

The Fragments are Gathered Up:

Notes on the life, work & legacy of Mrs Ethel Felkin and the Tarot of the Golden Dawn.

Marcus Katz

“Having now revised the 22 Atouts or Trumps in succession, it will be wise for the student to reverse the process and seek to follow the Path of the Pilgrim from below upwards, thus seeking to comprehend the interior process of Initiation and Illumination. It is a process in which the whole Universe does not disdain to take part, for Man is himself the Microcosm of the Macrocosm, and the Child of the Gods. And again, the Macrocosm must itself undergo a corresponding process in which the experience not only of humanity but of each individual must be an integral part. The fragments are gathered up into the baskets, that nothing may be lost; and from the feeding of the multitude there remains not less but more than the unbroken bread and fish - fit emblems of Earth and Water.

Cease not to seek day and night the Purifying Mysteries.”

Ethel Felkin, writing as G.H. Soror, Q.L.



Introduction

Mrs Ethel Felkin is not widely regarded as a stellar player in the dramatic personae of the Golden Dawn, and indeed, is not mentioned at all in Mary K. Greer's "Women of the Golden Dawn."ⁱ However, Israel Regardie wrote that of her "unofficial" paper on the Golden Dawn Tarot, "The Tarot Trumps"ⁱⁱ often reproduced under her Magical Motto of "Quaero Lucem,"ⁱⁱⁱ "certain aspects of this interpretation are not without high significance."^{iv}

[Illus 1. Ethel Felkin]

It should be realised that in the Golden Dawn, the Tarot trumps were not only divinatory props but also teaching tools and significant items of regalia in the initiatory rituals. It is in this latter light that Regardie suggests we read Ethel Felkin's descriptions. The cards were revealed to the Initiate at precise moments of ceremony, to anchor certain themes of teaching and realisation that would only later become apparent as the Initiate progressed on their spiritual journey.

The Golden Dawn version of the Tarot cards was probably designed by Mathers, drawing on the work of Eliphas Levi, and executed by his wife, Moina, a student in the Slade School of Art. However, the cards were hand-copied by members as part of their training, so variations arose. The Golden Dawn deck that is widely published is based on Israel Regardie's sketches, but these were based on the Felkin's own

interpretation of the deck, so the deck was amended to accord with the Mathers original intentions, according to Robert Wang.

A modern re-creation of the Felkin-based Whare Ra cards is available from:

<http://www.classicgd.bigstep.com/>

And is reviewed at <http://www.ata-tarot.com/reflections/03-15-05/goldendawn.htm>

The Life of Ethel Felkin



[*Illus 2. R.W. Felkin*]

Ithell Colquhoun writes that “Ethel was extremely mediumistic,”^v and indeed Dr Robert Felkin, Ethel and daughter sat in a “family circle” to contact Hidden Chiefs, the “Sun Masters,” to rival those contacts of other members of the Golden Dawn such as Mathers and Waite. Dr. Felkin had learnt techniques of trance-mediumship and clairvoyance whilst in Florence Farr’s secret group, The Sphere^{vi}. Ethel was widely travelled, met Steiner and many other luminaries during her time in England and across Europe, and moved to New Zealand with her husband and daughter in the early 1900’s. In the 1920’s, after her husband’s death, she took over the running of the Stella Matutina lodge, Smaragdum Thalasses,^{vii} in New Zealand.

This Lodge, founded in New Havelock, was to become a significant vortex of magical energies. The house which was built for the Felkins, Whare Ra^{viii} was constructed in 1913 by the architect J.W. Chapman-Taylor and is described as having,

“A long verandah extends between two gables, the nearest of which contains a formal entry into a large drawing room, where adherents of the Temple of the Golden Dawn met before descending via a circuitous stairway to the temple.”^{ix}

[*Illus 4. Whare Ra House*]



[*Illus 3. J.W. Chapman-Taylor*]



At it’s height, the Lodge had three hundred members. According to Pat Zalewski, despite the common political upheavals of magical orders, the actual ritual practice of the New Zealand group, based on talks he had with prior members, was extremely advanced and accomplished. Zalewski’s research made it clear that the Golden Dawn did not die out in the early 1900’s but indeed blossomed on the other side of the world until at least the late 1970’s.

The Whare Ra house is still open as a centre of Arts and Crafts, and apparently the basement Temple space is extremely spacious. In 1939, Mrs Felkin had purchased land near Taupo to establish a centre for propagating organic and biodynamic horticulture/agriculture, as well as a retreat centre^x. She wrote that this centre aspired to, “the study and practice of Spiritual Wisdom in all its aspects; a centre designed to link together all men and women of goodwill, irrespective of their particular beliefs or methods of working^{xi}.”

The legacy of the Felkin family spreads out further; in around 1940, Felkin’s daughter said to the “New Thinker” Herbert Sutcliffe, “On Yonder hill you will pitch your tent,”^{xii} pointing to the nearby Te Mata Peak. In a couple of years, he purchased a large house, Swarthmoor, on the slopes of the peak, and created Pelho (Peace, Love, Harmony) as a Retreat and Teaching Centre.

[As a side-note, Herbert Sutcliffe, who founded the “Radiant Living” movement, taught Sir Edmund Hillary, who, with the Sherpa guide Tensing Norgay, became the first people to stand on Earth’s highest point, the summit of Mt. Everest;

“A Dr Herbert Sutcliffe was in town and he was talking about a new philosophy - Radiant Living. My family and I went along to his first lecture and were very impressed. It was a combination of Christianity, psychology and health and fitness and it just seemed to fit our needs at the time. We became members and when Dr Sutcliffe introduced training classes I qualified first in the course and became a Teacher of Radiant Living. I gained quite a lot from Radiant Living - I learned to speak confidently from the platform and even started thinking more freely on important topics. But finally my enthusiasm faded, as it always seemed to do. I developed the conviction that I was trying to escape from ordinary life, so I reluctantly withdrew from the organisation.^{xiii}”]



In 1970 the Taupo Council bought the land originally owned by Mrs Felkin and in 1971 the Tauhara Trust (an off-shoot of the Whare Ra group) bought land in Acacia Bay, just outside Taupo, where the Trust^{xiv} currently operates.

[*Illus 5. Tauhara Centre*]

The Tauhara Centre is described as “the expression of an unfolding vision,” and this vision was truly given impetus by the life and work of Ethel Felkin. The Trust currently hold the Felkin’s library and other Whare Ra ritual implements, although apparently many documents and items were burnt when the original Order closed in 1978^{xv}.

The Tarot Paper

Although we cannot in this article explore every nuance of this short but deep work by Mrs Felkin, we can briefly highlight some of the more interesting statements and begin their exploration.

In the “unofficial” paper on the Tarot Trumps, Ethel Felkin, as G.H. Soror Q.L., writes, “the three Trumps attributed to the Elemental Paths are perhaps the most

difficult to understand.”^{xvi} She goes on to say “they represent the action of the forces exterior to the experience of humanity ... the impact of the Supernals upon the sublunary.” That is to say, they pictorially represent transcendental influences impacting on our awareness. These three cards are the Fool (Air), The Hanged Man (Water) and the Last Judgement (Fire). The fourth element, Earth is attributed to the Universe card.

She depicts these three cards as representing pure spirit, sacrifice and judgement. There are references to Felkin describing the Inner Order mysteries and rituals as “Christian” and we can see an apparently Christian ethos from the description of the Last Judgement; “He [the Pilgrim] is not the Judge nor does decision rest in his hands. Lazarus cannot emerge from the Sepulchre until the Voice cries out, ‘Come Forth!’ Nor can he cast aside the conflicting grave-clothes until the command, ‘Loose him!’ is given.”



[Illus 6. Whare Ra Temple]

If we look a little deeper though, we see that she also refers in her paper to the ‘sepulchre of environment’ and the ‘trammels of desire’ (i.e. the grave-clothes). This is a clear statement of metaphor and correspondence to both personal development and the initiatory ritual itself for those who can look beyond the blind of religious language. The Voice is both the officer in the initiation ritual who speaks for the candidate’s Higher Self, and the Higher Self who is ourselves recognising the illusion of the apparent (the Sepulchre) and free from our attachment to the material (grave-clothes).

These Elemental cards hence show the spiritual light shining in the material darkness in four guises; beneath (and within) all activity a single unification (that ultimately is ‘no-thing’ or Zero, i.e. The Fool) dwells, our awareness is ‘upside-down’ to reality and drowned (to the bombardment of senses) whilst we remain in our illusionary attachment to our perceptions, which we must sacrifice (the Hanged Man), and Reality is constantly present throughout our activities and indwells our every action (the Last Judgment) but our actions come to naught because they are based on an illusion. The apparent environment is both Reality and the Illusion in a cosmic dance (the Universe) and it is here that we are called to the Awakening Journey (the Fool).

There are other important Mysteries that Felkin alludes to; of the Chariot, Strength and the Hermit, she writes, “these three trumps should be collated in studying them for they represent the three stages of initiation.”^{xvii} Unfortunately there is no opportunity in this present article to explore this further, but as a starter one could consider that the Hermit represents the Seeker on their Way (Neophyte), Strength represents the Seeker in Relationship to their Self, (Adeptus Minor) and the Chariot represents the Seeker in Relationship to the Universe (Magister Templi). In terms of the Tree of Life map of the Initiation System, the first is the initiation into the Work, passing the Guardian of the Threshold, the second is the initiation passing the Veil, and the third is the initiation crossing the Abyss.

She writes that The Devil “should be studied in conjunction with No. 13.” (i.e. Death). These two cards represent two fundamental forces in the Universe, locked together creating progress and life. Indeed, this is a theme that Crowley develops in his own Book of Thoth and the pair is described by Felkin as the “two great controlling forces of the Universe,” being “destructive and reproductive.” This contrast can be used to greater understanding when these cards appear in divination.

The Egyptian trilogy, Isis, Hathor and Nephthys are used to describe the feminine principles within the Tarot Trumps, with particular reference to the High Priestess, Empress and Justice. There is much that can be gained from contrasting this set of three cards and referring to Felkin’s descriptions.

The Legacy of Ethel Felkin

Ethel Felkin died in 1959 and is buried with her husband and daughter in the Havelock North Cemetery in New Zealand, within sight of her house, Whare Ra.

Not only did she preserve some of the important teachings of the Golden Dawn with regard to the ritual mysteries and usage of the Tarot, but her life constantly developed her vision; to never cease seeking the mysteries.

Contemporary beneficiaries of the magical currents initiated by the Felkins include Jen de Cabalis^{xviii} who was taught by Frank Salt, a former Chief of the Whare Ra Golden Dawn group, as was Pat Zalewski, author of many books on the Golden Dawn, and the first researcher to uncover the details of the New Zealand Golden Dawn stream. If you are interested in the story of his research, I recommend his book, “Secret Inner Order Rituals of the Golden Dawn.”^{xix}

ⁱ Women of the Golden Dawn, Greer, M. K. Park Street Press. 1995. ISBN 0-89281-516-7

ⁱⁱ <http://www.tarot.org.il/Library/Misc/The%20Tarot%20Trumps.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘Seeking Light’ [Nb. Although this motto literally means ‘seeking light’ it has passed un-remarked that Felkin’s Tarot paper ends with the phrase, “Cease not to seek day and night the Purifying Mysteries” which may indeed have been her actual motto. It is not uncommon for those taking on Latinised mottos to simplify the actual phrase for ease of translation. Note also that G.H. is simply ‘Greatly Honoured’.

^{iv} An Introduction to the Golden Dawn Tarot, Wang, R. Weiser (1978). Pg. 143. ISBN 0-87728-370-2

^v Sword of Wisdom, Colquhoun, I. Pg. 216. Neville Spearman (1975). ISBN 0-85435-092-6.

^{vi} Ibid, SOW, pg. 214

^{vii} ‘Emerald Seas’

^{viii} ‘House of the Sun’

^{ix} “*A History of New Zealand Architecture*”, Peter Shaw, photographs by Robin Morrison and Paul McCredie, revised edition, Hodder Moa Beckett, 2003.

^x New Zealand Occult and Esoteric Fraternities, <http://www.ace.net.au/darkmoon/nzoccult.htm>

^{xi} Islands of the Dawn - The story of Alternative Spirituality in New Zealand, by Robert S. Ellwood, pub. University of Hawaii Press, 1993 [In which find more details of the centre as a ‘zoekaiphos’, a “place of light and life” and the more Universalist direction of the Trust as emerging from the Golden Dawn tradition of Whare Ra]

^{xii} <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/Gallery/RadiLiv/Peloha.htm>

^{xiii} Hillary, E. *View from the Summit*. London, Doubleday, 1999, pp. 44-5

^{xiv} <http://www.tauharacentre.org.nz/>

^{xv} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whare_Ra

^{xvi} The Golden Dawn: Volume IV Book Eight, pg. 592.

^{xvii} Ibid, TGD, pg.590

^{xviii} <http://cabilis-topcities.com/> [http://www.jeandecabalis.com/Whare_Atua/index.htm (Revised JdC Apr-06)]

^{xix} The Secret Inner Order Rituals of the Golden Dawn. Zalewski, P. Falcon Press (1988). ISBN 0-941404-65-X

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