

# THE ORIGINS OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY IN FINLAND

Tore AHLBACK

The Donner Institute  
FIN-20500 Åbo, P.O. Box 70, Finland

The Theosophical Society in Finland was founded in 1907. But already in 1892 there were Finns who joined the Theosophical Society in Sweden. Because of the political situation it was not possible to establish a theosophical society before 1907. About one hundred years before the founding of the Theosophical Society in Finland the country had become a grand duchy of Russia, after the war between Sweden and Russia in 1808–1809, and the Russian authorities did not accept the proposition of a theosophical society in either the grand duchy or in the motherland.

## RESEARCH GOALS

The following study attempts to delineate the origins of the Theosophical Society in Finland in broad lines. The research begins with a clarification of how theosophy was presented in the Finnish press at the beginning of the 1890s. Notices in the Finnish press were few, but from the newspaper articles that did appear the Finnish reader could still get a certain concept of what the teachings of the theosophical movement were. After that the origins of theosophical activity in Finland are described from the humble beginnings in the 1890s to the founding of the Finnish society in 1907.

## SOURCES AND EARLIER RESEARCH

An inquiry addressed to the Theosophical Society in Finland resulted in the find that the society does not dispose of an archive dealing with its own earliest history. The most important sources are consequently limited to newspapers and journals, the publications of the Swedish and Finnish theosophical societies, that is, *Teosofisk Tidskrift* (Theosophical Journal), *Omatunto* (Conscience) and *Tietäjä* (The Wise), the Finnish society's published minutes as well as non-contemporary sources, especially such as originate from theosophists, all of which means that the better part of the sources must be under suspicion of bias.

The history of the Theosophical Society in Finland has been dealt with in two previous monographs: *Suomen Teosofinen Seura 30-vuotias* by Atte POHJANMAA (The Theo-

sophical Society in Finland 30 Years) in 1937 and Teosofinen liike Suomessa (The Theosophical Movement in Finland) by A. E. JOKIPII, also in 1937. The former work must lay under suspicion of bias in favor of the society and the latter for bias against the society.

The central figure within the Theosophical Society in Finland, Pekka Ervast, has been the focus of a tendentious biographical presentation, namely Pekka Ervast, Kirjailija, teosofian tutkija, kristillinen mystikko (Pekka Ervast, Author, Student of Theosophy, Christian Mystic) by Aimo MELA (1956). It is in no way surprising that the Theosophical Society in Finland has not been the focus of more interest on the part of research in the History of Religions. The situation is the same on the international level. Neither the Theosophical Society nor the Anthroposophical Society have so far been the focus of scientific study to even the smallest extent to which corresponds the significance upon the religious field that these movements have had and continue to have.

### THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY IN THE FINNISH PRESS AROUND 1890

The first notices about the Theosophical Society in the Finnish press were reports of the founding of the Swedish Theosophical Society in Stockholm in 1889. The chief figure in the Swedish society was called Gustaf Zander. It was he who gathered seventeen like-minded persons on 10 February 1889 to a council in his home in Stockholm to discuss the question of establishing a department of the Theosophical Society.

From the introductory presentation which Gustaf Zander made on this occasion it is clear what goals the first theosophists in Sweden had. Zander began by reminding those present what intentions the founders of the Theosophical Society, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott had, when they established the society in New York in 1875. Zander says that these “[...] believed that the concerns of Religion and Science might best be furthered through reviving the study of Sanscrit, Pali, Zend and other ancient literature, in which the wise and initiated of humankind had vouchsafed truths of the highest value concerning nature and man. A society, completely free of all sectarianism, whose task should be carried out in all nations in a spirit of unselfish consecration to finding out the truth, and which with impeccable impartiality should publish the results of this research, could presumably accomplish much in combating materialism and raising the sinking level of religious sentiment” (ZANDER 1897: 33–34; it is not clear what source Zander is quoting). At the following gathering on 28 February 1889; the officers were presumably elected and installed “[...] and so the theosophical movement had come to Sweden and achieved its first organisation” (ZANDER 1897: 35).

### ARTICLES ABOUT THEOSOPHY IN ÅBO TIDNING

The founding of the Theosophical Society in Sweden was noted barely two months later in the Finnish press. In the newspaper Åbo Tidning on 7 April 1889 there appeared an article with the title “Theosophy”. This unsigned article is the first presentation of the

Theosophical Society in a Finnish newspaper. The author of the article begins by saying that for a number of years one has heard about “[...] a life view, a religion if you will, which under the name of theosophy from India, where it is most ancient, has wandered into the West and gained more and more supporters” (Teosofi 1889: 1, 6). The writer suggests that contemporary adherence to the established religion is weakening and that there are a number of people who are searching for “something to hold on to”. The author sees this as the explanation of the fact that theosophy is successful in Europe. Further, it appears that he considers that many of the theosophical teachings are compatible with “a more modern need for a practical religion, to participate in the struggle for the betterment of ones fellow human beings” (Teosofi 1889: 1, 6).

The correspondent in Åbo Tidning remarks that there have also been published in Finland “[...] certain writings [...] which stand in a certain relationship to the chief concerns of theosophy”, namely “‘Buddha dens upplyste och hans lära’ (The Enlightenment of the Buddha and His Teachings) and the most recent ‘Den moderna spiritualismen, dess filosofi och etik’ (Modern Spiritualism, its Philosophy and Ethics) by C. R. S(ederholm)” (Teosofi 1889:2, 1). Both of these works had been published in Helsingfors, the first mentioned in 1886 and the latter in 1889. Sederholm had further published *Kristendomen och därmed öfverensstämmande religioner och filosofemer, Helsingfors 1888* (Christianity and Religions and Philosophical Systems in Agreement with It).

The correspondent in Åbo Tidning ends his article by remarking that he neither desires to make a statement about the value of the books he has mentioned, nor take a position on the “rightfulness” of theosophy, he only wishes to make the reader aware of this literature, since he is of the opinion that “theosophy is worth taking note of” no matter what one’s personal position in regard to religious matters may be. He ends his article with the words: “Let us read first and then judge” (Teosofi 1889: 2, 1).

The first detailed account of the Theosophical Society and its message was an article by Alexander FULLERTON, *Hvad är teosofien* (Wilkesbarry Letters on Theosophy) published 1891 in the newspaper *Nya Pressen*. This article was the most important source of information about theosophy for the Finnish public at the beginning of the 1890s. Already in 1889 the newspaper *Åbo Tidning* had given an account of what theosophical books were available in the Swedish language, but Fullerton’s article, which also circulated in the form of an off-print, was accessible in an altogether different way than the books in question.

## THE FIRST FINNISH MEMBERS

Theosophical literature, mainly in Swedish, began to be sold in Finland in 1891 (Teosofinen liike 1908: 38; POHJANMAA 1937: 18). In the following year, 1892, the first Finns joined the Swedish Theosophical Society. By way of comparison, it can be mentioned that the Swedish society’s first Norwegian and Danish members joined in 1891 (ZANDER 1897: 35). Later in 1892 two more Finns joined the Swedish Theosophical Society. Four of the then altogether six members lived in Helsingfors, one in Viborg and one in Gamlakarleby (ZANDER et al. 1893: 58). In the annual report of the Swedish

Theosophical Society for 1891 Finland is mentioned in connection with the plans of the society to establish an independent section consisting "of Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland" (ZANDER et al. 1892: 58). The plans of the Swedish Theosophical Society to establish a Scandinavian section continued during 1893. At the officers' meeting on 24 September 1893 "[...] the officers proposed to make of the Swedish theosophical society a Scandinavian subsection under the European section of the Theosophical Society and proposed the name 'Scandinavian Theosophical Society', which should consist of all the lodges of the society in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland (the Swedish-speaking section)". The goal of this proposal was explained to be the desire to further the theosophical movement in the countries where "Scandinavian is spoken" (ZETTERSTEN 1893a: 222). This shows that at least Swedish-speaking Finland should be included in the planned subsection.

In Finland at the time there was not yet any local chapter under the auspices of the Swedish Theosophical Society. A short time previously the first local chapter related to the above council was established in Norway, that is on 3 September 1893: "During the past year the wave of the theosophical movement has reached the shores of the capital of our brotherland, Kristiania and many persons living there have joined the society. These, seven (sic!) in number, have now joined themselves and on 3 September formed a new local association of the Swedish T. S. under the name of 'The Norwegian Theosophical Society'" (ZETTERSTEN 1893a: 224).

At the meeting of the Swedish Theosophical Society on 8 October 1893 the final decision was made to establish a Scandinavian subsection including Sweden, Norway, Denmark and the Swedish-speaking part of Finland. It was further decided to hold an annual all-Scandinavian theosophical meeting in the latter half of May (ZETTERSTEN 1893b: 254). On 7 July 1895 the Scandinavian subsection became an independent territorial section of the Theosophical Society, "comprising Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland" (ZANDER et al. 1895: 161).

## SWEDISH-SPEAKING THEOSOPHICAL ACTIVITY IN FINLAND BEGINS

The earliest information about organized theosophical activity in Finland goes back to 1894: "On 16 January in Helsingfors was established a lodge of the Scand. T. S. We have not yet received more details about the matter" (Teosofiska rörelsen 1894a: 64). There now existed a Finnish lodge and the number of Finnish members in the Scandinavian Theosophical Society had gone up to 20. By way of comparison it may be noted that the number of members in Norway at the same time was 12, the number of Danish members was 8 and the number of Swedish members was 266 (ZANDER 1894: 65). Although the number of Finnish members from a Nordic perspective seems rather high a correspondent from the Teosofisk Tidskrift considered that the reason more interested persons in Finland did not join the Scandinavian section was because of "[...] the poor practical usefulness such a step seems to be, considering that within the borders of the homeland there was found no lodge or association, in a word, no central

organisation for a systematically and practically run work" (Teosofiska rörelsen 1894b: 255).

On 14 October 1894 it was decided to found a theosophical association in Helsingfors. It was decided to meet every second Sunday; on this occasion members who had prepared beforehand could present a matter for discussion (Teosofiska rörelsen 1894b: 256). The number of Finnish members inscribed in the Swedish society by the time the association was established had increased to about 30, a remarkably high number. (Teosofiska rörelsen 1895: 60).

## HELSINGFORS CENTRE

In the February 1895 number of the *Teosofisk Tidskrift* there is again a report on the theosophical activity in Finland. It says that the Helsingfors theosophical association, here called "Helsingfors Centre" has met every other Sunday in "the chairman's home" and that "the association is developing a notable activity and a lively production of theosophical essays both in the original and in translation." One of the meetings (2 December 1894) had been open to the public. The association is presented as having acquired "a considerable theosophical literature" as a gift of the Swedish society, a gift that should form the basis of a library of its own (Teosofiska rörelsen 1895: 63). On 2 October 1896 the Scandinavian Theosophical Society had 447 members of whom 44 were Finns; of these 41 were so-called free-standing members and three were inscribed in Swedish lodges (the number of Swedes was 353, the number of Norwegians 32 and the number of Danes 18; of the total number of members 281 were men and 166 were women. These statistics conflict with the contention that the members of the Theosophical Society have been mainly women). The number of Swedish lodges in the Scandinavian Section was 14, and in addition there were one Norwegian and one Danish lodge. In regard to Finland it is noted: "Besides the local association existing in Helsingfors a new one has been established in Hangö. These associations are not official." Two months after the annual meeting of the Swedish Theosophical Society in May 1896, Gustaf Zander, who was installed as general secretary at the same meeting, sent a letter together with 42 like-minded to the president of the Theosophical Society, H. W. Olcott, in which he stated that the undersigned relinquished their membership in the Scandinavian Section and in place of it intended to found a new society "according to the same plan as those already existing in America, England and Ireland." This means that Zander took the part of Judge in the quarrel between Besant and Judge and followed its consequences. Zander founded a new society which was called "Svenska Teosofiska Samfundet" (Swedish Theosophical Society) with the parallel name of "Teosofiska Samfundet i Europa (Sverige)" (Theosophical Society in Europe [Sweden]). In Norway also was established a Judge sympathetic society under the name of "T. S. E. [that is, Teosofiska Samfundet i Europa] (Norway)" (ZANDER 1896: 275; Teosofiska rörelsen 1896: 311; ZETTERSTEN 1897: 169). The members who left the society in the autumn of 1896 and established the "Swedish Theosophical Society" reorganised themselves in May 1898 under the name of "Universella Broderskapet" (The Universal Brotherhood). A hundred or so members,

among them Gustaf Zander, did not accept this, and wanted to continue with the earlier organisation, and so did not follow the others into the Universal Brotherhood. (ZWETTERSTEN 1898a: 285–286).

After a lapse of two years more information about the situation in Finland appears in the March 1897 number of *Teosofisk Tidskrift*. It reports that the Theosophical Library in Helsingfors opened on 10 January 1897. The library opened on 10 January 1897 and in the beginning it was open to the public three days a week in the afternoons and the demand for books was lively. When the library was founded, it may be remarked, the facilities were small, but nevertheless made possible meetings of “smaller groups”. An example of such a meeting is mentioned for 24 January 1897 when student Pekka Ervast held a lecture on the subject “The Secret Doctrine” in Swedish and that “this will be translated to Finnish, and this will be the beginning of the transmission of the truths of theosophy in that melodical and beautiful language.” Pekka Ervast refers again to the establishment of the library in a notice from 1905 and says that one can regard the opening of the Theosophical Library in Helsingfors on the first of January 1887 (sic!) as a token that the spiritual and religious life in Finland began to become freer. He notes that Finnish language theosophical literature at the time was not successful. Indeed, the tiny Swedish-speaking theosophical cradle which generally gathered in the library discussed the need for such literature (ERVAST 1905a: 27).

A theosophical discussion association was founded on 11 December 1897. It had its first meeting on 9 January 1898. The association had about 40 members and met once a month (*Teosofiska rörelsen* 1898: 93; *Teosofinen liike* 1908: 39). Pekka Ervast writes ten years later that the discussion association was the result of negotiations at the Helsingfors theosophical library concerning the founding of a Theosophical Society of their own in Finland, and he adds that the association was active for several years. (ERVAST 1908: 10).

From the annual report for 1897 of the Theosophical Society’s Scandinavian Section it appears that the number of Finnish members in the Theosophical Society’s Scandinavian Section on 30 May 1889 was 55. The chairman A. Zettersten says of “our dear brothers and sisters on the other side of the Gulf of Bothnia” the following: “The old Finnish loyalty has not faltered, for the great majority of the Finnish members have remained faithful to the society.” By this it can be seen that only a few Finns left the society during the Judge quarrel. It was further noted that the “conditions” in Finland, that is the political conditions, did not permit the establishment of a lodge, but that there was a library with a reading-room.

During 1897 a little leaflet was published, *Ihminen, miksikä itket?* (Man, Why are You Crying?) authored by Pekka Ervast. Pekka Ervast further published on his own account *Teosofisk uppslagsbok* (A Theosophical Encyclopedia). (ERVAST 1905a 26–27). The annual report for 1898 of the Theosophical Society’s Scandinavian Section contains a short report of the theosophical activity in Finland during 1898. It reveals that the Finnish members in the section had increased to 66 (294 in Sweden, 39 in Norway and 49 in Denmark). The activity at the library in Helsingfors had been lively and during the year there had been 600 loans. There had been lectures in the reading-room of the library every Thursday evening, both original lectures and translations and there had been much

discussion of different theosophical questions. Helsingfors Discussion Association now had 50 members, among whom also persons who were not inscribed in the Theosophical Society's Scandinavian Section. There was a great interest in questions having to do with comparative religion research. (ZANDER 1899: 164, 169–170; Teosofinen liike 1908: 39).

During the beginning of 1899 activity slumped. "During the year 1899 nevertheless the activity in the theosophical sphere was significantly less for recognizable reasons. The deeply inauspicious political conditions have been not only depressing but have taken up more or less all the time and thoughts" (ZANDER 1899: 164, 169–170).

The political freeze began. The first comprehensive russification plan began with Nikolaj Bobrikov's appointment to the general governorship in 1898. He wanted, for example, to dismantle the country's own army; it should become part of the Russian army. He considered that "Russia's dignity" required that Finland should be administered only by Russian statutes so that the country should appear from the outside as a Russian province. He wanted public official positions to be open to Russians. His ambitions were crowned with success on 15 February 1899 when the Czar Nicholas II signed an ordinance which provided that national laws, that is, laws applicable to the entire empire including Finland, as well as laws applying only to Finland but which could be seen to be of significance to the whole empire, should be administered in the Russian legislative order. This led to reawakened but fruitless protests on the side of the Finns.

Because of the political situation the Thursday evenings in the library continued in a more private form. At this time Annie Besant's *Introduction to Theosophy* was published in Finnish in a translation by Pekka Ervast under the title of *Johdantoa teosofiaan*. Several private persons subscribed to the costs (Teosofinen liike 1908: 39; Besant's book had appeared in 1899 in Sweden under the title of *En inledning till teosofien*). Ervast comments on the publication of Besant's book in *Omatunto* 1905: "[...] in the autumn of 1899 Annie Besant's book in Finnish translation, 'Johdantoa teosofiaan' [...] Theosophy was all but an unknown word to the Finnish public" (ERVAST 1905a: 27).

Information about the theosophical activity in Finland during the year 1900 is very sparse. It does indeed appear that during this year in Viborg "a few interested theosophists" founded a library with theosophical, spiritistic and related literature in Swedish, Norwegian and English (a collection of 125 books). Some of the books had been donated from Sweden and some had been bought. The library was open every day (Teosofiska rörelsen 1900: 288; Teosofinen liike 1908: 39). The only information about activity in Helsingfors to be found is that the Thursday meetings in the Theosophical Library continued throughout the year (Teosofinen liike 1908: 39).

The report of the annual meeting of The Swedish Theosophical Society's Scandinavian Section for 1901 notes that the number of members in Finland during the year 1900 was 63 (310 in Sweden, 40 in Norway and 89 in Denmark). (ÅRSMÖTE 1901: 143–144).

In 1901 there began theosophical activity in the Finnish language. From January to May 1901 a weekly paper was published, *Uusi Aika* (New Time), containing Pekka Ervast's so-called theosophical letters. Ervast expresses himself in a notice from 1905 about the founding of *Uusi Aika*: "It was a bold attempt in 1901 when *Uusi Aika* was founded.

This weekly did not last long, but it played its part: it made the name of theosophy known to a wider circle." (ERVAST 1905a: 27).

The editor V. Palomaa, who according to his own report, became interested in theosophy through *Uusi Aika*, began to hold regular lectures on Sunday mornings in the facilities of the workers' union in Sörnäs "Vuorela" (*Teosofinen liike* 1908: 40). Among a score of listeners was found the editor in chief of the newspaper where Palomaa was working. After Palomaa's lectures Palomaa's and Ervast's right to use the workers' union facilities in Helsingfors and to spread theosophical "humbug" there was rescinded. In its place arose the possibility for Palomaa from the beginning of autumn 1901 to hold lectures in the workers' union facilities in Sörnäs "Vuorela" and there he alone held theosophical lectures every Sunday in Finnish for the next two years, after which Pekka Ervast and a person named Maria Ramstedt in 1903 began to alternate with Palomaa in holding the lectures. This form of activity continued for several years.

For Christmas 1901 Ervast published on his own account the book *Valoa kohti* (Towards Light). It contained the "lectures about the teachings of theosophy", which he had earlier published in *Uusi Aika*. (*Teosofinen liike* 1908: 39–40).

From the beginning of 1903 there is a report on the theosophical activity in Finland during the year 1902, produced by Herman Hellner. Hellner remarks that it was still impossible to organise the theosophical movement in Finland because of the political conditions, "since freedom of expression and action are too limited to allow it". Despite all "[...] during 1902 sympathy for theosophy had put down deep roots, especially among the 'working classes' around Helsingfors". Hellner states that theosophy was known as far north as the province of Kemi. He considered that the population had "a tendency to the religious and the mystical", and that both augured well for the future of theosophy in Finland. (*Teosofiska rörelsen* 1903: 21–22; cf *Teosofinen liike* 1908: 39).

Information on the theosophical activity in Finland during 1903 is very sparse. In the January-February number of *Teosofisk Tidskrift* for 1904 there is a short report about Finland dealing with activity during 1903. It says that the interest in theosophy in Finland "continues" to be very great.

## THEOSOPHICAL ACTIVITY OUTSIDE HELSINGFORS

Now theosophical activity began to appear in other parts of the country. In Kouvola the first theosophical lectures are known to have been held already in the autumn of 1902. After that the interest in theosophy in this area increased all the time. Also from Lahtis there are reports of theosophical activity. A correspondent in Omatunto tells about people in working circles who did not consider themselves materialists, and would willingly ally themselves with other doctrines than those of Christianity to satisfy their inner needs. They then found theosophical literature and this was what they had been looking for. They wanted to make theosophy known to all and decided to organize lecture events.



## PLANS TO FOUND A FINNISH THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

Now there arose more and more often the desire among theosophists in Finland to organize a society of their own with their own lodges both in cities and in the countryside. Wherever there were at least seven persons they could found a lodge. (ERVAST 1905b: 148).

At the end of 1905 political changes were introduced in Finland, namely the so-called peaceful revolution, which meant that plans to found a Theosophical Society in Finland could be brought forward in earnest, or as Ervast expresses it: "The great peaceful revolution of 1905 was a turning point in our situation[...] Now the old question arose again about founding our own society and it was discussed enthusiastically among the members of both the Scandinavian Section and among the great many Finnish theosophists who over the years had learned to consider theosophy as a worldview and to commit themselves to the theosophical idea." Only after "the November days, when Finland took its first steps as a cultural nation, only then begins the history of the founding of the T. S. Finnish Section." (ERVAST 1908: 10).

During 1906 the lecturing activity continued in Helsingfors in the same way as before while activity in other parts of Finland increased. The activity during the whole of 1907 was dominated by the continuing attempts to found a society of their own. Meeting activity continued during the autumn of 1907 in the same way as earlier (Teosofinen liike 1908: 42). There were now founded lodges in Viborg, Nokia, Kurikka, Äggelby, Sörnäs, and two in Helsingfors (of the lodges in Helsingfors one was Swedish-speaking. (Tien varrelta 1907a: 234). An eighth lodge, "Aura", was founded in Åbo in November 1907 (Tien varrelta 1907b: 251–252; ERVAST 1908: 23). In the first annual report of the Finnish section there is a report on the activity of these lodges during the end of 1907, that is, in principle for the period from 21 October to 31 December 1907. A number of these lodges had actually existed informally before 21 October 1907, but they were formally instituted as lodges on 21 October. But, for example, the Swedish-speaking lodge "Vågen" in Helsingfors had already existed for a decade.

## THE FOUNDING OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY IN FINLAND

The beginning of preparations for founding a Theosophical Society in Finland goes back to the year 1906. "We have written to the head, Olcott, the president and founder of the Theosophical Society, explained our situation to him and asked for his counsel, and we have a certain hope that already next autumn we shall be able to leave our application with the Senate for ratification". Olcott was in Paris at the moment. In the letter to him, which was sent May 1 1906, he was informed of the Finnish initiative to found a section of their own (Tien varrelta 1906a: 141; ERVAST 1908: 10). In the June number of *Omatunto* it appears that an answer from Olcott had been received, which says that he understood and approved the plan to found a Finnish section apart from the Scandinavian. Olcott hints that he might come to Finland during the latter part of July 1906, after participating in the annual meeting of the British section in London. On the Finnish side

it was rather noted that it would be impossible to get a Finnish society legalised by that time, and it was felt that such a time would not be auspicious for a private visit on Olcott's part since all theosophical activity was low during the summer. For this reason Olcott did not come to Finland on this occasion and circumstances never allowed him to come to Finland later either (Tien varrelta 1906b: 161–162).

Plans to found a Finnish Society are taken up again in November 1906. On 3 March 1907 about 80 persons gathered in Helsingfors (among others two theosophists from Viborg) to discuss the question of founding a Finnish section. At the meeting Ervast reported first on the work of the committee. It appeared that it would be possible to found 8 (sic!) lodges. Pekka Ervast notes later that this meeting was not especially successful. He says himself that he was "away in spirit". Ervast says that there appeared a rupture between the Swedish- and Finnish-speaking theosophists. The Swedish-speaking ones, who were members in the Scandinavian Section, began to quibble that two such peoples as the Finns and the Swedish Finns could co-operate in an intellectual and spiritual brotherhood. In this situation it was finally decided to appeal to Annie Besant" (ERVAST 1908: 15). So the committee turned to Annie Besant in March 1907 with an application to have the society ratified; she had succeeded H. S. Olcott in January 1907 as president.

On 15 September 1907 at 6 p.m. was finally held the third and final constituting meeting of the Theosophical Society's Finnish Section, in which about 80 theosophists took part. After 21 October 1907 the Scandinavian Section no longer accepted members from Finland. Only old members who did not wish to transfer to the Finnish section were allowed to remain (Tien varrelta 1907b: 251–252). The application of the Theosophical Society was handed in on 22 November 1907 to the Imperial Senate with an appeal to ratify the application (Tien varrelta 1907c: 274–276). The answer to this appeal came only five years later in the form of a negative. On the theosophists' side the consternation was all the greater because of the fact that the Theosophical Society had already during that time been permitted in Russia. It was noted in the Senate decision on February 1913 that the members of the Theosophical Society had not left the State Church and therefore the society was considered a scientific association (Tien varrelta 1913: 108).

## SUMMARY

The results of the investigation of the origins of the Theosophical Society in Finland are to illuminate a religious movement of a very special type. This movement lacks one of the most important components in every religion or religious movement, namely liturgy. The Theosophical Society is a religious movement without a liturgical gathering. It has become apparent that the members come together to hold lectures for one another and also to discuss the contents of the lectures. The theme of the lecture generally turns on existential, religious and occult questions. Meetings are often begun and ended with music, which is used also to mark new points in the program, but there is no prayer nor offering, no liturgy and no preaching. In the absence of a regular liturgy, the lecture becomes a substitute for divine service and has a ritual function. The fact that the Theosophical Society itself does not wish to categorize theosophy as a religion or religious

movement is not relevant in this context. In the book *Handbuch Religiöse Gemeinschaften, Freikirchen, Sondergemeinschaften, Sekten, Weltanschauungsgemeinschaften, Neureligionen, Gütersloh 1979*, under the title of "Weltanschauungen (Weltanschauungsgemeinschaften) (Neuzeitliche Weltdeutungssysteme mit religiösen Funktionen, aber weitgehend ohne Kultgemeinschaft)" there are described seven movements, among them theosophy and anthroposophy (the other five are the Rosicrucian movement, spiritism, transcendental meditation along with two purely German movements, die Welt-Spirale and Aktionsanalytische Organisation.) Without taking a position on the other five movements, I remark that the placement of Theosophy and Anthroposophy in this group is well motivated.

From the information that has appeared about the activity of the Theosophical Society in Finland one can remark that it is mainly the intellectual aspect in religion which is of interest to theosophy, without thereby making any judgment about the intellectual level of the theosophical doctrine. The way in which the Theosophical Society established itself in Finland is consistent with the assumption that it is the intellectual aspect in religion which is of interest to theosophy. Interest in the matter is spread through the holding of lectures about the theosophical faith and giving the possibility to discuss this doctrine (the fact that theosophists themselves claim that their doctrine is not a form of religious belief but rather a form of scientific knowledge only means that they believe that this is so, not that it is so). It appears that as many as hundreds of listeners have attended the public theosophical lecture events, which shows that the theosophists were touching issues of vital concern. That the Theosophical Society did not attract an especially great number of members as compared to the high attendance in the public lectures corresponds to a conscious purpose among the theosophists: they were not trying to gather great crowds into their own society; rather they wanted to inform people about where the true religion was to be found and about how an individual by the aid of it could develop himself faster than he could without this knowledge, and this laid upon them the obligation to arrange lecture events for the public.

Consistent with lecturing as a means of marketing the movement is the great importance given to the publication of books about theosophy, both original books and translations of foreign theosophists. It was noted that interest in theosophy among the Finns was found mainly among persons belonging to the so-called working class; in Helsingfors this interest was concentrated on the members of the Sörnäs workers' union. This places Finland in a special place as concerns the interest in theosophy, which in other contexts, in the Western world, appears mainly among the higher classes (cf JOKIPII 1937: 38). I contend that the origin of this is quite wholly and simply on the personal level, namely in the fact that Veikko Palomaa had a position working for a socialist newspaper while at the same time he became a theosophist and that he and Pekka Ervast intended to make of theosophy the new religion of the workers, since Christianity rejected socialism, and in the fact that they also got support from the utopian socialist Matti Kurikka.

Special for theosophy in the Western world is the type of racial problem in which the Finnish theosophists developed. It is a racial problem in which the color of the skin is not a central criterion. It was an unfortunate coincidence that Blavatsky's idea that the Finns were a more developed people than the Swedes came to coincide with the fact that a

great proportion of the Swedish Finns belonged to the so-called instructed class at the turn of the century in Finland.

The presentation has shown who the principle figures were when the Theosophical Society was established in Finland. On the Swedish Finnish side it was Herman Hellner with the support of Pekka Ervast, and on the Finnish side it was Pekka Ervast with the support of Veikko Palomaa and Maria Ramstedt.

The reasons why theosophical activity in Finland during the first ten years took place mainly in the Swedish language have already been touched upon many times. When theosophical activity began in Sweden in 1889 publication of theosophical literature in Swedish also began as well as a monthly journal, and this literature reached Swedish-speaking Finns. Therefore Swedish-speaking Finns could inscribe as members of the Swedish Theosophical Society, which they also did.

What role was played by the fact that the authorities did not permit the establishment of a society of their own before 1907 for the activity of the theosophical movement in Finland? It has appeared that already in 1887 people began discussing the question of founding a Finnish society of their own. This meant that it was necessary to exist for a decade without the form of organisation that was desired. But did this have some inhibiting effects on the theosophical activity in the country? In my judgment it hardly had such consequences. The theosophists had, already in the middle of the 1890s, the right to found a library with a reading-room and the right to hold public lectures and the right to publish theosophical literature. They got the right, if also after a long wait, to publish their own paper.

Considering the way in which the Theosophical Society carried out its activities one can remark that the movement in the first place strove to raise the religious knowledge of its members and place them among people who have thoughtful opinions about existential questions.

What meaning and impact did the theosophical movement have on the religious area in Finland at the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s? According to the number of members in the movement, little, but through the number of participants at public lectures significantly more. It is nonetheless clear that the importance of the theosophical movement as compared for example to the Lutheran State Church was purely marginal, quantitatively speaking. But its importance in introducing new doctrinal points of non-Christian provenance should not be underestimated. It was through the Theosophical Society that the population of Finland learned of such doctrines as reincarnation and karma. Persons who actually visited the theosophical lecture events and acquired theosophical literature came to know an alternative to the Christian worldview, and even if such people are numbered only in hundreds and thousands rather than in tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands, the Theosophical Society succeeded well in entering a religious market which was almost entirely dominated by the Lutheran State Church.

## LITERATURE

## ERVAST, Pekka

1905a: Teosofinen maailma. Teosofinen toiminta Helsingissä. *Omatunto* 1: 26–27.

1905b: Teosofinen maailma. *Omatunto* 1: 148–149.

1908: Vuosikertomus. In: Teosofisen Seuran Suomalaisen Osaston ensimmäinen vuosikokous maaliskuun 14–16 p:nä 1908; pp. 9–30. Helsinki.

## JOKIPII, A. E.

1937: Teosofinen liike Suomessa. Historiaa, oppi ja arviointia. Porvoo.

## MELA, Aimo

1956: Pekka Ervast. Kirjailija, teosofian tutkija, kristillisen mystikko. Helsinki.

## POHJANMAA, Atte

1937: Suomen Teosofinen Seura 30-vuotias. Helsinki.

*Teosofi*

1889: Teosofi. *Åbo Tidning* nr 94, 7.4.1889: p. 1, col. 6–p. 2, col. 1.

*Teosofinen liike*

1908: Teosofinen liike Suomessa. Katsaus vuosiin 1891–1907. In: Teosofisen Seuran Suomalaisen Osaston ensimmäinen vuosikokous maaliskuun 14–16 p:nä 1908. Pöytäkirja y. m.; pp. 38–42. Helsinki.

*Teosofiska rörelsen*

1894a: Den teosofiska rörelsen. *Teosofisk Tidskrift* 4: 61–64.

1894b: Den teosofiska rörelsen. *Teosofisk Tidskrift* 4: 252–256.

1895: Den teosofiska rörelsen. *Teosofisk Tidskrift* 5: 60–63.

1896: Den teosofiska rörelsen. *Teosofisk Tidskrift* 6: 311–313.

1900: Den teosofiska rörelsen. *Teosofisk Tidskrift* 10: 283–288.

1903: Den teosofiska rörelsen. *Teosofisk Tidskrift* 13: 19–24.

*Tien varrelta*

1906a: Tien varrelta. *Omatunto* 2: 138–141.

1906b: Tien varrelta. *Omatunto* 2: 161–163.

1907a: Tien varrelta. *Omatunto* 3: 234–236.

1907b: Tien varrelta. *Omatunto* 3: 251–252.

1907c: Tien varrelta. *Omatunto* 3: 274–276.

1913: Tien varrelta. *Tietäjä* 9: 101–108.

## ZANDER, E.

1896: Om förhållandet mellan de båda Teosofiska organisationerna i Sverige. *Teosofisk Tidskrift* 6: 274–275.

1899: Årsberättelse. *Teosofisk Tidskrift* 9: 163–171.

## ZANDER, G.

1894: Tal af Skand. T. S. president på samfundets sjette årssdag, d. 10 febr. 1894. *Teosofisk Tidskrift* 4: 65–68.

1897: 1889–1897. *Theosophia* 1: 33–37.

## ZANDER, G. et al.

1892: Årsberättelse för 1891. *Teosofisk Tidskrift* 2: 56–61.

1893: Årsberättelse för 1892. *Teosofisk Tidskrift* 3: 57–61.

1895: Skand. T. S. självständig Sektion af Teosofiska Samfundet. *Teosofisk Tidskrift* 5: 161–163.

## ZETTERSTEN, A.

1893a: Den teosofiska rörelsen. *Teosofisk Tidskrift* 3: 222–224.

1893b: Den teosofiska rörelsen. *Teosofisk Tidskrift* 3: 254–256.

1897: Årsberättelse. *Teosofisk Tidskrift* 7: 163–182.

1898: Till medlemmarna af Teosofiska Samfundets Skand. Sektion! 1: Meddelande af generalsekreteraren. *Teosofisk Tidskrift* 8: 285–287.

*Årsmöte*

1901: T. S:s Skand. Sektions sjätte årsmöte. *Teosofisk Tidskrift* 11: 143–144.