

A NOBLE ROSICRUCIAN APOLOGIST

Ralph M. Lewis, FRC

Ralph Lewis served as Emperor of the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC from 1939 to 1987. In this article, a reprint from the Rosicrucian Digest October 1956, he extols the courage and convictions of two great defenders of the Rosicrucians of the early 1600s—Robert Fludd of England and Michael Maier of Germany and explores Francis Bacon's connection with the Rosicrucians of that time.



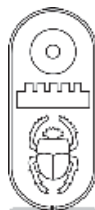
Everyone has his or her convictions, whether they are born of belief or experience. Such convictions constitute our fount of knowledge. Philosophically, the idea of belief as knowledge may be challenged. It can be contended that, to have reality, knowledge must be capable of being confirmed by sense experience. Nevertheless, for many persons, where there is the absence of a conflicting reality, a belief stands as a personal conception, a point of knowledge.

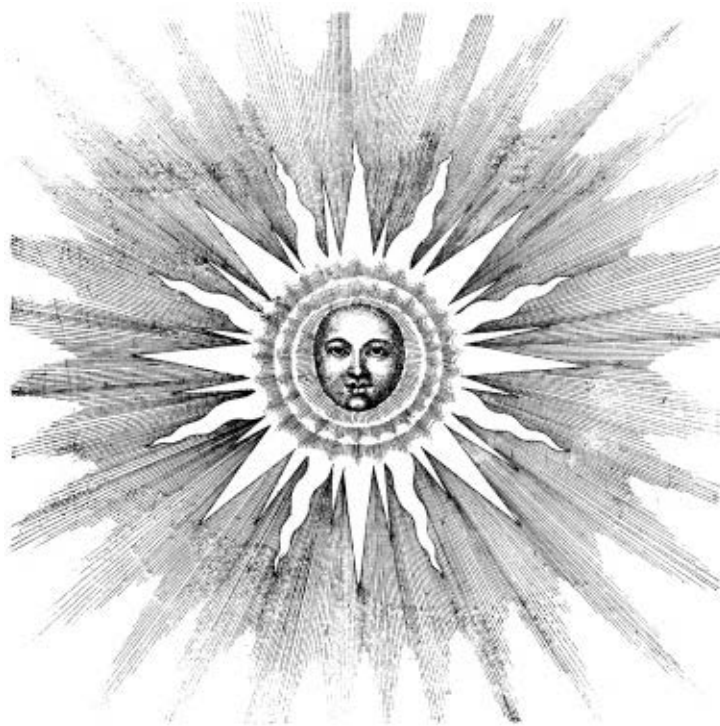
Such convictions become an intimate part of the personality of the individual. One's intellectual self, if it is well defined, participates in one's state of preservation equally with one's physical well-being. A strong conviction has the character of reality to the mind. It has as much existence as does our body or our family. Opposition to the conviction will, therefore, arouse as much resistance as a corresponding attack upon the person or character. The sensitivity of the personality, the emotional state of the individual, determines the degree of retaliation to any opposition to a conviction just as it does to an offense against the physical being or character. Convictions, points of knowledge, which have become intimately associated with the moral or religious ideals of an individual are defended more fervently than others. They are root-

ed deeply in one's psychic and emotional nature.

Robert Fludd was a man of moral convictions that were not a mere inheritance of ideas. They are set in an intellectual framework, the consequence of personal long study, experience, and meditation. As a consequence, a challenge of his convictions called forth such a defensive action in words and deeds as to require great fortitude. It is one thing to utter aloud our beliefs in tolerant surroundings; it is quite another to speak of them in a hostile era and before an antagonistic mentality – and the latter is what Fludd did, not once but many times.

In the beautiful rolling countryside of Kent, England, near the picturesque village of Bearsted, are the remains of Milgate House, the manorial home of Robert Fludd. The original structure, of which a portion now remains, and to which additions have subsequently been built, was erected by Sir Thomas Fludd. He was Treasurer of War to the celebrated Queen Elizabeth I. It was there that Robert Fludd was born in 1574. The setting is one of inspiration today. One sees patches of wooded land, interspersed with small acreages of hops bisected by pleasant streams along which little flocks of sheep graze. One feels quite isolated from the political and social





turmoil of the times. This tranquility must have touched the consciousness and spirit of Fludd at an early age. Near the house of his birth are the rose farm and other gardens where he cultivated the plants used in his pharmaceutical and alchemical experiments.

At a time when higher education was, to an extent, a luxury, young Robert was fortunate to have a parent whose economic status permitted him to attend college. He matriculated at St. John's Oxford on November 10, 1592, and took his M.A. degree in 1598. After attaining his Master's degree, he spent the next six years in study and travel on the Continent. This practice of travel and study in foreign lands among cultured Europeans, then and in more recent times, when conditions permit, was considered a requisite for education.

Fludd's study on the Continent was by no means confined to the furtherance of his knowledge of medicine. His pursuits were diversified and influenced by his interest in natural philosophy. His fascination by the sciences and his conscientious observations and analysis are reflected in his liter-

ary works and the methodical illustrations of their texts. He maintained a laboratory during his sojourn on the Continent, in which he constructed various and strange mechanical devices, one of which was a self-playing lyre. Many of these devices, it is reported, had a useful value. In fact, some writers credit Fludd with being the original inventor of the barometer.

Era of Intellectuals

It would appear that Fludd's pharmaceutical studies led him to the threshold of alchemy – and he crossed over. Alchemy being contiguous to and allied with Hermeticism and Occult Philosophy, Fludd soon found interest in the Rosicrucian philosophy. He pursued diligently the teachings and doctrines of Paracelsus, which much of his own later ideas paralleled. There are many circumstances which would indicate that Fludd made the acquaintance, while on the Continent, of the celebrated German Rosicrucian Grand Master and Hermetic philosopher, Michael Maier. Though Maier was but in his thirties, he was then known for his writings on Hermeticism and the Kabbalah.

In Maier, Fludd must have found a virtual treasure because of the former's quest for magic, the secret lore and order behind the phenomena of nature. In young Fludd, Maier found a keen intellect, an uninhibited imagination, and a devout love for esoteric wisdom. Fludd returned to England and was admitted to the practice of medicine in 1606. In 1609 he became a member of the College of Physicians.

The versatility of Fludd's talents was being expressed in other channels than that of medicine. He became,

as well, a philosopher, an anatomist, physicist, chemist, mathematician, and engineer. His literary works were numerous and brilliant, though often ponderous. Some of the principal ones are: *Apologia Compendiaria pro Fraternitate de Rosae Crucis* (Leyden 1616); *Tractatus Apologeticus Integritatem Societatis de Rosae Crucis Defendens* (Leyden 1617); *Mosaical Philosophy, Tractatus Theologo-philosophicus*, etc. (1617); a treatise



Robert Fludd.

in three parts, dedicated to the Rosicrucian fraternity, and *Summum Bonum* (Frankfort, 1629). In addition, he wrote numerous tracts on Kabbalistic Theosophy and Rosicrucian doctrines, as well as on faith healing.

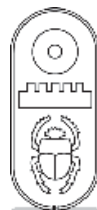
Grand Master Michael Maier visited England sometime between 1614 and 1620 – the exact date is in dispute. This followed closely the issuance of the famous *Fama* and the later *Confessio*, the former being the first public announcement of the Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross. These pamphlets became the focal point of considerable controversy. There were those who, after reading them, immediately became hostile to the Rosicrucian move-

ment. The liberal views, as set forth in the *Fama* and in the *Confessio*, antagonized the Roman Catholic Hierarchy which thought it saw in them an alliance with the Lutherans. There were also those of the vast multitude who were fascinated by the proclaimed aims of the Rosicrucians, having never heard of the secret movement previously. There were, too, those individuals who sought to exploit the public interest aroused by the pamphlets in the Rosy Cross Brotherhood by avowing their membership in it.

While in England, Maier renewed his association with Robert Fludd. Historians within the Rosicrucian Order, and most of those others who had chosen to write its history as a literary achievement, declare that Maier then initiated Fludd into its higher degrees. It was in 1618 that Maier published his *Themis Aurea* in Latin, which contained the laws of the Fraternity of the Rosy Cross. These were perhaps imparted to

Fludd or followed as a result of their private conclaves. Subsequently, at least, Robert Fludd became a Magus of the Order in England. He *fearlessly* let his identity with the Order be known. He even expounded the general objectives of the Order, as its proselytizer, to his colleagues in the medical profession in London where he practiced. He had their respect because he was called "eminent in his medical capacity."

It must not be inferred from the foregoing that Robert Fludd was the first person of the Rosicrucian Order to bring it to the attention of his country people. There is evidence that the Rosicrucian Order was known in England before the *Fama* was issued in its original version in about 1614.



The Order was also known some eleven or twelve years before Michael Maier initiated Fludd into the higher degrees as a Magus on the occasion of his visit to England.

One account relates that, on January 6, 1604, the Queen held a masque ball at Whitehall. Inigo Jones, celebrated architect, was commissioned to design the costumes for the gentlemen. Over one of the sketches Inigo Jones submitted, he had inscribed the words, "A Rosicross." Thus evidently the Rosicrucians were sufficiently well known so that a character designated "A Rosicross" would have significance. As F. de P. Castells, well-known historian of arcane orders, has written, if the ball occurred on January 6, 1604, most certainly Inigo Jones would have prepared the sketches at least a few weeks before for the consideration of Her Majesty. This being so, it constituted evidence that the Rosicrucians were known in England as early as 1603.

Ben Jonson, playwright, whose most noted work is *The Alchemist*, was actively associated in many enterprises with Inigo Jones. It is he, we are informed, who often interpreted certain allegorical references for the crown. Jonson said, in effect, that "A Rosicross" might be called a mere fool because he represents a man who foolishly labors under the opinion that merely declaring himself a Rosicrucian would thus make him a member of the secret brotherhood. Jonson then adds that such a person foolishly believes that he has "vowed himself into the airy (lofty) Order." Jon-

son concludes that anyone who so merely vowed himself deserves to be called "a mere fool." The costume, then, was not in derision of the Order but to signify a fool, one who thought himself "A Rosicross" by the mere wearing of a costume and so declaring himself. All of this discussion, we repeat, does establish the fact of knowledge of the Order before either the issuance of the *Fama* or Fludd's initiation by Maier in or about 1615.



Michael Maier.

Though historians, not within the circle of the Rosicrucian or Masonic Orders, consider Francis Bacon's connection with the Brethren of the Rosy Cross a controversial subject, those of the above Orders, in the main, are convinced of such relation. Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam, was actually associated with prominent Rosicrucians of the

period and was followed by those who met as an "invisible college." Bacon's *New Atlantis*, published in 1627, has a number of points of striking similarity to the objectives set forth in the *Fama*. Especially is this so of the "House of Solomon" (sages' home) where learned people were to gather and devote their lives to the acquisition of knowledge. Further, the requirements of these sages of the New Atlantis parallel the moral obligations exacted from the Brethren of the Rosy Cross. Cryptographers, interpreting the hidden code in Bacon's writings, have brought forth much that can only be construed in the light of his affiliation with the Rosy Cross.

Though, in Rosicrucian circles, Bacon is recognized as having been the Emperor of the Order for England, Robert Fludd is



Francis Bacon.

accepted as the *Magus* or Grand Master of England. Bacon's prominence at court and the strong political enemies which he had, necessitated the concealment of his connections with the Order at the time. There must have been the greatest collaboration between Robert Fludd and Francis Bacon.

Bacon was a genius of the time and though Fludd was also an exceedingly learned man, we can, without detracting from his eminence, assume that he echoed, in his writings, some of the conceptions of Bacon.

In Defense of Truth

The attacks on the *Fama* by prominent Jesuits and others who sought to deride the Rosicrucian Order, terming it a newly organized Lutheran body and an anti-Christian secret society, evoked the force of Fludd's convictions. He became England's foremost Rosicrucian *apologist*. This is a classical term denoting one who argues in defense of a principle or cause. It is thought that Fludd wrote his *Apologia*, published in 1616, after Maier paid a visit to England and conferred the higher Rosicrucian degrees upon him. The courage of Fludd should be an incentive for Rosicru-

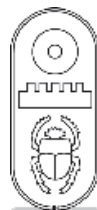
cians today, for the Order is still the victim of vilification by religious bigots.

Fludd staunchly defended the Brethren of the Rosy Cross in his *Tractatus Apologeticus*, published in 1617. In 1629, his *Summum Bonum* and *Sophice cum Moria Certamen* appeared. In 1633 Fludd writes: "Of the former so-called Rosicrucians, who are now known as Sapientes, Sophi, or Wise Men," that they "under the type of an architect erect their House of Wisdom." In much of Fludd's writing he used architectural terms as symbolic expressions. In fact, in certain Masonic records of the period there are charges, that is, orations, signed "Fludd." These use the same type of architectural phraseology as a symbolic language.

The teachings of Fludd, as mentioned previously, were greatly influenced by his study of Paracelsus. The latter's views are extended by his own scientific researches. Fludd's cosmology and theology are principally those of the continental Rosicrucian. There is much reference to the word magic in his writings. It must be understood that the word magic at this time had reference to the applications of many kinds of phenomena. Fludd classified magic under various headings, three of the principal ones being:

1. Natural magic "...that most occult and secret department of physics by which the mystical properties of natural substances are extracted;"
2. Mathematical magic, by which adepts are able to "construct marvelous machines by means of their geometrical knowledge;"
3. Divine magic, this being moral laws and theological precepts.

Fludd expounds that the universe proceeds from the Divine and will return to the Divine. Creation, he declares, is "the separation of the active principle (light)



from the passive (darkness) in the bosom of the Divine Unity (God).” The universe to him consists of three worlds: the archetypal (God), the macrocosm (the world), and the microcosm (humans). All parts of each world correspond to each other; that is, there is a harmonious parallelism between them. Fludd holds that things are not just the result of necessity but determinism, the will of God. In his work, *Mosaical Philosophy*, Chapter VII, he states:

For first of all what (I beseech you) is of greater antiquity than God, being that he was before anything? What is in geometry before or in measure less than a point? Or which among all the numbers of arithmetic is of so ancient a standing as is the unity? Wherefore it must needs follow, that God is free and voluntary in his actions, being that he was of himself, and did exist without any respect had unto any other...

Robert Fludd, then, as the Rosicrucians have ever done, denounced the superstitions which, in the mind of the masses, had been associated with the Brotherhood. He inveighed against “venefic, necrominic, goetic, malefic, and theurgic magic.” This put aside all attempts at communication with the dead, spiritism, and what is today also termed *black magic*. The writings of that later Rosicrucian, Johannes Kelpius, who in 1694 first brought the Rosicrucian teachings in an organic form to America, reflect much of the works of Robert Fludd.

Fludd’s pantheistic theories – the Divine in all things – were challenged by the astronomer Kepler. Their arguments constitute one of the literary achievements of the day. In reply to Kepler’s *Apologia*, Fludd says in part (1622):

Finally, Pythagoras, and all the other philosophers who were endowed with some touch of the Divine, recognized that God is one and indivisible.

Wherefore, we can argue syllogistically as follows:

- a. That which was a whole before any division is not a part of something;
- b. Now, the soul was a whole before any division;
- c. Therefore, it cannot be a part of nature.

On his death (1637) Fludd was buried in Holy Cross Church, Bearsted. This is but a few miles from Milgate House where he was born. A monument to him is now in the choir vestry under the tower of that centuries-old edifice. It bears an inscription extolling his virtues. The memorial monument “is a copy of Camden’s monument in Westminster Abbey.” There is a brass plate in the flagging of the church, indicating where Fludd’s body is interred. Those Rosicrucians who gaze upon the monument are fortified in their convictions, and their courage is renewed to defend anywhere at any time the Order’s noble purpose.

