

H. SPENCER LEWIS

RESTORER OF ROSICRUCIANISM

Christian Rebisse, FRC

The Rosicrucian Order, AMORC is one of the most dynamic philosophical and initiatic organizations in the world. Rosicrucians are men and women who study natural laws in order to live in harmony with them.

The roots of the Rosicrucian Order go back to early seventeenth century Europe, with a traditional history that goes back much further than that, all the way back to the Ancient Mystery Schools of Egypt and Greece.

In this article Rosicrucian historian Christian Rebisse presents the inspiring life and vision of AMORC's founder, H. Spencer Lewis – Restorer of Rosicrucianism.



Harvey Spencer Lewis was born on November 25, 1883 in Frenchtown, New Jersey. A few years later his family moved to nearby New York City where he was raised.

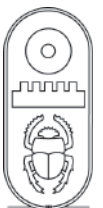
H. Spencer Lewis's family environment contributed much to the development of his mystical sensitivity. Not content with simply attending church on Sunday; the family read and also discussed the Bible at home. Until he was sixteen years old young Harvey participated enthusiastically in the

activities of the Metropolitan Temple of New York City also known as the Church of the Open Door. He loved to sing in the choir, and he listened attentively to the sermons of Dr. S. Parkes Cadman, the church pastor and a pioneering radio minister. H. Spencer Lewis often spent his free time meditating in this church, and it was here that he had his first mystical experiences. These experiences had such an impact on his soul that he was led to question himself about the profound nature of humanity and the possibility of establishing a dialogue between the soul and the higher worlds.

In March 1903 H. Spencer Lewis married Mollie Goldsmith, and the following year they had a son, Ralph Maxwell Lewis.

A Mystical Experience

In the spring of 1908, on the Thursday after Easter, while seated in a pew to meditate, he had a mystical experience that would affect the rest of his life. During this experience, he came to understand that the knowledge he sought could not be found in books, but rather deep within himself. He was also convinced that he had to go to France so as to come in contact with Rosicrucians. This mystical experience left



a profound impression upon H. Spencer Lewis and became the starting point for his "Pilgrim's Journey to the East."

In the hope of obtaining some information regarding Rosicrucianism in France, he decided to write to a Parisian bookseller whose catalogue he had obtained. We have not succeeded in identifying this individual, however this person contacted H. Spencer Lewis with the following reply:

If you came to Paris and found it convenient to call at the Studio of M. —, the professor of languages at No. —, Blvd. St. Germain, he might be able to tell you something of the circle of which you inquire. It might be advisable to hand him this note. Certainly a letter to him announcing your coming (by date and name of boat) would be courteous.

The Journey to France

Although his financial situation did not permit him to consider such a voyage, an unexpected opportunity presented itself the following week. His father, Aaron Lewis, an expert in authenticating documents as well as a renowned genealogist, needed an assistant while conducting research in France for the Rockefeller family. On July 24, 1909, the two men sailed for Europe on the *Amerika*, of the Hamburg Amerika Line. On Sunday, August 1, the ship arrived at Cherbourg, and the two travelers set off for Paris by train. The days that followed were entirely devoted to genealogical research, and it was only in the following week that H. Spencer Lewis was able to visit the bookshop and the professor of languages on Boulevard Saint-Germain. "A Pilgrim's Journey to the East" reported his meetings with the professor on Saturday, August 7, and on Monday, August 9. This man was about forty-five years old, spoke perfect English, and asked many probing questions to determine Lewis's intentions. At the end of the second meeting, he rec-

ommended that his American visitor travel to southern France, where he would receive further instructions.

Toulouse

Once again good fortune (or maybe more appropriately, Divine Providence) smiled upon our traveler, because his father had just planned to travel to southern France where he could continue his genealogical research for the Rockefeller family. On Tuesday, August 10, the two men left Paris, and following some adventures that H. Spencer Lewis interpreted as his having been put to the test, they arrived in Toulouse on Wednesday. On the following day, his father resumed his work and probably went to the *Donjon* (Keep or Old Tower) to consult the city archives. Meanwhile, H. Spencer Lewis went to the *Salle des Illustres* (Gallery of the Illustrious) of the Capitol, where he met an individual who was instrumental in bringing his quest to a successful conclusion. After a brief discussion, this person gave him a piece of paper on which was written the name of the street where he should go so as to meet some Rosicrucians.

H. Spencer Lewis does not disclose the name of this individual, but merely indicates that his profession was photography. Later, Ralph M. Lewis, his son, indicated that this person was an eminent photographer. In all likelihood, he was Clovis Lassalle, a photographer who specialized in the fine arts, archeology, commerce, and industry. This hypothesis is confirmed by the fact that H. Spencer Lewis's personal archives contain a letter that Lassalle wrote to him on August 26, 1909.

Around three o'clock in the afternoon, Lewis engaged a taxi and went to the address provided. ... After passing through the old town of Tolosa, he arrived at a stone edifice encircled by high walls and situated on a hill. It was in this castle that, according to "A Pilgrim's Journey to the



East,” he was initiated into the Rosicrucian Order. Although this text does not give any details regarding this ceremony, his autobiography provides some intriguing information. We learn that the person who greeted Lewis was Count Raynaud E. de Bellcastle-Ligne, a seventy-eight year old man, who lived here with his widowed daughter and whose means of living were modest, despite his noble origins. Speaking perfect English, he conducted Lewis to a drawing room where he questioned him about the psychic research he conducted in America, and showed great interest in his visitor’s previous mystical experiences.

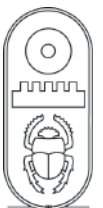
At the end of the interview, Count de Bellcastle-Ligne informed our pilgrim that the moment had now come for him to be initiated and asked whether he felt ready to confront the “terror of the threshold.” He was then led to the second floor of the chateau where he was shown what remained of an ancient Rosicrucian lodge. The count indicated that this temple had not been used for more than sixty years, although it had been visited by a few Freemasons on several occasions until 1890. His father had been the last presiding officer.

The conversation continued until the count stopped before an iron door to tell his visitor that he must now enter three chambers one after the other, “alone with God and his Master.” Carrying out the command, Lewis entered the first room, an antechamber. He then went into the

second room, a darkened place where he underwent the “test of the threshold”; he then had a mystical experience where he sensed once again the presence of the invisible being who had manifested to him the previous year. He finally came to the third room where the count awaited. The latter explained to him that this room no longer had the decorations or furnishings it once had, and consequently he was forced to adapt the initiation ceremony. The count led him to different places in the chamber and communicated the secret meaning of this ritual.

Now considering his visitor to be initiated, the old master led him into a little room. He recommended that the young man lie down, because he needed to rest in this room a few hours before meeting several other people. H. Spencer Lewis sat on a couch and dozed off. Upon awakening, he realized that he had slept for three hours. While asleep, he had dreamed the ceremony he was about to take part in. However, this time around, it was not the count who conducted him, but the “Master” whose presence he had perceived in the second chamber. After a short time, Bellcastle-Ligne introduced him to three elderly men whose forebears as well as themselves had been members of the Rosicrucian Order. At the end of this conversation, Lewis was led once more into the former lodge, where the count placed around his neck a cross adorned with a rose, thus signifying that he was now charged with the founding of the Order in America.

After this ceremony, one of the members present permitted Lewis to consult a collection in which the principles and major laws of the Order were represented. He was also allowed to copy the symbols and diagrams of the various Rosicrucian ceremonies. From a trunk placed in the middle of the room the count drew out some symbolic aprons, an altar cloth, and various archival documents so that the new initiate



could take note of the symbols belonging to the different degrees of the Order. Afterwards the necessary information for the establishment of Rosicrucianism in America was communicated to him. The man directing the meeting at this point was not the count, but an individual named, who acted as the master of ceremonies. Although the spelling of his name differs slightly, might this not be Clovis Lassalle, the photographer Lewis had met the same morning in the Gallery of the Illustrious? We would be tempted to think otherwise, seeing that the latter described the master of ceremonies as being the author of numerous historical documents, whereas we know that this photographer wrote no books. However, it is possible that his statement alludes to innumerable photographic works concerning archeology and prehistory that were produced by Clovis Lassalle. Whatever the case, the master of ceremonies informed H. Spencer Lewis that he was now in possession of all the necessary instructions, but that other inner experiences were yet to come. He concluded by requesting that no lodge be opened in America before 1915.

On August 13, 1909, the day after his acceptance into the Rosicrucian Order, Lewis wrote to his wife Mollie:

...all my hopes on this trip have been realized, but not without many tests and trials.... A pretty place, here. I have taken plenty of photos of the old fortress where I have participated in many strange ceremonies that I have never seen At last I am in the R+C, thank God—but the oaths and vows are severe. How many in America will I find to keep them with me?

A few days later, on August 26, when he was about to return to Paris, Lewis received a letter from Clovis Lassalle. On the following Monday, Aaron Lewis and his son traveled by train to Paris. After a stop in London, where they visited the British

Museum, they boarded the *White Star*, of the MS Adriatic Line, on Wednesday, September 1, and sailed for New York. For Harvey Spencer Lewis, it was the beginning of a great adventure.

The Renewal of Rosicrucianism

For several years, H. Spencer Lewis prepared for the resurgence of the Rosicrucian Order in America.

In May 1913, his wife Mollie died as a result of appendicitis. He was profoundly affected by her passing, which shattered his family life.

In December 1913, Lewis confided to members of the New York Institute for Psychical Research his intention of establishing the Rosicrucian Order in America and he invited them to a meeting. However, more time was needed to see this project come to fruition. After a difficult period, Lewis began to see the hints of a new day. In the middle of 1914, he married Martha Morfier, a young woman whom he had met a few months previously. This understanding spouse accompanied him unobtrusively in his great project of restoring Rosicrucianism. Indeed, a few months later, events began to unfold, and a meeting held on Thursday, April 1, 1915, culminated in the official founding of the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (AMORC) in America. H. Spencer Lewis was elected to head this order, which, under his direction, would experience a rapid development. In the following months other Lodges were established in Philadelphia, Boston, Wilmerding (Pennsylvania), Altoona, Rochester, Harlan (Iowa), and Detroit.

In January 1916, H. Spencer Lewis launched the *American Rosae Crucis*, a monthly magazine for Rosicrucians that was dedicated to science, philosophy, and religion. Until his death in 1939, he regularly wrote articles on Rosicrucian phi-

losophy and mysticism for this magazine, which changed its name several times until it became the *Rosicrucian Digest* in 1929.

Technology Serving the Ideal

In 1926 H. Spencer Lewis, whose mind was endlessly bubbling over with ideas, began to engage in new activities. One of his projects was to set up a radio station that would broadcast special programming. He did not want this to be a source of propaganda for AMORC, but rather a tool dedicated to the arts, culture, and spirituality in general. In 1903, he had constructed a radio apparatus, and in November 1913 he had obtained an operating license. He was thus in possession of all the elements allowing this experiment to be placed in service of his ideal. The radio station was soon in operation, and in April 1927, *The Mystic Triangle*, AMORC's magazine, made reference to the Order's broadcasting activities. Once again, H. Spencer Lewis gave proof of his creativity by introducing a new trend—in this instance by engaging the listeners by means of the telephone—and he would follow this with other innovations that would soon be copied by numerous radio stations.

Nicholas Roerich

In November 1927, AMORC established its headquarters in San Jose, California. This was the beginning of activities at Rosicrucian Park, whose architecture was inspired by ancient Egypt. Soon afterwards an Egyptian Museum was opened. Recognized by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and by the Egyptian National Museum of Cairo, it has welcomed millions of guests over the years and remains the largest Egyptian museum in Western North America.

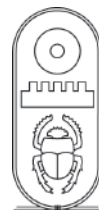
At the beginning of the 1930s AMORC's development was such that H. Spencer Lewis had become the leader of a worldwide organization. He felt that

it had become necessary to create an International Supreme Council, the *World Council*, composed of those individuals who directed the Order in the different parts of the world—France, Denmark, the Netherlands, Canada, Puerto Rico, Bolivia, Australia, Sweden, England, China, and Poland. Among these members, we may note the presence of the Russian painter Nicholas Roerich, who had apparently become a member of the Order in 1929, the period in which he was proposed as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize. H. Spencer Lewis related that he met Nicholas Roerich at the inauguration of the Roerich Museum in New York, in October 1929. The two men were on such friendly terms that Nicholas Roerich was named AMORC's legate and was charged with carrying out certain missions for the Order. In 1934, during an expedition across China and Mongolia to find plants capable of combating the desertification of the American prairies, Roerich stopped at Harbin in order to meet his Rosicrucian compatriots. The local press related the Rosicrucian activities that he participated in during his stay in China.

Writer, Lecturer, and Artist

In 1929 H. Spencer Lewis published several books, including *Rosicrucian Questions and Answers*, which presented the Order through a series of questions and answers, as well as its history; then *The Mystical Life of Jesus*, an essay on the mystical life of Christ, a subject he would return to in a later publication. Always preoccupied with adapting the traditional teachings to modern life, he also wrote *Self Mastery and Fate with the Cycles of Life*, an original work that proposed a method for understanding all matters, allowing people to regulate their lives by using the planetary and biological cycles that mark their existence.

Although endowed with a penetrating, ever-restless mind, Lewis did not lack a sense





of humor, and during conversations he loved to slip in humorous maxims that set off volleys of laughter. This big-hearted man knew how to maintain an exemplary simplicity despite his important responsibilities. A musician from an early age, he skillfully played the cello and piano. He was also an excellent painter who created works whose themes were intimately associated with his centers of interest. Thus, one of the oldest pieces that has come down to us, *Arabian Nights*, evokes the Orient. Egypt was for him an inexhaustible source of inspiration, and many of his pictures were dedicated to this land, such as *The Love Idol*, or the inspiring *Entrance to Karnak Temple, Luxor*, which he painted on the spot during a trip in 1929. Esotericism was never absent from his canvases, as can be seen in *The Alchemist*, completed a few months before his death.

Humanism and Fraternity

H. Spencer Lewis accorded special importance to the matter of fraternity and had a keen awareness of the equality of men and women, whatever their backgrounds may be. On numerous occasions he expressed himself on this point in his writings. In 1929, in *The Mastery of Life*, a booklet providing information concerning

AMORC, he emphasized that racial superiority did not exist. In his book *Mansions of the Soul*, published in 1930, dealing with the origins of and the nature of the soul, he stated:

...it may be mentioned that this ancient understanding of the association of all egos with each other, and the uniting of all souls into one soul, establishes the fact that all human beings are brothers and sisters under one creator and of the same essence, same vitality, and same consciousness, regardless of race, creed, color, or other distinctive elements of the ego.

An International Federation

Although busy directing the activities of AMORC, H. Spencer Lewis continued to maintain relations with other individuals in the world of esotericism and in August 1934 he traveled to Brussels so as to participate in the creation of the FUDOSI, a federation meant to bring together authentic initiatic orders. He became one of the three directors of this worldwide organization. He also used this occasion to renew ties with the Martinist Tradition. During this first congress of the FUDOSI, Victor Blanchard, director of the Ordre Martiniste et Synarchique, conferred on him the initiations and authority necessary for the establishment of Martinism in the United States.

During his travels to Europe, H. Spencer Lewis had the opportunity to visit the planetarium at the Deutsches Museum in Munich. On his return to San Jose, he devoted all his energy to drawing up plans and creating the first planetarium projector put together by an American. In July 1936, the Moorish-style building constructed for housing this projector was inaugurated. This audacious creation was a testimony to the genius of the first Emperor of AMORC.

H. Spencer Lewis was a humanist and was a member of numerous philanthropic societies and associations. Despite his constant activities and numerous travels that he carried out in serving AMORC, he still found the time to devote himself to writing. In 1936, he published *The Symbolic Prophecy of the Great Pyramid*, a book that brought forth the mysterious knowledge of the Egyptians. In the following year, he published two more books. In the first, *The Secret Doctrines of Jesus*, he returned to ideas that he had discussed in a previous work. In the second, *Mental Poisoning*, he denounced the detrimental effects of negative suggestions and superstitious beliefs. He showed how the laws associated with the activities of the subconscious condition our life, and he proposed keys allowing us to not only liberate ourselves from all forms of mental poisoning, but also to use suggestion in a constructive way.

The Departure toward the Light

Shortly after his return from his European travels, where he had participated in the FUDOSI congress that brought together Rosicrucian leaders from all around the world, H. Spencer Lewis's health went into a decline. Perhaps he had overtaxed himself while serving others for too many years and thus began to pay the price. As is true of all extraordinary individuals, he was naturally criticized and slandered, but he always worked with ardor and conviction in serving his ideal. He passed through transition on August 2, 1939, being only fifty-six years old. Thus disappeared the individual who, following a long quest, had attempted to give a fresh momentum to Rosicrucianism by way of the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis. That is why, without falling into the cult of personality, which is contrary to Rosicrucian ethics, the members and present leaders of AMORC recognize him for the work he accomplished.

Although Harvey Spencer Lewis gave AMORC a special touch, it must be emphasized nonetheless that the Order has evolved considerably since that time. In fact, this worldwide initiatic and philosophical movement has never ceased to perfect itself due to the research and work of its directors and members. In keeping with the wishes of its restorer, the teachings themselves have been constantly enriched and updated so as to be always adapted to the evolution of consciousness, knowledge, and society. Almost a century after its resurgence, the Rosicrucian Order remains faithful to the spirit of Harvey Spencer Lewis by bringing together men and women without regard to race, social class, or religion, in a spirit of humanism, fraternity, and spirituality. It thus constitutes in our era one of the most dynamic and most innovative esoteric movements in the world.

