put it on a roller to send. I have been going to send it for months, but being so very busy, I kept putting it off. I have not yet made out the smallest print in it for want of time. The whole process is there symbolically. Your letter stirred me up to send it.

I abominate the B.B. [Jesuits], as you know, but, from my point of view, I should not waste my time in any controversy with or about them. At one time, I was always writing letters to the Papers. Now, the one thing needful appears to me to be to concentrate yourself upon the one thing of attaining to Adeptship of some sort. Olcott and others have said to me “why

don't you publish something?” I answer, it is all vanity, and I will not publish anything.

I congratulate you on obtaining the valuable work on B.B. Do not think I underestimate getting knowledge about their doings. In last week's P.O. was a quotation shewing that there are some Frenchmen who know that the B.B. were at the back of Boulanger.<sup>1</sup> I could see it all the time, but this is the first time I have seen it mentioned. They are plotting all the time.

You say Elementals help you to books. If so, you are in a bad way. It is not Elementals who help us to books, but much higher powers. Unless you have attained to spiritual Adeptship so as to be able to *command*, to accept the services of Elementals is most dangerous, as they are sure to turn the tables on you, sooner or later, and you come to great grief. I fancy you, at one time, did too much of Spiritualism. Just as I took leave of your good wife, a something in the expression of her face struck me, upon which I have since reflected that probably she is vampired by an Elemental. You told me she was a Medium. Now, all Mediums are liable to be preyed upon by Elementals. I have known some dismal cases of it. You cannot be too careful in these matters.

I had my Photograph mounted and framed to hang up to contemplate.

Mrs Ayton joins me in wishing you both a very Happy New Year and success in xxxx [i.e., Alchemy].

I have been too busy to touch my Chemicals yet. In haste.

<sup>1</sup> Georges Boulanger (1837–91), French general and minister of war, had headed a brief authoritarian movement which threatened to topple the Third Republic in 1889. He had recently died in exile in Brussels.

39

Chacombe Vicarage  
30 December 1892

I am glad you see what I perceived. The question is how to expel the foe [i.e., an Elemental]. The Pentagram used with the proper invocations &c &c., according to the rules of the

Quabalah, is potent to expel these creatures. They say also that the burning of fir cones drives them away, but I have never tried it. Read about the Pentagram and Hexagram in Eliphas Lévi. Do you know any Jew Qabalist who would do it for you?

It is a pity but you had belonged [the sense is, 'that you do not belong'] to our Rosicrucian Society [i.e., the Golden Dawn], in which all these things are taught. The T[heosophical] S[ociety] teaches very high things, but omits the practical details. In this, our Order is ancillary to the T.S. However, there are several stiff examinations before you could get to this practical expelling of Elementals, which would take months, if you want immediate help for this. Do something as soon as possible. I am glad you like the Photo. It is important. In haste.

40

Chacombe Vicarage  
26 September 1893

Thanks for the Cat[alogue]:. We only returned from London on Saturday [presumably from the G.D. Equinox meeting], and I found your letter then, but have been too busy to answer it. Neither could I find time to see you in London, tho' I should much have liked to have had a talk. I was house-hunting most of the time, anticipating the giving up this [house] next year.

We are both tolerably well I am glad to say. From your saying nothing I suppose you are both the same.

There is nothing in the Cat: exactly answering to my wants. In fact, I am so occupied with the practical part [of Alchemy] that I can only read what is necessary for that. Tiffereau is a humbug!

You mentioned having picked up Bekker's "Opuscula chemica rariora" and then come two more words I cannot read, and then you say "Rusenstein's Commentary on it". I do not know what you mean his Commentary to be on. I beg to congratulate you upon securing Opusc: rariora, but the Author of this is John Joachim Becher. A very different person is Daniel Becker or Beckher. If it be a commentary on J. J. Becher by Rusenstein, I should very much like to see it, if it be in any language I can read. I did not know of such a work of his.

It is a good idea putting out such a Cat: tho' I doubt that the badness of the times will make a sale doubtful. I heard dismal accounts whilst I was in London. At the beginning of this year I sold my superfluous books for £10, but there were no Occult books of value among them.

After you have sufficiently read books you should begin practice. No one can form an idea of the difficulties of it till they try, and when you are young is the time to learn. I find it too much for me at my age, tho' I mean to persevere to the end.

We have had a most enjoyable Summer here from the great dryness, but it is a very bad look-out for Farmers this Winter. There was no hay scarcely, and cattle are starving, and there is no sale for them.

F. L. GARDNER was initiated into the 0° = 0° or Neophyte grade of the Golden Dawn on 20 March 1894. Although the G.D. was nominally a secret society Ayton had long since disclosed that it existed (see the undated letter printed here as No. 14, p. 40). My hypothesis that Gardner had never been in any great hurry to join the G.D. is based upon the assumption that during H. P. Blavatsky's lifetime he had been satisfied with his membership of the Theosophical Society. It is clear, however, that after H.P.B.'s death he had little sympathy for the new dispensation under Annie Besant's leadership. Furthermore, he had recently resigned from the office of secretary of the Chiswick Lodge of the T.S. and now had time to devote to the G.D.

In 1894 Gardner was already acquainted with Dr W. W. Westcott, a co-founder of the G.D., and with Percy Bullock,<sup>1</sup> one of its most active members. Together with Gardner and John M. Watkins, who had recently established himself as a bookseller, they founded the Theosophical Society's Ananda Lodge in November 1893. It was disbanded in November 1895, probably because they all disliked Annie Besant. Hence it was Westcott and Bullock rather than Ayton who brought Gardner into the G.D.

Chacombe Vicarage  
3 April 1894

Care Frater [Gardner],

So we of the G[olden] D[awn] address one another, and sign by our Motto or a part of it. I beg to congratulate you on having become one of us. There are many advantages, which it is as well not to put on paper. We could not be present this Equinox, for, Easter fell most awkwardly, and moreover, my Churchwarden was and is most seriously ill, and my absence might have been taken amiss. When I shall be in London I do not know, but we are preparing for a flit as soon as we can arrange it. In this we have been much impeded by our Squire who begged me to delay it till he could try to effect certain purposes of his own.

You do not say that your good wife is also a Member of the G.D. Some of our Lady Members are the most advanced. One of Jewish extraction is, I think, the most advanced of all.<sup>2</sup> It is a thing to be worked together, husband and wife especially.

I have told you I have a Jewish learned friend who was very advanced tho' he never would belong to any Order or Society.<sup>3</sup> I naturally concluded he had arrived at a communication with higher Intelligences and the Powers of Nature by the rules of the Qabbalah. The last time I saw him. I alluded to this, and he astonished me by saying he had never put those rules into practice at all, but that everything came to him naturally. People in general have no idea of what gifted men, the best of Jews are.

"Quam potero" [Ayton's wife] is as well as usual and so am I.

<sup>1</sup> Percy William Bullock (1868–1940) was then a clerk in the employment of Slaughter and May, a firm of solicitors in the City of London. In 1898 he was articled to W. C. Slaughter and his first Practising Certificate was dated 26 January 1904. He disappeared from the G.D. milieu c.1903.

<sup>2</sup> Gardner's wife was never a member of the G.D. The 'lady member of Jewish extraction' was Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers's wife Moina.

<sup>3</sup> The Jewish learned friend was undoubtedly Julius Kohn. See Letter No. 42.

THE NEXT letter (No. 42) is not in the Yorke Collection but was once in the possession of Mr R. A. Gilbert. It was to Julius Kohn, 'the Jewish learned friend' mentioned in No. 41. In the meantime Ayton, who was close to his 79th birthday, had retired from his living at Chacombe and had moved to West Hoathly, a village 4½ miles from East Grinstead in Surrey.

It has not been possible to discover anything about Kohn's life, but in the Introduction to his translation of *The Prophecies of Paracelsus: Magic Figures and Prognostications* (1915),<sup>1</sup> he mentioned that his 'studies in the Occult . . . have now extended over forty years', which suggests that he began them c.1870–5. Thus I assume that he was born c.1850. According to a letter to myself from Mr Gilbert: 'He also wrote an article "The Adeptship of Jesus Christ" which appeared in *The Medium and Daybreak*, 2 September 1881, p.556. This, and other papers, brought a violent response from *The Theosophist* in October and November 1881. Kohn had attacked Theosophy with gusto – bringing Paracelsus to his aid.' In his 'Hermetica' catalogue No. 25 (Summer 1981) Mr Gilbert described Kohn as an Austrian emigré. In this catalogue Mr Gilbert listed seven of Kohn's alchemical manuscripts. There was evidently a traffic in such manuscripts between Ayton, Kohn and Percy Bullock ('Levavi Oculos' in the Golden Dawn). Thus Kohn's copy of 'Oeuvre de Jean Saulnier à son fils' was described as 'Gardner's MS. copied from Ayton's copy'. Ayton made his copy in September 1903 and sent it to Bullock who, with the exception of Ayton and Gardner, was the GD's most energetic copyist of alchemical manuscripts.

Rosebank, West Hoathly, East Grinstead  
2 February 1895

My dear Kohn,

By this post I shall forward to you vol. i, i.e., really vol. vi of the Fr[ench] MS.<sup>2</sup> I was delayed copying it by Bronchitis, or you would have had it a fortnight sooner. I told you I felt Bronchitis coming on, &, in fact, was so ill as not to be capable of writing properly. I had to take to my bed for several days & got over it. I

went out & seemed all right. Suddenly it came on again, & I had to take my bed for a longer period. I perceive what gives it me. The fireplaces are so badly constructed that either they give out too little heat, or else too much. When it is the latter, I get into a lather just before bedtime perhaps, then go into my cold dressing-room, & take a chill at once. No one knows nowadays how to make a fire-place. I shall be more careful in future now that I know the evils of the house. We have a fire in the bedroom now, so as to avoid the great contrast between an over-heated room & an icy cold one. I am convalescent again, & I hope to keep it so.

I thought it better to send you vol. 1 at once, for I am really very anxious to have your views upon it. The spelling, grammar & punctuation of the French are all infamous, but you must not let that prejudice you against it. I have come to the conclusion that the Adept who enuntiated it employed a scribe to do the writing. The internal evidence of it seems to me to show that, probably, the Adept was not a native of France, but a German domiciled there, & that he probably employed a German Scribe to write to his dictation, that this scribe knew nothing of occultism, for he does not use the Alchemical Symbols, & the mistakes are just such as a Scribe imperfectly acquainted with French, would make, writing the words more according to the sound of them as his master uttered them, than according to the orthography and grammar. However, I long to know what you think of it.

I have more carefully compared the Process given with that of Mynsicht's 'Unicorno Milnerale' at p.1 of his 'Thesaurus & Armentium Medico-Chymicum' and also 'Tinctura Veneris & Martis ex scriptis Fratris Basilii Valentini in unum processum collecta', at p.73 of Rhenanus' 'Solis e puteo emergentis'. I feel as sure as one can be about anything that it is the same process given in all its details wh[ich] were concealed in Mynsicht and B.V. Supposing this to be the case, I do not see the sense of your reading from the first Greek and other authors as you said, but that your course is to make yourself fully Master by memory of all the details of this Process, so as to be sure of not making a mistake, choosing the first 'Procès accuratoire' to work upon, on

account of the expense of the longer process. I am also anxious to know, if by any chance you have the other 5 vols. If not, and if by any further chance you happen to perceive who this anonymous author is, we might institute a search abroad. Anyhow, you will know the handwriting and look out for the others.

Mynsicht was a Rosi<sup>+</sup>ian and it has occurred to me whether the original of this MS was not a private affair of the Order, and surreptitiously got hold of by some one out of the Order and copied.

All other MS[S] and books on the subject make use of sublimated mercury, antimony and iron, but this Adept seems to use separately the sophic mercury or soul of each, and this may be the best way. I shall soon copy the other vol. if I keep well, and will send it to you. It is about 30pp. shorter. It contains the process in detail for making the sophic mercury and oil of gold wh[ich] I have nowhere else seen. I cannot imagine such an MS being intended for any but the eyes of members of an Occult Order. Why it should come to such a miserable wretch as myself is curious.

You may suppose that the Medical part interests me. According to modern lights he is wrong in some of the particulars of his Physiology, but he has a very good general idea of it. The cures he declares himself to have made, seem incredible, but experience alone could tell us whether it is possible. I suppose Paracelsus did quite as much. This part I care for more than the transmutation.

This spell of horribly cold weather prevents me from doing anything practical. I am obliged to be so careful not to get Bronchitis again. I can employ the time profitably in copying the second vol. of this MS and by the time I have finished it, I hope it will be warmer and allow me to get to work.

Your vast reading and general knowledge may cause you to value this MS less than I do. If you do not care for it I shall be glad to have it again.

Mrs Ayton joins me in kind regards to you both, and hoping you keep well this trying weather.

1 This book (128pp) was published by William Rider and Son Ltd. Only the initials J.K. appear on the title page. Kohn's edition of *Splendor Solis, Alchemical Treatises of Solomon Trismosin, Adept and Teacher of Paracelsus* bore the Kegan Paul imprint (1921, 104 pp).

2 'Fratrum Rosae Crucis. Pratique des oeuvres des Frères de la Rose-Croix et leur Clef pour extraire d'or vif' (No. 6 in Mr R. A. Gilbert's *Hermetica* Catalogue No. 25, Summer 1981).

A YEAR AFTER being initiated in the Golden Dawn's lowest  $0^\circ = 0^\circ$  degree and after passing a series of examinations Gardner reached the G.D.'s Second Order (Ordo Rosae Rubeae et Aureae Crucis) and joined its select coterie of Ritual Magicians. Gardner's subsequent unsatisfactory career in the G.D. is commemorated in my *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*.

Ayton was wrong in supposing that the G.D. had existed from time immemorial. It was a very recent (1888) foundation. The suggestion that Gardner could now use his room 'for all sorts of experiences' implies that he could practise certain rituals, such as the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram, without the participation of other Adepts.

This esoteric exercise is apparently not without its therapeutic effects. In 'Suster's answer to Howe', a hostile chapter contributed to Israel Regardie's *What you should know about the Golden Dawn* (Falcon Press, Phoenix, Arizona, USA, 1983), Mr Gerald Suster wrote: 'Anyone who doubts this should try performing the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram daily for six months – it will occupy less than ten minutes a day. I have done this myself and experienced improvement on every level of my life. Mr Howe would be well advised to go and do likewise, but it is doubtful if he will for he thinks he knows better.'

43

West Hoathly  
5 April 1895

Care et V.H. Frater [Gardner]!

We beg to congratulate you on your advancement to  $5 = 6$ .<sup>1</sup> Most certainly this Order gives you much more of the practical working of the Occult than the T[heosophical] S[ociety], and is really the best aid to the T.S. Moreover, it is an Order that has existed from time immemorial, and included such Adepts as Hadrian Mynsight, Eugenius Philalethes, Sigismund Backstrom, and a host of others. We must, however, never forget that the T.S. has a peculiar Mission for this "Fin de Siècle" and England and India in particular. The T.S. teaches generally and theoretically for the most part, tho' there are some practical points in the S.D. [i.e., H. P. Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* 1888] we should do well to bear in mind and add to the practice of our Order. The T.S. is doing a great work, as we may see shortly.

The B.B. [i.e., the Jesuits] are most active and have developed a most elaborate and perfect scheme for the destruction of British power and influence, and it is so far successful, and they may get the upper hand temporarily. I believe that it is this which the Mahatmas are trying to provide against. I am thoroughly convinced the B.B. have somehow got at Judge, in order to destroy the T.S. I think they will not succeed in doing this, tho' they have contrived to cause the utmost confusion for the present.

You can now use your room set apart for all sorts of experiences. By rights, Mrs Gardner ought to be associated with you. The great danger is, the diverging into B[lack] M[agic].

We are sorry Mrs Gardner is suffering from Rheumatism. I too have been suffering frightfully. I can tell you that the steam-bath is the best cure for rheumatism. At Bath, they have all sorts of baths to cure it.

Mrs Ayton is fairly well, but I have not been at all well, and, in fact, so ill and incapable I have done nothing in any way, and I am still far from well. When warmer weather comes I hope to do something.



I hope Fra: Johnson [i.e., Johnston?] will now do something. Fear of Influenza prevented us being at the Equinox. Canon and Mrs Venables went to London for an outing. They were both dead of Influenza in 10 days.

<sup>1</sup> With Gardner's promotion to the G.D.'s 5° = 6° and its Second Order he had become a 'Very Honoured Frater'.

44

West Hoathly  
24 May 1895

Care Frater [Gardner],

Your letter this morning. Many thanks. MS 476 did not come by first post, but we have to go to P.O. this afternoon and I daresay we shall find it by second post, and I shall acknowledge receipt before I close this. I am sending up to early post, and have despatched the Bacstrom MS by it. Please to acknowledge receipt. I shall be glad to have Bacstrom MS returned when you have quite done with it.

I have my Irwin Cat: returned by this morning's post.<sup>1</sup> Did you buy 517 Secret [word illegible] &c. I meant to have bid for that. Also, did you buy 444 Tarot. I meant to bid for that tho' the instruction we get from the G[olden] D[awn] is probably better. Also, did you have 233? If you get any of these, I shall be glad to borrow them, or one at a time, when I shall have returned 476. All kind regards. In haste,

Yours fraternally,  
Virtute orta

If I am only well enough to travel, I shall be coming up for the day to Arne & Co. of Barbican to get Chemicals and apparatus. If you were at liberty, you might go with me there and have a talk. I do not think I ought to order things without seeing them. You would be getting familiar with such things by going with me. My mind is much exercised as to what apparatus I really require. I am beginning in earnest, if I am only well enough to

bear the labour of it. I am better today. I am much obliged to L.O. [Percy Bullock] for letting me have MS 476.

No Parcel by second post, so I post this. I suppose it will come tomorrow morning. Written at 3 p.m.

<sup>1</sup> F. G. Irwin died on 26 July 1893. His widow presented his Masonic books, manuscripts copies of rituals and about 150 letters from Freemasons or occultists to the library of the United Grand Lodge of England. No copy is known of the 'Irwin Cat[alogue]' mentioned by Ayton. It is possible that Irwin's miscellaneous books on spiritualism, etc., were sold by auction at Bristol.

45

West Hoathley  
16 July 1895

Care Frater [Gardner],

I sent off the Cagliostro MS by early train this morning, thinking it would be delivered at your Office before you leave. I told you of the missing leaves. At another point also the pagination is wrong, but that you can easily rectify. In some parts, the writing is much faded, and being very small, it is difficult to read. It is mostly copied from well known Authors. There is very little if anything original in it. Any how, it is worth what you gave for it. Not having that particular work of Basil Valentine and Eireneus Philalethes, I copied them, as they bear upon what I am now working at. One thing in it is a copy of D'Espagnet which I possess, and perhaps you do. That part by Dr Grimaldi does not seem to me to be of much value.

If you and Fra. L.O. [Percy Bullock] have quite done with it, I shall be glad to have my MS returned. Get all you or he want out of it. I will not hurry you at all. It is the one I mostly work by, and therefore I shall be glad to have it again as soon as you have quite finished with it.

I have not been at all well, and quite incapable of travelling or I should have been in London to order apparatus at Messrs Arne. I was wanted in Oxon and Northants to give my votes for the Conservatives, but I cannot travel so far, and so my votes are

lost. I am, however, determined to get better and to go on with my work. I fancy I am better for means I have adopted the last few days. I have been very busy comparing one Author with another, and now feel quite sure of my ground which I never did before. The nearer one gets to it, the more Daemons seem to be let loose to hinder and obstruct one. The practical difficulties are greater than any one could imagine, but to be spiritually obstructed is worse still.

I have no manner of doubt that the whole trouble in the T[heosophical] S[ociety] is a B.B. conspiracy, plot, and machination. It will not succeed in the long run. The B.B. have failed all along the line, and, I believe, will fail in this. It is the same in politics. My own strong impression is, that Rosebery, Harcourt and the rest are all concealed Papists. Ripon is avowedly so. It is a heavy blow and great discouragement to Harcourt to be turned out of Derby. It is not likely that Harcourt himself really believes in Local Veto, but he knows that Publicans exercise a great influence upon a wide circle of Voters, and that on the Unionist side, and so they want to swamp and get rid of them. It is the same with the House of Lords, which prevents them forcing Rome Rule down our throats, that they may make Popery predominant, and destroy the great Protestant Empire of England.

46

West Hoathley  
18 July 1895

Care Frater [Gardner],

The MS came last evening but too late to acknowledge by same post. You were good enough to pay carriage. I did not pay carriage to you, because Q[uam] P[otero]<sup>1</sup> said it is much safer to be delivered if carriage be not paid. I intended to have sent you 6 stamps to pay for that to you, but I had not so many, and our Post Office is a mile off and all up hill, so I must bear it in mind and send them the first opportunity.

I am sorry to say I do not possess "79 Wonders of a certain subject". A friend of mine has it, and I can borrow it off him

for my own use, but I dare not lend it to any one else, or he would never lend me another. I will write to L.O. [Percy Bullock] and tell him so.

It may perhaps answer your purpose to go to the Harz Mountains to get fresh ore. Of course it spoils by keeping, i.e. the essential part evaporates. In a MS I have it says that Paracelsus knew about this, and it intimates that he went, when the Sun goes into Cancer and exactly at full Moon when the same entrance takes place which happens every year close upon the middle of June, go into a Silver mine, as in Hungary, or Freyberg, Clausthal, Hallerfeld and Fichteburg, and you will find a brown earth between the passages, which will change in the above named hour, and, N.B. become as yellow as gold, such as I have found in the mountains of Kipphausen. Take this and immediately put it into an oaken firkin so that it may not be acted on by the weather. From this fill a Retort &c. It goes on to describe the Process when you have got it home, and finishes by declaring that it is the [illegible] of the Philosophers and that the L[apis] P[hilosophorum] may be made from it. Could I have spared the time from Chacombe, I should have been there long ago. Of course, many have been to it, and it may all be gone. It is too late for this season.

That theory as to pure Alcohol has been propounded before. From what I know, I fear it will not stand the test. I have made pure Alcohol from the best French Brandy for Spagyric purposes. There is nothing but the orthodox method of making the Elixir. Alcohol is merely a help towards it, so far as I know.

I am glad you are getting on in the G.D. The working the two is perhaps impracticable, but we must never forget that the T[heosophical] S[ociety] has a great mission for this Age.

I do not feel at all well to-day. In haste.

<sup>1</sup> 'Quam Potero Adjutabo' was Mrs Ayton's G.D. motto.

Caledonian Temperance Hotel  
Harpur Street, Theobald's Road, WC  
London, 24 March 1897

According to your suggestion I wrote at once to S[apere] A[ude i.e., Dr W. W. Westcott] asking if I could see him on Friday upon this serious crisis.' This evening I have his answer saying he thinks he had better not see me till later, as he would be accused of plotting &c. I quite see his view of it. I do not know what more I can do. I am too old and not well enough to take the active part I should like, but must await developments. I thought I would let you know. In haste.

<sup>1</sup> Dr Westcott wrote to Gardner on 17 March 1897 to inform him that he had that day resigned from all his offices in the G.D., but was remaining as a 'private Adept'. He continued: 'I have to say that as it happens, the reason is a purely personal one, owing to my having recd. an intimation that it had somehow become known to the State officers that I was a prominent official of a society in which I had been foolishly posturing as one possessed of magical powers – and that if this became more public it would not do for a Coroner of the Crown to be made shame of in such a mad way. So I had no alternative – I cannot think who it is that persecutes me – someone must talk.' (For the complete text of the letter see my *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*, pp. 165–6).

THE NEXT and the following letter refer to Gardner's resignation from the Golden Dawn in September 1897. The reasons are discussed in the 'Complications Galore' chapter in my *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*.

West Hoathley  
15 October 1897

Your letter with inclosures received by second post. I can only acknowledge receipt by this post as I am very busy. Q.P.A. [Mrs Ayton] went by early train this morning to see her sister at Brixton and will be back tomorrow, or, at latest, on Monday. I

should like her to see this correspondence, and then I will return them as soon as possible. I am very busy, and grieved beyond measure that these things should go on in our beloved Order. Such seems to be the fate of all Societies, to break up from their innate want of co-herence. I was in hopes of seeing you at Autumnal Equi<sup>x</sup> but Q.P.A. was taken seriously ill and could not travel, and I could not leave her. I have given myself more and more to my own working, and feel quite incompetent to take any active part in what is going on in our Order, and, in fact, have not learned enough about it to know the merits of the case. Your part in it quite bewilders me, and I know not what to say about it. I do not think I know Bennett.' There is not much chance of my coming to London as it is so near Winter, but if I do I will try to see you.

<sup>1</sup> Alan Bennett (1872–1923). He first encountered Aleister Crowley in the spring of 1899. According to the latter: 'We worked together at Ceremonial Magick; evoking spirits, consecrating talismans and so on' (*Confessions*, 1969, p. 181). Bennett went to Ceylon early in 1900. By then he was a self-converted Buddhist. In 1907, now named Ananda Mettaya, he entered the Burmese branch of the Buddhist Sangha order. Briefly in England in 1908 he formed the English branch of the International Buddhist Society. He was in London from 1914 until his death in 1923. Author of *The Wisdom of the Aryas*, 1913.

West Hoathly  
19 October 1897

Care et V. H. Fra D.P.A.L.' [i.e. Gardner],

Q.P.A. [Mrs Ayton] has returned and carefully read over the correspondence which I now return. She is as much puzzled as I am to understand the whole affair. We are quite sure you had no other feelings but those of the utmost benevolence and fraternal kindness. It is a great pity and misfortune that all these things should happen in our most important Order! We should like to have a talk with you, but our being in London now the Winter is coming on, is not at all likely. If we do come, I will be sure to let

you know. In the mean time you have all our fraternal sympathy.

Q.P.A. joins me in kindest regards to Mrs Gardner and yourself.

We appreciate most fully your kindness in letting us see this correspondence, so that we know something of what is going on. Our isolated position cuts us off from a great deal.

<sup>1</sup> Gardner's motto in the Golden Dawn was *Frater De Profundis ad Lucem*.

50

West Hoathly  
27 December 1897

Thanks for your kind remembrance of Xmas Card. Pray excuse us not reciprocating the Card, for we have none. Q.P.A. [Mrs Ayton] has been ill the last six months which deranges our manège [*sic*; he meant *ménage*], and nothing gets done. I am busy with my own particular work, and I have Q.P.A.'s to do as far as I can. She was not careful enough in the choice of her ancestors, and consequently has inherited gout, which in her case has taken the form of renal colic. All movement is painful and she passes most of her time in bed. She is getting over it, tho' slowly, but, with time, there is every reason to expect she will quite recover. To add to our troubles, we are obliged to quit this house at Midsummer and we hope Q.P.A. will be all right long before that, or the removal will be very uncomfortable.

I must see you and have a talk if I do come to London at the Equinox. Your present abode I think is not quite so inaccessible as that at Chiswick.<sup>1</sup>

In the Political world, there seems to be unrest and disquietude all over the world, all pointing, at present, to some great crisis in human affairs. Of this, the Mahatmas seem to have been aware. There is no telling what may happen before I see you in March, and we may have much to talk of.

I am better in health than I was, but still not well. I am very busy with my own particular work.

<sup>1</sup> Gardner had moved a little further west from Barrowgate Road, Chiswick, to Marlborough Road, a turning off Chiswick High Road and close to the recently-built Gunnersbury station on the District underground railway line.

AYTON'S WIFE died during the summer of 1898. He then moved to a hamlet in the vicinity of Greenhithe on the Thames estuary.

51

3 Carlton Avenue  
Horn's Cross by Greenhithe  
22 July 1898

[Mourning border]

I beg to thank you very much for your kind sympathy with me in my great calamity [i.e., Mrs Ayton's death]. I know well all the Philosophy of the thing, and that it is Nature's Law, and, as she herself said, when her brother died a short time ago "we have arrived at that time of life, when we must expect such things", and afterwards applied it equally to herself. For all that, there is no escaping the physical strain and mental depression which such a wrench causes. You have seen something of her at Chacombe and must have seen she was everything to me. I have been exceedingly ill. A week before the final catastrophe I had to go to Brighton, and on my way back a stupid fellow kept the windward window open, and gave me a great chill. I was so intent upon the coming event that I was unconscious that I had bronchitis, tho' my voice was nearly gone. Consequently, it got a great hold upon me, and I have only just barely got rid of it. I had also an affection of the eye so that I saw double, unless I shut one eye, with neuralgia in and over that eye and the whole left side of the head. This is a trifle better, which gives me hope it will soon leave me. Johnson first cheered me up by coming, and since then I have been gradually improving, but still I dare not risk travelling just at present. A draught in a rail-road carriage would bring on Bronchitis again, and I should not be a cheerful guest. Many thanks, therefore, for your kind invitation

to visit you, which I should much like later on before the November fogs arrive. Also my Sister is coming for a few days from Brighton to visit me for a fortnight. I have some business transactions to get thro' which as yet I have been quite incapable of attending to. When I come we will have a long talk upon the Occult.

52

Horn's Cross by Greenhithe  
2 November 1898

Having to make my Will afresh in consequence of the decease of my dear Annie, I am in want of Executors. I have outlived most of my friends and those who survive are too old for such an Office. I turn therefore to my younger friends and especially those who are Occultists like myself. Will you be so kind as to allow me to nominate you as one of my Executors? What I have is all in Railway Stock and will not be troublesome to do. If you are good enough to consent, I will ask Fra: Levavi [Oculus, i.e., Percy Bullock] to be the other one. We, Occultists, should help one another, and I hope I may rely on you for helping me in this way.

My Sister has come to live with me permanently, for I found it impossible to live alone any longer, after such a congenial and capable companion as I have had for so many years. We shall leave this house next Lady Day, for this one is too small and inconvenient for us.

53

Horn's Cross by Greenhithe  
3 November 1898

Many thanks for your kind accession to my request. By to-day's post I will write to Fra: Levavi [Oculus] to ask him.

As you say to Old's prediction,<sup>1</sup> you mention it for what it is worth which may be very little. Unless I were sure that he were quite capable of rectifying a Nativity accurately, I should take no notice of his predictions. It requires a good Mathematician to

rectify a Nativity. I have neglected my Mathematics and Astrology too for many years and could not do it now. Astrology, as I take it, is founded upon the Taro, which, when worked by a skilled and experienced person, is far more reliable. If you will not to die prematurely and take every precaution, you will live, Old and his predictions to the contrary, notwithstanding. My own impression is that you will live the full span of life in general, barring accidents against which every one should be on his guard.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Walter Richard Old (1864–1929), who later called himself Walter Gorn Old, was a professional astrologer who used the pseudonym Sefhrial. For his career see my *Astrology and the Third Reich* (Aquarian Press, 1984). Between August and November 1898 he wrote five letters to Gardner about small loans.

<sup>2</sup> Gardner was still worrying about his horoscope and 'fatal planetary aspects' a quarter of a century later. Three letters written to him by Westcott in 1922 refer to his fear of death.

54

Horn's Cross by Greenhithe  
25 January 1899

My Dear Kohn,<sup>1</sup>

I am now able to return you your most valuable MS. The first part seemed very prosy & tiresome, wh[ich], added to the bad writing, made it seem very troublesome. I never saw writing with so much inward cussedness in it. Metaphorically speaking, it needed a heavy porter to lift the veil of obscurity wh[ich] the profoundly perverse formation of the letters cast over it. As I went on I became more familiar with his perverse characters and got on more quickly. I made out all but about five words, &, on a separate paper I have put down those five with the p. in your MS &c. If, at any time, you should have leisure enough, I shall be much obliged, if you have made them out, to put down on the same piece of paper, opposite the red line, what you interpret them to be & return it to me. If you are too busy, then we will be

content with things as they are. I have made a memorandum of the corresponding No. in my MS, so that I can easily refer to it.

I was in ecstasies with the letter part wh[ich] corroborates all I have in S. Bacstrom & others, more clearly given. It is more clear & easy to practice than the Particular in that Rosi+<sup>n</sup>. MS in wh[ich], as I thought, I had so nearly succeeded, but for that most unfortunate blow up. As soon as I arrive at the new house, & have a Laboratory ready, I shall try to put it into practice, if I only live long enough. I am just now beginning to work in earnest for another house. As ill-luck would have it, a friend who was to have looked at houses for me, was detained in France till yesterday. Today the house-hunting begins in earnest, & I shall be summoned in a day or two to London to look at one or more thought likely. I suppose you are concluding about Southend. Alas! You run off just as I am coming nearer to you. I shall try hard to get to Acton.

I am fairly well in health, & doing all I can in Occultism.

The Author of this MS mentions Kabbalah, confirming what I said in previous letters that the 2 ought to go together. He must have been a real Adept.

With my kind regards & good wishes to Mrs Kohn and yourself.

<sup>1</sup> This letter has been in the possession of Mr R. A. Gilbert.

By January 1900 Ayton had moved from Horn's Cross to Uxbridge Road in the Shepherd's Bush district of west London. His new home was not far from Chiswick where both Gardner and Percy Bullock lived.

55

285 Uxbridge Road, W.  
8 January 1900

Care Frater [Gardner],

A letter from Julius Kohn, yesterday, says he will come to see me next Saturday week, i.e. the 19th inst. He will be here about 2 o'clock. Please let me know at what time you can come on that

day to meet him, that I may arrange accordingly. There will be lunch at 2 o'clock. J.K. is a Vegetarian, but if I know that you can come at that time I will provide according to your habits at that time. There will be T. about 4, and supper at 7. If you cannot come for 2 o'clock I will arrange for something for you at 7. So please let me know. Perhaps I shall see you before then. At present I am rather bound and cannot stir out.

56

285 Uxbridge Road, W.  
9 October 1900

Mrs Emery left Volo' yesterday, and she is now at

67 The Grove, Hammersmith, W.

I will not now write about the contents of your letter, but with your kind permission, I will come next Sunday afternoon and we will talk about it.

<sup>1</sup> Mrs Emery was Florence Farr, actress and 'liberated woman'. A close friend of W. B. Yeats, her liaison with G. B. Shaw during the period 1891-5 coincided with her early years in the Golden Dawn. After Dr Westcott's retirement from the scene in March 1897 she was in charge of the Isis-Urania Temple as Mathers's representative. She and Gardner were mutually antipathetic and the latter resigned following a row with her. 'Volo' was Mrs Florence Kennedy, one of her friends.

57

285 Uxbridge Road, W.  
6 November 1900

I think there must be some mistake or misunderstanding as to Mrs Emery's circulating a report that you "were the means of inducing me to dismiss her from my household"<sup>1</sup>. Knowing the circumstances, as I do, it is utterly inconceivable to me that she should have so said. Is it not probable that some evil-disposed person has circulated the report to make mischief?

Most certainly "the desirability or otherwise of retaining her" never formed the subject of our conversation. Neither did I tell you that she was going to leave me, nor that she had left me, nor did I speak of it to any one else. Nor did you, in any way whatever, directly or indirectly influence me in the matter. Whether she left me of her own accord, or whether I wished her to go, I have never mentioned to any one, nor do I wish to do so now. Any how, you had nothing to do with the matter. You may make what use you please of this letter.<sup>1</sup> I am suffering from Bronchitis and cannot stir out, or I would go and see her, and also come to you.

<sup>1</sup> Florence Farr had recently spent a brief period at 285 Uxbridge Road. The reasons for her departure are unknown.

58

285 Uxbridge Road, W.  
21 November 1900

A letter at last about the Rotalo MS.<sup>1</sup> As yet my friend [i.e., Julius Kohn] cannot lay his hands upon it. His books are in double rows, and he finds it very difficult to find any MS he has not seen for some time. He will send it as soon as he can lay his hands upon it. He is much obliged to you for the Chinese book. It is very uncertain when I can come to you. Monday and yesterday being fine I was out, but to-day I dare not stir. Barometer has fallen. Perhaps you will be coming this way before long.

<sup>1</sup> The Rotalo MS appears to have contained instructions for making some kind of simple apparatus, perhaps from cardboard, for predictive (?) purposes. There are further references to it in the letters that follow.

59

285 Uxbridge Road, W.  
23 November 1900

Many thanks for another Chinese book received last evening. It seems to me to be likely to be of great service to one learning the language. I have sent it to my learned friend [Julius Kohn].

Since writing to you I have another letter from him in which he says "Rotalo is as completely lost as if I had dropped it into the sea. It may be among one of the bundles that I have put unopened in the loft. At my last removal I became desperate towards the end and tied up papers, catalogues and books indiscriminately. Some bundles are still as they were when we came here last year in summer. As I have sky-lights put into the roof I shall go up one day and have a search for that MS."

He is sure to find it, especially now we have reminded him of the importance of it, and he is quite aware of the importance of it. Also, I shall keep him up to it.

I am very busy just now, and so we will postpone other matters till I have the pleasure of seeing you.

60

285 Uxbridge Road  
20 December 1900

Care Frater,

Wilson called yesterday evening for the last time.<sup>1</sup> I told him of your kind offer to mention him to the Paper makers, but he said it would be useless, as, not being an analytical Chemist, they would not take him. He was admitted before examinations were required, and not having passed those examinations, he would be rejected, so there is an end of that. He thanks you very much all the same.

I had asked Kohn to come and spend a day here, during his Xmas holidays. Last evening I had a letter to say he was so busy he could not come now, but would come some Saturday in January. I had also proposed to him to meet you here to talk about books. He says I could arrange for your meeting him then. He also says "If I can, I will have a thorough hunt for Rotalo. As

far as I remember I must have three copies, one printed thin oblong quarto, one copied from Riston's Cabbala, and one in MS (a kind of schoolboy writing) in the German language. I presume they are all together in one bundle safely stowed away so safe that I cannot get at them."

I will let you know when it is arranged for him to come.

<sup>1</sup> Probably Thomas Wilson, an early member of the Golden Dawn (see p. 27).

61

285 Uxbridge Road  
29 January 1901

Many thanks for the List. I am very busy and have not had time to compare. I will talk to you about this when we meet again.

It is well that you have been able to get any answer at all from the  $\Delta$ . It does look rather 'pour dire la bonne fortune', but one example proves nothing. As to ambiguous, all oracles from the beginning of the world have been ambiguous. As far as I can judge at present, it is really taken from Rotalo's wheel, and that is founded upon the relation of words and numbers according to the Cabbalistic and Pythagorean schools. It is most likely the very thing advertised in Hockley's Cat:,' but Cats: necessarily give too picturesque a description of things.

I overlooked one part of it which J[ulius] K[ohn] brought, of about 8 pages, which should be copied into the larger of the 2 MSS I brought to you. I will do that as soon as I have it again, but there is no hurry about it. I will come over again the first opportunity.

Rotalo could only found his scheme upon what the Cabbalists and Pythagoreans had done before.

<sup>1</sup> Frederick Hockley, a well-known 'seer' and producer of strange magical manuscripts, had died as long ago as 1885. No copy of a catalogue of his library is known. See also p. 105.

62

285 Uxbridge Road  
3 February 1901

I have copied the part of Rotalo which I had overlooked, and now send it to you to have another try at it. To omit this was like the Play of Hamlet with the part of Hamlet omitted. So far as it appears to me to be the real thing and for those who can master it, of infinite value. I have not done so as yet, having only slightly considered it as I copied it.

I caught a desperate cold last Sunday. On Monday morning I went out again and in afternoon was caught again in a storm of sleet. On Tuesday I found Bronchitis coming on and I have not been out since. The Inhaler did some good, but I was so ill, it was not sufficient and I took a special medicine I have for such emergencies and it prevented further evil consequences, and I have been gradually recovering, but it has not gone yet. I have been very incapable of mental application to anything.

63

285 Uxbridge Road  
12 February 1901

Thanks for transmitting Fra: S[apere] A[ude]'s [i.e., Westcott's] interesting book. I have read it thro' with great satisfaction.

A letter from J. K[ohn] this morning says: "I have no more of Rotalo either copied or printed. I had a German MS but that is lost or hopelessly mislaid. I remember I attempted to make a complete Rotalo out of the two MSS, the printed book and [word illegible], but this is at least 15 or 20 years ago and I have quite forgotten all about it. I have no Triangular Wheel, but remember a Triangle was in the German MS which I have hunted in vain thro' the dust of ages. I must have disposed of it when I left my Lodgings or else it is gone astray in some unaccountable manner."

From this it appears you are right as to there being a  $\Delta$  missing. I have a Kabbalistic MS on numbers, which contains a circular wheel, which may help to elucidate the matter. I will



shew it to you when you next come. It is, I suppose, upon the principle which Ginsburg gives in his 'Kabbalah', of Combination, Permutation, Gematria, Notaricon [?], and substituting their numerical value for the letters.

Nine answers to each question may be a sufficient number, for aught we know, but, there is evidently something missing.

I am much occupied for a few days in private business and write in haste.

BY THE END of 1901 the original Golden Dawn had to all intents and purposes collapsed. In February 1900 Mathers had revealed in a letter to Florence Farr that Dr Westcott had 'forged or procured to be forged' the documents which had been used to support Westcott's claim that a 'high Rosicrucian Adept in Germany' had given him permission to establish a branch of the G.D. in England. The London members now became embroiled in a major row with MacGregor Mathers. To make matters worse a Mr and Mrs Horos appeared at Mathers's home in Paris at about the same time. They were American confidence tricksters and succeeded in purloining a copy of the G.D. Neophyte ritual. In September 1901 Mr Horos was arrested in London on a charge of raping a young girl and his wife was accused of aiding and abetting him. Much to the distress of Ayton and others extracts from the Neophyte ritual and the text of the G.D.'s Obligation were read at the magistrate's court proceedings and there was extensive press publicity. Many of the G.D.'s members resigned after the Horos couple were sentenced to lengthy terms of imprisonment. Ayton had by then moved to Saffron Walden, a small market town fifty miles north-east of London in Essex.

64

Grove Lodge, Saffron Walden  
13 November 1901

[F. L. Gardner deleted  
November and pencilled in  
October]

Will you be so kind as to lend me the following [G.D. manuscripts]:

- S.2 Enoch[ian] Attributions, Official.
- T. Enochian Calls.
- X. Pyramid Gods.
- Z.2. Ceremonial Magic.

I have applied at head-quarters and was told as to one thing I asked for that it was only allowed to those who had passed some certain Degree, but that I could get it at the Brit. Mus. and on the last occasion I was told that all MSS relating to the Enochian were out. I will pay all cost of Registration both ways, and return them most carefully. I am going to do the Enochian Tablets, and I want all the help I can get. Because I did not approve of the B.B. [Jesuits] various MSS were not sent to me, and I find that it was the same with Wilson and all who were my friends. This has kept me back. I am now much better in health, and more capable of attention in the Occult and I mean to do it. Wilson is with me for the present and we are trying various scientific experiments but not with *metals*.

What a frightful shew-up as to the Horus [*sic*] couple. In the D[aily] T[elegraph] of yesterday, a great part of the G.D. ritual was exposed, even as to the "current" which was to blot the renegade. Also I am told that the Police have the whole of the Ritual and that it is stenographed. You may consider yourself as lucky to be out of the G.D. for it is the finishing stroke. In the "Standard" yesterday, there are rather more details as to the Horus exploits at the Cape, and her giving herself out as having been taught by the Mahatmas. This reflects on the T[hosophical] S[ociety], and, I should suppose, the B.B. will

not fail to make use of this exposure against both the T.S. and the G.D. It would seem as if the Hori had *bought* their Initiation for the express purpose of misusing the information given them.

The more I study the system, the more truth and beauty I see in it, and it is very lamentable the G.D. should have come to an end, which, virtually, it has done by this dismal exposure.

I have not had a touch of Bronchitis since I have been here. The air is dry and it is a very nice bit of country.

65

Grove Lodge, Saffron Walden  
17 October 1901

I should not like to ask either of those you mention,<sup>1</sup> so I must wait till you return, when I shall be much obliged to you to send them to me.

Years ago I invented a cure for cockroaches, and have cleared several houses of them. It is Calomel, i.e. submuriate of Mercury. Get a quarter of an ounce of it at the Chemist's. Then take a piece of dough about the size of an egg, and mix half of the  $\frac{1}{4}$  oz with it, break it up into small pellets, and put it into any small holes about the kitchen fire-place, or where they most congregate. If there is an ash-pit, as there is to most kitchen fire-places, take up the grating, and put the pellets into any small holes or corners in the brick-work. They eat it greedily. After the first application, you will see quite a few changed to almost white. Then mix the remainder of the Calomel with another piece of dough, and place that as before. I have always found twice sufficient, but it is possible that a third dose might be necessary. I wish you success. Kind regards.

<sup>1</sup> i.e., for copies of G.D. manuscripts.

66

Grove Lodge, Saffron Walden  
11 November 1901

I think you must be at home by this time and that perhaps you have forgotten the MSS I am in need of. I am stopped in my work for want of them, so please excuse me reminding you of my needs.

It has occurred to me that perhaps the Oracle numbers you were wishing for, are contained in P. Christian's 'Histoire de la Magie' which I suppose you have. At p.177 is given an account as to Cagliostro predicting all the events of the first French Revolution, and even of the whole career of Napoleon Buonaparte whilst he was yet a Pupil at the École Militaire, and the system by which he did it, which is really the Taro, only a different way of working it. It is farther corroborated [*sic*] in the next chapter (3rd book) p.253 by another Adept, Pierre le Clerc using the same system for Napoleon himself.

I was trying to work this at Chacombe, but interruptions and troubles came which made me partly forget it. Perhaps you may have missed seeing this.

There was a droll, tho', in one sense, a serious incident here a few days since. Sanger's Circus came and pitched itself on the Common which my house overlooks. There was an Elephant who did wonderful and amusing feats. When the performance was over and all gone to bed, he broke loose, sallied out, went to a farm-yard on the N. side of the common, lifted the gate off its hinges, carried it off for a  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile, returned to the entrance he had effected, broke down part of a barn, and helped himself largely to a quantity of barley which had been thrashed out that very day. The serious part is that the damage is between £50 and £60 and the Farmer is a poor man. I suppose he will recover it off Sangers who are credited with being very rich. Perhaps the Elephant thought they had not given him enough supper.

67

Grove Lodge, Saffron Walden  
13 November 1901

I think you must be misunderstanding my position in the G.D. I am 5 = 6 and as such have a right to MSS belonging to it. I underwent the first Exams and was ready and willing and capable of undergoing all further Exams, but Mathers said, as I knew so much it was not necessary for me to go thro' the formality of Exams, and I was admitted to 5 = 6, S[apere] A[ude] officiating. In consequence, I suppose, of this irregularity, some of the MSS were not sent to me, as they ought to have been, but I have the [illegible] of Enoch, the Clavis Tabularum Enoch, Consecration Ceremony, [illegible] Chameleonis, parts of Ritual Z. &c. From my possessing these, it is evident that I was entitled to the whole of them, but, thro' some inadvertence they were not sent to me. I feel sure S.A. [Westcott] would have ordered them to be sent to me, if I had asked for them, but I went off on another track [i.e., Alchemy] which is a legitimate part of Rosicrucianism, the Chemical [i.e., Alchemy], and neglected to ask for them.

As you were so long at Bournemouth I applied again at head-quarters, and was told the MSS were not there, but in some one's hands to be revised. This is the real reason I cannot have them, and revision is a long process. I should not have thought of asking you for them, if I had not a right to them. The T. Enochian Calls, I more especially want immediately, and I still hope you will be kind enough to send me them.

The G.D. is now so disorganised that the Obligation practically ceases to be binding. The Horos case has given it its death-blow, not so much from the Public Trial, as from the fact that the Ritual and the knowledge MSS are not only in the hands of the Police but also have been printed by the Editor of "Wings of Truth" to whom, I suppose, they had been previously sold. What has become quite Public, there can be no harm in your lending me, even if I were not entitled to them from any Grade.

AYTON got many of his facts wrong in the letter that follows. For the Fratres Lucis, the Order of Light and the Sat B'hai see my 'Fringe Masonry in England, 1870-85' in *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, vol.85 for 1972. Lord Lindsay (1847-1913), who succeeded to the Earldom of Crauford and Balcarres in 1880, was never a member of the Sat B'hai. He had more sense! Ayton joined it in May 1883 but was admitted without payment of any fee. His Obligation form is illustrated opposite.

68

Grove Lodge, Saffron Walden  
18 January 1902

My idea is that the Fratres Lucis and the Order of Light are one and the same.<sup>1</sup> Portman left this Order in my hands, and I think I can say positively that [John] Yarker and Lord Lindsay were not in it. Tis true Portman at Yarker's request, allowed me to let Yarker see the Ritual and copy it, but nothing further.<sup>2</sup>

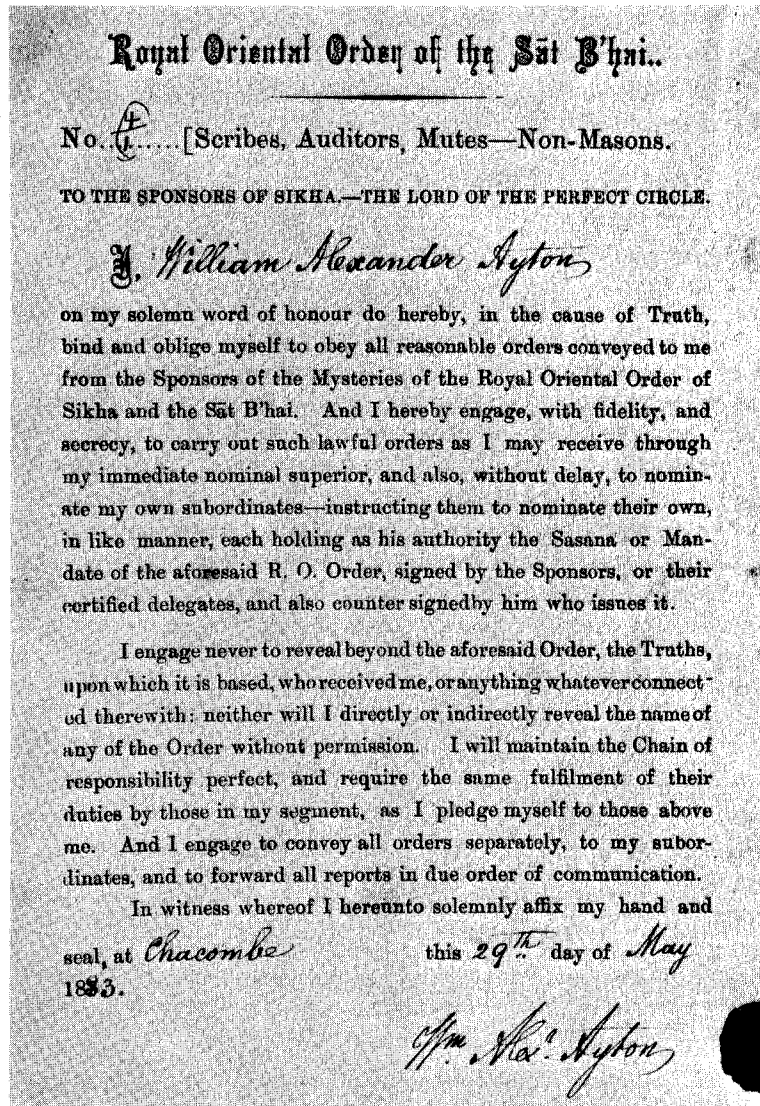
I think probably you are mixing up the Order of the 'Sat B'hai' (7 brethren) with the Order of Light. Yarker and Kenneth Mackenzie instituted this. Then they quarrelled, and each went on with it in their own way. It was said that Yarker quarrels with every one. I have had much correspondence with him and found him very pleasant and learned, and very intelligent, tho' he worked much at ordinary Spiritualism.

To the best of my recollection, the Ritual of the Sat Bhai is so complicated, that it would require an Indian Temple to carry it out thoroughly. It is very likely that (the late) Lord Lindsay as well as Yarker, was in it, but I have no cognisance of it.

I keep quite free from Bronchitis here, and am very busy so write in haste.

<sup>1</sup> They were not. The Fratres Lucis existed mainly in F. G. Irwin's imagination, even if he managed to recruit a few (half a dozen?) carefully selected initiates.

<sup>2</sup> Yarker clearly copied the ritual and handed the Order to some friends in the Bradford area. It still exists obscurely today.



The Revd W. A. Ayton's Sat B'hai Certificate

AYTON continued to invent myths. Lord Lindsay was not initiated on the Continent but at Cambridge when still an undergraduate in 1866. The fact that he later became a Senior Grand Warden in the United Grand Lodge of England and Deputy Provincial Grand Master for West Lancashire and a Provincial Grand Master for Aberdeen West merely indicates that noblemen were then almost automatically promoted to very senior offices. I have not been able to identify any specially 'Occult Lodge' in England and doubt whether anything of the kind existed.

For Frederick Hockley see John Hamill's forthcoming study *The Rosicrucian Seer* (Aquarian Press, 1986).

*Zanoni* (1842), a novel by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, was said to be a 'Rosicrucian' novel and was once greatly admired by occultists although for what reason I cannot fathom.

69

Grove Lodge, Saffron Walden  
22 January 1902

You have asked me a question, which, I fear I am not competent to answer fully. I knew the late Lord Lindsay most by a book published by him, entitled "Progression by Antagonism", a very Philosophical work, shewing great learning and acquaintance generally with Occultism. I have not read it for years, and unfortunately I cannot lay my hands on it to refresh my memory. My impression of what I do recollect of it, is, that he had been initiated on the Continent, as so many of our Nobility were at the beginning of last century, especially Scotch Noblemen. I do not think there was any opportunity for him to work practically at any Occult Lodge in England. The late Fredk. Hockley was about the only man doing anything in that line, and his was only with a Magic Mirror and a Clairvoyante. He has told me that often he has had Noblemen come to him to work with him and his Magic Mirror. If there had been anything higher than that going, Hockley would have been in it, and in the conversations I have had with him, he would have told me of what was going on in that way. He knew the original of Glyndon in "Zanoni", who was living at Highgate, I think. The late Ld

Lindsay would be likely to take up with the Sat B'hai and work at it, but I have no exact information that he did so. I should say that his working, if any, was on the Continent. In his said book he makes some strictures on Occultism.

The G.D., according to what little I hear, is practically in the hands of the B.B. [the Jesuits] who have worked on their old principle of "Divide et impera", and have succeeded in breaking it up, which is always their aim with Occult Orders. The wish to keep it on is not sincere on the part of at least one. It is only a blind to keep it in the hands of the B.B.

Be careful as to Bronchitis. I am glad you are getting over it. Here, I have not had a trace of it as yet, and I go out in all weathers.

70

Grove Lodge, Saffron Walden  
24 June 1903

You are quite right to take every precaution for this MS being returned to you in case of anything happening to me.

I have ventured to make a slight alteration, as my acting Executor would know nothing about MSS, and might mislay the Memorandum or forget it, which would make it much safer. I will ask my Solicitor to place my instructions to him about it with my Will. Perkins is not only my Solicitor but a personal friend, and will, I know, carry out my instructions to the letter.

The rest of what you wished I have embodied as exactly as possible in the accompanying document. If you wish any alteration made, just write it in to it, return it to me, and I will recopy it and send it to you.

As an Occultist I am at one with you as to the rule of safeguarding all valuable MSS &c. from the profane.

If what I have written meets with your approval, I shall be glad to have the MS as soon as it is convenient to you to send it, that I may begin on it at once.

71

Grove Lodge, Saffron Walden  
18 September 1903

I have to thank you for a copy of your "Catalogue Raisonné" just received. It is very good of you to think of me.

You ask for information as to other books. You only give Mylius' "Anatomia Auri" &c. In Dufresney's "Philosophie Hermetique" he gives "Opus Medico-Chymicum" &c. and also "Philosophia Reformata" as being by Mylius.

I am at work copying Jean Saulnier, and shall send off another 30 pages to L.O. [Percy Bullock] today or tomorrow.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> i.e., Gardner's *Catalogue Raisonné of Rosicrucian Books* (1903), published privately in an edition of 500 copies. It reflects his interests as a collector rather than his scholarship.

<sup>2</sup> Oeuvre de Jean Saulnier à son fils, No. 15 (Kohn MSS), in R. A. Gilbert's *Hermetica Catalogue*, no. 25, 1981.

72

Grove Lodge, Saffron Walden  
10 March 1904

I send you the MS formerly in the possession of d'Espagnet. I kept it till I should have my copy of it returned by L[evavi] O[culos: i.e., Percy Bullock] to read as I had not attended to it much in copying it. L.O. has not sent me my copy yet, he has been too busy in preparing for his avocation. I was expecting mine to be returned much sooner.

Some parts of the MS are, as I think, valueless and I did not copy them.

I am glad that Mrs Gardner and yourself are well, tho' the weather has been abominable and seems likely to continue so. I am only moderately well and cannot walk as I used to do. Yet I do get out every fine day.

I do hope England will not be dragged into this Jap-Russ war. The Jesuits are behind it all. Gladstone, with the Jesuits behind him, in a public speech, alluded to the Tsar as the "Divine figure of the North". The Jesuits have been calculating on the

supposed huge power of Russia to crush Protestant England. The supposed great power seems likely to turn out to have been a big bubble, which having become too large, bursts. If so, it will make a great difference, a great bully having been removed.

There is a noted person coming to reside at Lord Braybrook's princely mansion at Audley End close to Saffron Walden. It is Lord Howard de Walden, whose yearly income is reported to be £200,000. His age is just 26 years. He has leased Audley End for seven years. Charles II resided for some time at Audley End, and at Newport, a few miles off, lived his mistress, Nell Gwynne. The house she inhabited is still there.

73

Grove Lodge, Saffron Walden  
30 November 1905

I have the (so-called) Tables of Rotalo, which I obtained at your instigation in 1901, but, as then you pronounced against it, as you will see by your letter of that date now inclosed, which I found in the MS, I do not see what use it can be to you. I have never given any sustained attention to it, being otherwise much engaged. I do not know any one who has anything else upon the subject. There is a bare possibility that there might be some account of it in Harmsworth's Cyclopaedia, as there are some allusions to the Occult in that, but it is very unlikely.

There is a book you ought to read, if you have not, entitled "The Law of Psychic Phenomena: a working Hypothesis, &c. &c. by Thomson Jay Hudson, ninth impression. London: G. E. Putnam's Sons. 1905." It will cause a great stir in the U.S., where it was first published. It is remarkable, tho' my long experience makes me think he has made some errors.

In the September No. of "Chamber's Journal" there is a very curious story told by Commander Chambers of a most romantic adventure of a Naval Officer named Anson, entitled "The Past, the Present, and the Future". The Occult comes in as a part of it. Anson says the first 2 have come to pass, and he is sure the 3rd will, but as that involves a war with Germany and England, it is difficult to believe it. However, the Kaiser is as mad as a

hatter, and there is no knowing what folly a mad man may commit. There seems to be some evidence that the Jesuits have got hold of him, and, of course, they would like to bring on a war which would cripple one or both of the great Protestant Powers.

Thanks for inquiries as to my health. I have not been at all well. My old complaint has troubled me much, and I am in my 90th year.

THE LETTERS now come to an end. There may have been more, but in view of Gardner's hoarding instincts this seems unlikely. Correspondence was not absolutely necessary because at that time Saffron Walden could be reached by rail from London and I imagine that Gardner, Percy Bullock and Julius Kohn would have made occasional visits.

By 1903 the Golden Dawn had ceased to exist in its original form. A. E. Waite had gained control of what he called the 'Independent Branch of the Order' – in fact what remained of the membership of the Isis-Urania Temple – and co-opted Ayton as a co-Chief, 'he being the senior Adept among us'.<sup>1</sup> Living a secluded life in the country he continued to copy alchemical manuscripts and to allow Gardner, Bullock and Kohn to make their own transcriptions.

W. B. Yeats certainly had recent news of him when he wrote to Lady Gregory on 20 January 1902. He mentioned that 'my alchemist is very anxious to have a look at that magic book of Robert's. He says that it is really valuable. Can you bring it when you come? He has just made what he hopes is the Elixir of Life. If the rabbit on whom he is trying it survives we are all to drink a noggin full – at least all of us whose longevity he feels he could encourage.'<sup>2</sup> However, the rabbit died.

Ayton published one book. There is no copy of *The Life of John Dee, translated from the Latin of Dr Thomas Smith* (Theosophical Publishing Society, 1908) either in the British Library or the Library of Congress. For the rest, a small number of his copies of old alchemical manuscripts are now scattered in various collections. With the widespread availability of copying machines it is unlikely that many will follow Ayton's and his

friends' example and laboriously transcribe ancient documents.

He died on 1 January 1909, a legendary and even revered figure among such occultists who had known him.

1 A. E. Waite, *Shadows of Life and Thought* (1938), p. 228.

2 *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. by Alan Wade (1954).

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