

"THE MASTERS ARE CLOSE TO AN ISOLATED LODGE"

THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY IN TASMANIA

1889 - 1930

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This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or award in any university, and to the best of this candidate's knowledge and belief contains no copy or paraphrase of material previously published or written by another person except when due reference is made in the text of this thesis.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AT Austral Theosophist Journal
ES Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society
ITS Independent Theosophical Society
LCC Liberal Catholic Church
OCC Old Catholic Church
OSE Order of the Star of the East
Star Star in the East (Australian Division)
 Journal
TAT The Australian Theosophist Journal
Tina Theosophy in Australasia*
TS Theosophical Society

*

Note: The journal of the Theosophical Society in Australia was titled Theosophy in Australasia (April 1895-May 1921) when it was retitled Theosophy in Australia. The title Australian Theosophist was used July 1926-August 1933. Tina is used for the first and second titles. TAT for the third.

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INTRODUCTION

The interaction of severe social change, new creeds and challenged beliefs during the nineteenth century created a cultural crisis for western society which would enable the Theosophical Society to emerge as an answer to that crisis.

The publication of 'The Origin of Species' in 1859 is a suitable starting point. The cultural impact of Darwin's work was wide-reaching, and those who read Darwin were only a fraction of those exposed to Darwinian ideas. Evolutionary notions settled on the bed of popular perceptions and, losing none of their potency, produced a great variety of expressions, even contradictory ones and the full impact of evolutionary theory upon the late nineteenth century mind caused the disquiet that pervaded late Victorian thinking.

A changing view of the Bible accompanied the adjustment to modern science and the appearance of 'Essays and Reviews' by seven liberal churchmen in 1860 presented a further shock. The higher criticism of the Tubingen School (denying Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and questioning the historical accuracy of the Old Testament, its rejection of the miracles and the old notion of

prophecy) transmitted to English readers challenges to the Bible as an inspired and infallible book.

One aspect of evolution was that it reduced all creation to being no more than the product of chance, of a Natural selection, which acted automatically perpetually organising and dividing, advancing solely through blind chance denying 'man' his position as the unique creation of a God that acted through specific interventions. The origin of man was the result of the continuous action of natural laws and not by special creation.

There is a need to recognise that we must not overstress the negative aspects of Darwin's thinking on his contemporaries. For example, the theory was vigorously applied to prehistory and anthropology by Sir John Lubbock, a close friend of Darwin, Author of "Prehistoric Times" and an influential exponent of the linear view of progress who argued that man's mind and body had improved through "natural selection" before Darwin himself positively applied to human history the argument he had applied to natural history. Lewis Henry Morgan, the influential American sociologist, was convinced that social progress was a fact and that all societies developed

through recognised stages ending on an eighth stage which would retain the advantages of the present civilisation but include the restoration of some of the virtues of savage society, including brotherhood; liberty and communal ownership.

Morgan's evolutionist view of history was to give stimulus to Karl Marx but Morgan's book published in 1877 called 'Ancient Society: or Researches in the line of Human Progress from savagery through Barbarism to Civilisation' was initially well received by all sides of the political spectrum.

Other areas of study, too, applied evolutionary theory to explain the development of man's institutions. Sir Henry Maine, authority on ancient laws applied it to the development of law, others applied it to economic theory arguing that as free competition had produced man, free trade would build a fit economy.

In fiction extrapolative futurizers such as Wells, Verne and Bellamy were able to use the progressive, or, in their terms, optimistic aspects of evolutionary theory.

In 1860, the response to "Essays and Reviews", as noted earlier, was shock. Two of the Essays authors H.B. Wilson and Rowland Williams faced legal proceedings in the church courts and were saved from conviction only by an appeal to the Priory Council. Prosecution was begun against Benjamin Jowett, too, but was dropped. Frederick Temples' essay through not actually endorsing Darwinian evolution, did assume that man was a developing creature and could not therefore have been literally created from the dust. William's review accepted geological time-sequences that ruled out Bishop Ussher's chronology. C.W. Goodwin similarly found the first chapters of Genesis unsatisfactory as a textbook in geology or astronomy. Jowett went so far as to support a continuous growth of revelation and argue that the scripture be interpreted with the same scholarship as any other reputable book.¹

¹ Stephen Neill and Tom Wright 'The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1986 (Oxford 1988) for the fuller details of the upsets caused by the Essays reception in Britain.

From a purely external viewpoint, traditional religion did not seem disturbed by these intellectual inundations - Chapels and churches remained for the most part, crowded. Books of conventional sermons were always among the best sellers. Missionary zeal was high but society was undergoing profound social change.

After 1870, British agriculture began to decline. The traditional wheat and meat agriculture collapsed and a lack of confidence in key sectors of the industrial economy created by overseas competition on an unaccustomed scale had a powerful impact on both the powerful land magnates and industrialists alike.

The crisis in agriculture, economic in nature, was for the aristocracy a social crisis, undermining the territorial basis of the ruling class as Tents as well as income from agriculture fell.

In the field of industry the emergence of rivals in Germany and America whose crude output of industrial commodities gradually overhauled that of Britain, and who both played a prominent role in developing the key new technologies of the period was decisive. Britain often played only a slight role in the new chemical, electrical and automotive industries.

The 'Great Depression' of the years 1870 to 1900 presents a potent mix of insecurities which were given a tight focus in the rediscovery of the enormous poverty and misery of the East End.

As the sordid conditions became known, the first impulse was towards increased charity. The traditional attitude of generous people of wealth who saw wealth as a blessing that carried obligations to the poor. When it became clear that charitable action would never be sufficient, then some radical change in the social order was necessary, could it stop short of revolution?

With the dissolution of traditional social hierarchies there was a clear, though variously expressed desire to establish a new elite. This new aristocracy would act to ease or resolve the crisis by strengthening the position of the middle class. Anxiety could only be erased by a radical plan of action.

There was a widespread desire for a new faith, founded on the collapse of traditional Christian belief and sharpened by the awareness of a profound social malaise. The seventies and eighties resound with the calls of those demanding faith but denied it in the light of the intellectual programme advanced by science.²

Subsequent to the need for programs to do good and a desire for a new faith, people sought a new cosmology as well as a programme for action. A cosmology, moreover, that could accommodate rather than deny the advances of materialist sciences.

It is in the manner that Theosophy was able to address itself to these needs that its popularity can be understood. At the very heart of Theosophy was a programme of social elites embedded in a vision of humanity which did not deny the portentous changes brought about by industrial advances and urbanisation. Thus its programme could appeal to both aristocratic and middle class presumptions without the slightest hint of contradiction.

² Warren Sylvester Smith *Heretics: The London Heretics 1870-1914* (London 1967) particularly examines the London scene at this time, including Theosophy.

The core concept for the idea of individual elitism lay in the belief in reincarnation and the associated doctrine of Karma. Hierarchy is inseparable from occult thinking and in Theosophy the hierarchy is of a spiritual nature, in which all humanity inhabits but a stage in the ladder of consciousness rising from matter to spirit.

In 'Do We Live on Earth Again?' by Annie Besant explains it in terms that "You can mould and shape if you have something to mould and shape... From this standpoint then, the criminal is the young ego, or soul.... to be taught, disciplined and built into a little better type... Then you come to the genius. What is he? He is the soul which has gone through life after life, and has gradually gathered together and accumulated all the results of life's experience until at last he has reached the splendour that we call genius."³

³ Annie Besant, Australian Lectures 1908 (Sydney, 1908) p47

Clearly then, with spiritually determined elites an individuals bound by the law of Karma, unable to break out of the soul hierarchy, there is ample scope for the imaginative depiction of self, group or class as a spiritual elite and for the relegation of the working class, subject to "the perfect justice of nature, which is the expression of God, his justice not topsy-turvydom".⁴ to be helped, shaped and guarded by the soul elite.

What imaginative programs must have offered themselves to genteel sorts of aristocratic or middle class persuasion that flocked to Theosophy. What fine paternalism must have suggested itself as in Lodge or drawing room they contemplated their spiritual superiority and the necessary social distinctions being reflected in the wider world. And with what joy must they have learned that however dark the present with problems "we see in all these strifes and upheavals... a foreseen end, in all the sufferings a lesson to be learned and an achievement to be made".⁵

⁴ Annie Besant, Australian Lectures 1908 (Sydney, 1908) p50

⁵ Annie Besant, Australian Lectures 1908 (Sydney, 1908) p133

The crisis will be resolved, social hierarchy maintained and the gulf between the various souls remains unbridgeable. And abroad, according to the doctrine of the occult destiny of the races, those remnants of the third root race, the Lemurians, an earlier and less differentiated form of evolution are even more divorced from the elites of western civilisation.

And yet, through the adoption of the doctrine of Karma, the awful inevitability of Darwin's natural selection, ceaselessly working like a machine is transferred in Blavatsky's cosmology to the working of Karma in the non-bodily stages of the soul's cycle. Now the onus is placed upon the individual to better his changes in the next incarnation by developing occult powers in the present carnation. Thus the automatic quality of natural selection has been transferred to this Hindu doctrine. Inevitability is retained but unlike evolution, Blavatsky's system provided the individual with the means of ameliorating his or her spiritual destiny. The significance of the individual in the greater scheme of things is thereby restored. This was a truly important innovation, humanity is restored to the centre of creation as a purposive being.

And of course Theosophy did offer a programme for social amelioration - it did provide a programme for action, and the mass meetings, lecture hours and Lodge discussions clearly speak of the incorporation of evangelical zeal and the organisation energies of nonconformity and secular thinkers being carried over to the Theosophical society.

The needs for faith and cosmology were also met by Theosophy. The appeal of a cosmology that retained individual purpose, rewrite the Darwinian script, accommodated the vast aeons of time required for evolution to operate and could underwrite imperialist adventure with its occult doctrine of races is clear. The need for a new faith is however a different matter, and the role of Theosophy here is best understood by considering the circumstances of its emergence, out of the recent proliferation of the spiritualist movement. Spiritualism provided its followers with a proposed world of 'spirit', yet provided no intellectual structure to advance the meaning of the random and frequently capricious communication received from the 'spiritual world'. Without any intellectual structure, spiritualism remained experimental, its explanatory role limited to that of the individual communicants with the dead, and their commentaries.

Into the gap spiritualism possessed in its inability to offer tenet or creed, except in adopting Christian belief and a modified order of service, Theosophy was able to provide a splendid and detailed cosmology which put spiritualism into a context and moved on from the spiritualists stasis.

A further crucial feature of Theosophical cosmology is that it did not demand the rejection of any creed. It is significant that Theosophy was quite different from other, contemporary forms of occultism, which did of course, demand many rejections particularly of Christian belief. In fact Theosophy represented an immense break with all other forms of occult thinking and practice.

Theosophy presented the modern world with its own unique synthesis. It did not deny Christian belief, or evolution, or the atomic structure of matter. Instead it relegated it, they were all depicted as features of a spiritual cosmology. In this manner, Theosophy could resolve the main anxieties of the cultural crisis. It was no longer a case of Christian faith or scientific knowledge - rather an acceptance of both but on quite different terms. Blavatsky's evolution worked within a timescale that offered 18,000,000

years since the appearance of humanity, and those oceans of time required by the Darwinian scheme could now be filled with progressive spiritual process, and that aspect of Darwin's evolution that caused so much distress, the common ancestry of man and ape is easily dealt with.

The treatment of Christ was equally radical with the insistence that the teaching of Christ were occult teachings were intended for the masses and that there were many in antiquity who bore the surname of title of Christ. The result was the Christ was relegated to being but a Christ, part of a tradition of holy men whose message had an esoteric meaning that needed such as Theosophy to unravel the secret. ⁶

Finally, apart from the purely structural features of Theosophic belief that helped explain its success, the leadership of the society by Blavatsky and Besant, two forceful individuals who shaped the work and nature of the society to some extent to their personalities.

⁶ A good locally produced overview of Theosophical teachings is John Willoughby Butler Bean's The Case for Theosophy (Hobart 192?) Reprinted from a series of articles published in "Hobart World".

CHAPTER ONE: THE ORIGINS OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY IN TASMANIA

The Theosophical Society was founded in New York in 1875. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott and others interested in occultism and wanting to pursue occult research. They reflected two characteristics that have been common among Theosophists ever since. They were solidly middle-class individuals - a large proportion professionals - and they were active in non traditional forms of religion and spirituality. They included several lawyers, doctors and journalists and an industrialist. Several were prominent spiritualists and occultists.

William H. Terry (1836-1913) was born in London, came to Victoria in 1853 and established a successful drapery business in Castlemaine. He also pursued religious studies in his spare time. In 1857 he became 'converted' to spiritualism and became an enthusiastic worker for the cause. He moved to Melbourne and established a supply of spiritualist literature and began editing 'Harbinger of Light' which quickly grew into an international spiritualist periodical ranking alongside the American 'Banner of Light' and the British 'Two Worlds'.

Terry had been corresponding with the founders of the Theosophical Society since its establishment and in 1878 he was manager of a tour of Australia by Mrs. Emma Hardinge Britten, authoress of 'Modern American Spiritualism' and other works on the subject and a founding member of the T.S. The early years of both spiritualism and Theosophy in Australia show a close inter-relationship centred in Melbourne, then considered a focus for 'advanced thought'. In December 1879, the 'Harbinger' drew the attention of its readers to a new theosophical monthly published in Bombay, 'The Theosophist'. Subsequently, Terry joined the T.S. and became the agent for 'The Theosophist' in Victoria, greatly improving the chance of those interested in Theosophy being able to get access to literature directly.

By 1880, the Society was organised into eight branches, in three countries: feeble in America, lively in London and very promising in India.

By 1882, in Madras on the banks of the Adyar River, a proper headquarters was established and the Theosophical Society had a secure home within easy reach of Australia.

In its early days, theosophy was often the pursuit of individuals and only occasionally did groups emerge, often to quickly disappear. The first theosophists in Australia are nearly all from a group established in Queensland, inspired by botanist Earl Heinrich Hartmann (1834-1887) for example.⁷

The importance of visiting lecturers of high calibre for the development of Theosophy can't be over-estimated. The colonial cities offered many platforms for both amusement and instruction through the public lecture circuit.

In 1878, under the auspices of W.H. Terry, Mrs. Emma Hardinge Britten came to Melbourne and Sydney. She stood out as a woman lecturer and while touring as an eminent spiritualist, her lectures showed her thinking to be close to Blavatsky's in seeing spiritualism as part of a bigger world of occult study. Her presence provided a direct source of theosophic thinking and influenced local groups such as the Psychological Society of New South Wales.

⁷ See Jill Roe *Beyond Belief Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939* (Sydney 1986) for details of the earliest history in Australia.

In 1886, Professor W.H. Chainey and his wife presented a series of lectures of a spiritualist nature. Chainey, one of the pioneers of astrology in America, was also a member of the Theosophical Society. From among those who attended his lectures in Melbourne he chose a group of seven to study Theosophy and kindred matters. They formed 'The Melbourne Gnostic Society' which barely survived their departure in 1887 but under the direction of the Russian-born Buddhist Mrs. Elise Pickett the almost defunct Gnostic Society was revived and a charter was granted from T.S. Headquarters at Adyar to form the Melbourne Branch of the Society.

1891 saw the President of the Theosophical Society, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott visiting Australia. After dealing with the legal difficulties that the Hartmann bequest created for the society (Olcott solved the difficulty by sharing the bequest with the aggrieved relatives thereby winning many friends) he spent several months touring the country from Queensland around to Adelaide and while he had to cut short his tour when news of Madame Blavatsky's death reached him, thus cutting New Zealand and Tasmania from the itinerary, his visit marks the beginning of organised theosophy in Australia. Three new branches were organised in Sydney, Adelaide and

Toowoomba to join the three already functioning in Melbourne, Hobart and Wellington and one revived branch, Brisbane. When Annie Besant toured three years later she had no difficulty in reviving the Australasian section which in modified form, continues to today.

In 1893 Mrs. Cooper-Oakley arrived in Melbourne. An early convert to theosophy she lived in the London commune of Annie Besant where Madame Blavatsky died. Staying with the Besant-Scotts she united and strengthened first the Melbourne Theosophical groups, then the Sydney groups, especially encouraging the development of libraries. Perhaps her most significant achievement was the encouraging of a local theosophical journal 'The Austral Theosophist' edited by Ernest Besant-Scott (1867-1939) begun in 1894. Her six month stay invigorated and unified the groups she met and 'The Austral Theosophist' provided a means of linking theosophists across the country.

The progress of the T.S. in Australia was steady. Lectures were given, meetings held, leaflets and publicity material produced, and journals published.

1894 saw the arrival of Annie Besant from London. For five months she visited Melbourne, Sydney and New Zealand, returning via Melbourne and Adelaide. Once again, Tasmania as well as Queensland and Western Australia were not included in the itinerary.

As a lecturer with over twenty years experience combined with a message that addressed the anxieties and ideals of the day, a dedicated and tireless worker for Theosophy, her actions lead to the successful re-formation of the Australasian section which came into existence on 1 January 1895.

In March 1895, the first annual convention was held and a new journal 'Theosophy in Australasia' was launched in Sydney following the last issue of 'Austral Theosophist'. English Theosophist John C. Staples, section President, began lecturing in outlying districts and visiting other branches.

Of 267 fellows of the Theosophical Society in Australia in 1896, 92 came from Melbourne, there were eighty members in three branches in Queensland, sixty-one in Sydney, twenty in Adelaide and fourteen in Hobart.⁸

⁸ Theosophy in Australia 5 May 1896, pp3-4

CHAPTER TWO: HOBART

"We are servants of the 'great white Lodge' we will... listen for the Master Voice in all weds"

- Hobart Lodge ACM 1928

The colonists of Tasmania, like their fellow Britons elsewhere in the colonies attached great importance to their links with the Old Country. The height of this imperial loyalty was manifested on the occasion of royal visits such as that by Prince Alfred 1869-70. In 1887 it was Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee that was celebrated with great enthusiasm across the State.

Reform and progressive legislation characterises the eighteen seventies and eighties. A revived economy and a more normal demographic balance all generated a spirit of optimism and energy in all areas of Tasmanian public life.

On August 7, 1889, the Hobart Branch of the Theosophical Society was issued with a charter issued in the names of Messrs. Beattie, Dawson and Ivey.⁹ Early records are few but from Tuesday June 2nd, minutes of meetings exist. The group meetings usually lasted an hour and a half and were held monthly.¹⁰

From the first minutes we meet Brothers E. Ivey, L. Susman, H.H. Gill, R. Chick, Joseph Benjamin and J.W. Beattie and W.H. Dawson: It is not for some time that a woman is admitted - Miss Octavia Susman, who joined at the beginning of 1893.¹¹

Everyone of these figures are interesting, particularly Beattie, Dawson and Ivey who were the prime movers behind getting the Hobart group formally organised.

⁹ Hobart Lodge Minutes, State Archives Non State Record Group NS 859/1.

¹⁰ Hobart Lodge Minutes, Monday June 9, 1891 NS 859/1

¹¹ Hobart Lodge Minutes List of Original Members NS 859/1

John Watt Beattie was born in Aberdeen, Scotland, on August 15, 1859, son of John and Esther Imlay Beattie. His father sent the young Beattie to look around Victoria and Tasmania with a view to migrating and in 1878 John Beattie senior arrived in Tasmania to take up farming on a property near New Norfolk.

Before long, John Beattie junior turned to photography, having learned the wet plate photographic process from his father who had been a portrait photographer in Aberdeen. His first major photographic expedition was made in 1879 with a party travelling to Lake St. Clair.

In 1882 Beattie accepted the offer of a partnership with the Hobart photographers Anson Brothers, whom he subsequently bought out in 1891. The business grew steadily gradually taking over the whole of the large three-storey building in Elizabeth Street with studios, work rooms and exhibition areas.

Before the 1880's landscape photography was severely limited by the wet plate process. Plates had to be sensitised, exposed and developed within a few minutes so a portable dark room and much heavy equipment was required for outdoor work. With the development of gelatin dry plates faster and easier exposure of pre-sensitised plates which could be developed later cleared the way for photographers like Beattie to visit remote and wild areas and record their scenic beauty for postcards, enlargement and the popular 'magic lantern show'.

Beattie produced his own lectures as well as producing sets of slides with accompanying notes for sale in Australia and overseas. Widely considered and outstanding documentary photographer, he was appointed Photographer to the Government of Tasmania and promoted the scenic, historic and industrial wealth of the State with his photographs.

From the minutes of the Hobart Theosophical Society, little emerges about Beattie's own involvement. He isn't recorded as having presented any papers to the regular monthly meetings but is clearly in contact with some of the international leaders of the group - in October he informs the brethren "Br. Count

Wachtmeister will represent them" at the convention to be held in Madras, reading a letter he had received.¹² That he was regarded as an important figure comes from the fact that at the special meeting called in July 1892 to deal with the vacancy caused by the sudden death of the President, Edward Ivey, Beattie was elected President to serve out the remaining six months of Ivey's term.¹³

In a pitiful note to this item is the comment that in addition to President Ivey's death "owing to the departure from this life of Br. Richard Chick, the number of members of the branch was now reduced to eight."¹⁴

Beattie's interests were very wide and he collected artifacts, photographs and documents of an historical interest as well as keeping notebooks recording anecdotes, character sketches and bits of historical trivia. Widely regarded as an authority on Tasmanian history, he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Tasmania in 1890 and established the historical and geographical section in 1899.

¹² Hobart Lodge Minutes October 12 1891 NS 859/1

¹³ Hobart Lodge Minutes July 21 1892 NS 859/1

¹⁴ Hobart Lodge Minutes July 21 1892 NS 859/1

Beattie was regularly elected Treasurer, in the late 1890's of the Hobart Lodge. A Tin A report of March 1899 shows him reading a paper titled "The Christian Theosophist" but no further details are available.¹⁵

In 1906 Beattie accepted an invitation to tour the South and Western Pacific on the Melanesian Mission Steamer 'Southern Cross'. He aimed to portray the life of the islanders as well as the scenery. In his journal of his Melanesian voyage, Beattie wrote of his personal life: his love and affection for his wife and daughters and of his preference for the 'warm embrace of the absolute freedom of religious thought' as opposed to 'clerical red tapeism'.¹⁶

His name disappears from the minutes from 1908 when the Hobart Lodge reorganised itself but he appears on membership lists for 1911 and 1924 as a fully-paid member.

¹⁵ Theosophy in Australia March 1899 Hobart Lodge Report.

¹⁶ Quoted in Marjorie Tassell and David Wood Tasmanian Photographer (Melbourne 1981). The diary is held by the Royal Society Archives stored at the University of Tasmania.

John Watt Beattie died suddenly of heart disease in Hobart on June 24, 1930. The minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Hobart Lodge held in February, 1931 noted the passing of the oldest surviving charter member... 'Mr. Beattie was the first E.S.T. warden in Tasmania', 'appointed by H.P.B.' herself. Beattie's own collection of theosophical books were, it was noted, donated to the society.¹⁷

The second of the three charter members mentioned in the minutes was William Henry Dawson (1857-1928) born at Stockport, near Manchester. Educated at Manchester Grammar School, he studied medicine for a time but gave it up to enter his father's business.

In 1884 he emigrated with his brother George to Tasmania. In Hobart he became articled to the book-loving solicitor J.B. Walker, then, failing to complete his course, he became instead, accountant to the firm of Young and Walker - when this partnership was dissolved in 1891, he transferred as accountant to the legal firm of Dobson, Mitchell and Allport where he remained until his retirement in 1925.

¹⁷ Hobart Lodge Minutes February 1931 Secretary's Report to the Annual General Meeting of the Hobart Lodge NS 859/3

He wrote verse and prose and under his initials V.H.D. or a pseudonym - ('Ernst H. Hawthorne' or 'George Lowndes') contributed his work to Australian and some British journals.

His first publication was a booklet, 'Buddha and Buddhism' printed by the Hobart 'Mercury' in 1888, reflecting his keen interest in theosophical things.

He threw himself enthusiastically into the fight for Federation, writing about it in the press and lecturing on the public platform. His poems 'Sons of Australia' and 'Star of Australia' were set to music and sung at Federation rallies.

He first appears in the Hobart Lodge records resigning from the position of secretary. No reason is given but he maintained his membership of the Hobart group and was a regular lecture presenter.¹⁸

The Boer War stirred his patriotism and in 1901 Walch published his book of poems on this theme called "War Songs 1899-1900."

¹⁸ Hobart Lodge Records June 2nd, 1891, NS 859/1

At the request of the State Government he wrote odes for the reception of the Duke and Duchess of York, to whom he was duly presented. Set to music these "songs of welcome" were sung by massed choir of Tasmania school children for the royal occasion. Two years later, in 1904 he was asked for an ode on the centenary of Tasmania. Concentrating on patriotic verse and prose as well as literary and theosophical subjects. He entered the debate sparked, in 1905, in the Launceston "Examiner" by the Rev. Charles Hamilton Shedden, Anglican priest of Ulverstone. Born 1860, ordained by the Bishop of Bathurst in 1889, Reverend Shedden arrived in Tasmania in 1901.

He spent two years at Kingston, then from 1904 to 1911 he was based in Ulverstone before being posted to Evandale where he stayed until his death in 1931. He re-enters our story in 1926 an implacable opponent of theosophy, the Reverend Shedden maintained that it was a danger to the faith of orthodox believers, denying the existence of a personal God and the divinity of Christ.

The Reverend Shedden wrote to the "Examiner" about his recent visit to Launceston where he discovered a branch of the Theosophical society was operating. In his letter he outlined the history of Theosophy with emphasis on the scandals "up to 1884, the society had no particular doctrines" he said, then "Madame Blavatsky's brain soon devised one". "It remains, then, for the ardent theosophist to show the World how the stream can be purer than the fountainhead".

A week later "Wayfarer" and W.H. Dawson replied to Shedden's attacks emphasising the non-doctrinal features of theosophy, emphasising brotherhood and open inquiry. Shedden replied to his critics as did W.N. Boutflower about whom no more than a name is known. Boutflower added further fuel to the fire by quoting anti-Blavatsky comments published by A.P. Sonnett, emphasising he'd been an intimate and should know.

On Thursday, June 8th, W.H. Dawson wrote in reply, again stressing theosophy was only interested in truth, open inquiry and was not anti-Christian. He concluded by quoting an inscription carved into the base of a monument to Luther "If this work be of man, it will come to naught, if of God it will endure".

Through out the debate, Dawson had been all reason, stressing that theosophy had no doctrine, was a group seeking truth and that critics of the society were usually unreliable or had a secret agenda. Dawson's approach was to overcome attack with grace. For Dawson, there was no incompatibility between Theosophy and Christianity. Both he and his wife were regular attenders at the New Town Methodist Church where he was a lay-preacher.

By the second decade of the century, Dawson was vice-president of the Hobart Lodge. With the outbreak of the First World War, Dawson's verse was again in demand. For the commemoration of Anzac Day in 1916, patriotic fervour was at its height with parades, a memorial service on the Queen's Domain, luncheons, stalls and kiosks, flags on sale and a concert and afternoon tea at the City Hall.

Dawson's poem "Anzac Day", was printed on the programme.

After the war, Dawson's name disappears from the list of those in positions of authority. A Final Note in 1924 named Dawson as one of three members who had resigned.¹⁹ In his late sixties failing health forced him to give up playing bowls where at the Buckingham Bowling Club he'd been deputy-president for many years. In 1925 he also retired from his position with Dobson, Mitchell and Allport.

He died at his home in Montagu Street on 18 April 1928. He was buried following a short private service at his home and a public funeral at St. John's Anglican Church attended by the Chief Justice, government dignitaries, representatives of the legal profession and others.

Henry Horatio Gill was born in 1840 at New Norfolk. He pursued a varied career after finishing his education at Hutchins School, Hobart.

¹⁹ Hobart Lodge Records December 1924, Executive Minutes July 1923 - December 1938 NS 859/5.

He was a law clerk, farmed briefly then went to New South Wales where he joined several exploration teams. Returning to Tasmania around 1865 he leased "Llanavan" near Cape Portland and settled down to sheep farming. The discovery of tin and gold made him wealthy but he also spent his time in the political arena in first local government (George Town Board of Works 1869-71 Spring Bay Municipal Council 1879). In 1882 he bought the "Southern Star" in Hobart and from 1883 began publishing his "Tasmanian News".

He stood for State Parliament in 1884 and 1886 unsuccessfully but in March 1887 he was elected MHA for Kingborough which he held for ten years. President of the Hobart Lodge in 1894 he remained a member until his death on 4th March, 1914 in Hobart.

Details about the other founding members is hard to find in most cases.

Edward Ivey was the first President of the Hobart group and almost certainly was well known as a progressive thinker. In the 1870's he'd been a member of the Minerva Club a focal point of liberal thought headed by Andrew Inglis Clark. In 1885, along with Clark, Ivey and others formed the Southern Tasmanian Political Reform Association

whose aims were manhood suffrage, increased representation, electoral reform including the payment of MP's and land taxation which would encourage the break up of the large landed elite who controlled large tracts of freehold land. In 1875, for example 90 out of the largest rural estates had been acquired before 1832 and 50 large estates held 50% of the freehold land in Tasmania. 17 family groups owned about 45 of the largest 100 properties and various liberals felt economic development was being stifled by such entrenched control. The Southern Tasmanian Political Reform Association had close links with the Trades and Labour Council and business leaders with liberal sympathies regularly shared the platform with leaders of organised labour during the eighties.

The honeymoon between liberals and organised labour came to an end during the strikes of the 1890's. When the TLC pledged support for the shearers strike and local dock workers struck in Launceston and later Hobart, resolutions to uphold private contract protection for non-union labour and employers against union boycotts and other moves clearly hostile to labour organisations, G.P. Fitzgerald MP for West Hobart and Edward Ivey addressed a Hobart meeting on the 15th September 1890 suggesting that no association avowedly against labour be formed - this was rejected by

the meeting and marks a critical moment in the political culture, witnessing the end of liberal consensus and the emergence of class conflict politics.

As noted earlier, Ivey was the first President of the Hobart Lodge and a regular presenter of papers until his death on Saturday July 16th ("in the 51 year of his age") 1892. ²⁰

Presenting papers on "Karma". "The difference between the views held by spiritualists and Theosophists" and "Theosophy and the Theosophical Society". ²¹

The other members included Richard Chick, compositor. He died in 1892 and no other details are available. Perhaps he worked for Henry Gill's paper.

Finally, Joseph Benjamin and Leo Susman. Both were businessmen with liberal sympathies.

²⁰ Mercury July 30, 1892. The "Tasmanian News" published by fellow member Henry Gill published a eulogy, too.

²¹ Hobart Lodge Records, notes on meetings, including topics of talks. NS 809/8

Joseph Benjamin held many positions in the Hobart Lodge over many years. By 1894 he was secretary, reporting on the growth of theosophy in Hobart for the "Austral-Theosophist". "The Hobart branch has also no increase of membership to report but meetings have been held with regularity both for members and public. A number of members are now doing their best to prepare original papers. These have proved interesting and a good discussion has followed".

By 1899 he is Vice President and presenting papers on "The Ethics of Theosophy". His confidence and influence increase during the early decade of this century. In 1908, the Branch renewed itself and Benjamin was elected President. The previous President having moved interstate, branch life had drifted. This time sees Benjamin elected President without a break for four years. From then until 1920 he is generally on the executive as either President or one of two Vice Presidents. Through out the twenties, when Hobart lodge became increasingly alienated, from the "various crises which have occurred" internationally, Benjamin stays with the old guard who supported the expelled Sydney lodge in their opposition to the Liberal Catholic Church and what they called Neo-Theosophy as opposed to HPB and "true Theosophy" as enunciated in the "Key to Theosophy". During

the twenties, Benjamin ran classes on the "Secret Doctrine" until ill-health forced him to reduce his involvement.

By 1931, times had changed and after eight or nine years separated from the Australian section, Benjamin announced at the executive meeting that "owing to various lodges becoming more in accord with our views that we be represented at convention."²² In August, 1931 Benjamin died suddenly and was buried "according to the Jewish rite". This was followed by a memorial service on the 16th "according to the Theosophical conception".²³

Leo Susman was an importer. A member of the Southern Tasmanian Political Reform Association in the 1880's, he was a foundation member of the Hobart group but seemed to have been active only for the first couple of years. His importance lies in the Theosophical dynasty he established - his daughter Octavia and son Maurice both joined, with Maurice especially rising to prominence in the lodge.

²² Hobart Lodge Records Executive Minutes. NS 859/5

²³ Hobart Lodge Records, 16th August, 1931.

Octavia joined early in 1893, the first woman member of the Hobart group. Born about 1865, she was active in public life, on the committee of Lindisfarne Convalescent Home, for example but particularly in the National Council of Women, representing it at conference overseas. She died in 1926. A memorial service was held by the lodge with her brother presenting the eulogy.

Maurice Susman joined after his sister, when exactly is hard to determine but before August 1908. "Mr. Susman offered to lend the Branch £6 to meet initial expenses" during it's revitalisation in 1908 following Annie Besant's visit. By December he is Secretary of the Branch and the delegate for the Annual Convention of 1909 held in Melbourne, rising to Vice President by World War I and into the twenties. In 1925 he was President, a position he held until 1930.

A list of lectures exist for the years 1908 to 1917 and Maurice Susman makes his appearance with "Is Theosophy practical?" which attracted twenty nine an average to above average number. Later, he appears more regularly, presenting "The Evidence for Theosophy" in August and "Clients of Wisdom from the Psychic Spheres" in September 1911.

During the crisis over the Liberal Catholic Church and the direction of the TS Susman was one of those in Hobart disciplined, being forced to either resign from the Esoteric Section or from Hobart Lodge for its stand in support of Sydney's rebels. He chose to join with the dissenters.

"Mr. Susman was given the choice either to resign from the Esoteric section or from our lodge" ²⁴ wrote the then secretary in 1929 concerning the treatment meted out to locals over the crisis which affected all groups over TS links with the LCC and other side issues.

Edward Ivey, W.H. Dawson and J.W. Beattie were all members of the Minerva Club, a centre of political and religious discussion centred on the hope of realizing the brotherhood of man. His aims neatly dovetailed with those of the Theosophical society.

²⁴ Hobart Lodge Records Minutes of Executive Meetings July 1923 - December 1938. NS 859/5

Andrew Inglis Clark, the acknowledged leader of this group discussed theosophy in a paper called "An Untrodden Path of Literature" written after having read A.P. Sinnetts "Esoteric Buddhism" published in 1883. Initial discussion Theosophy in terms which seem to suggest his own view is unqualified agreement, he concludes on a more even handed basis.²⁵

The depression of 1890 and the rise of Labour as a third force squeezed liberalism out of the political arena. Heterodox religious liberalism suffered a similar fate but at least for a time, it flourished through the Theosophical Society. The rationalist religious thinkers of at least some of the Minerva Club went down the "untrodden path" Clark had suggestively alluded to.

²⁵ Clark's Theosophical interest is hard to be definite about but is an area worth further exploration given the number of Minerva Club members who felt Theosophy matched their liberal opinions.

CHAPTER THREE: LAUNCESTON

"Willing instruments, pure in word, deed and thought".

- Launceston Lodge Records
Minutes of Meeting 12 February, 1906.

The Depression of the 1890's led the government to its traditional method of drastic retrenchment and although in 1896 the colonial debt was £8 million, revenue improved mainly due to the increase in output of gold, silver and coal and a steady production of tin. During this period, Hobart continued to decline and Launceston to increase in population and importance.

By 1899 the population of the colony was 183,000 and Launceston was the economic if not political capital of the colony.

Records of the Launceston branch of the Theosophical Society are fragmentary. However, an early membership list exists which is in distinction to that of Hobart. The list covers the first twenty members - 11 women, 9 men. ²⁶

²⁶ Launceston Lodge Records 1901 - 1906. Members names/attendance list. Launceston Lodge.

The initial branch meeting was held on January 27th, 1901 and of this foundation seven - the minimum necessary for a charter to be issued, there was only one man "Br. Worth", the husband of another member, present at the first meeting.

Despite this "Mr. Webb" was elected President in his absence. Meetings were set for the first and third Mondays of the month at the Worth's in Inveresk. Sr. Lithgow was elected Vice-President and she read a paper "The Place of Politics in the Life of the Nation" by Annie Besant. The main item of business was a letter from the General Secretary A. Marques covering the convention.

Quickly, the lodge settled into a regular routine of presentations shared among the members, generally, however, not original work but taken from Theosophical books and publications, digested or more usually read then discussed.

Links were also quickly established with confreres in Hobart. The adopted Hobart's bye-laws at their first regular meeting after chartering and by their fourth meeting they hosted Joseph Benjamin who addressed the group on "How desire should be eliminated". In summary, Benjamin urged the Launcestonians to "endeavour to raise the standards, and so educate our desires until we lose them in aspiration"²⁷ This mystical approach of "cultivation" of the will and silent meditation and "forgetfulness of self generally" was enthusiastically adopted by the Launceston Group.

In response to A. Marques letter inviting representatives to attend the upcoming conference in Melbourne, he also called on groups to send an original paper to be read at the conference. Launceston's contribution was "Notes, thoughts and comments on love" by Miss Esther Lithgow. Mrs. Petley, second on the list of TS members acted as the delegate.

²⁷ Launceston Lodge Records Minutes 6th May, 1901.

Hobart's assistance continued through out 1901 with "Practical Theosophy" being lent to Launceston by it's compiler, Miss Russell of Hobart. This paper had earlier been sent by Hobart to the convention and since Mrs. Petley represented both Hobart and Launceston, clearly she, too, was impressed by the quality of Miss Russell's work.

Launceston's position and steamer link to Melbourne ensured it would benefit from travellers passing through and it took the opportunity of visiting Theosophists holidaying in the north whenever the chance presented itself. Mr. Ray, from Melbourne gave his lecture on "Devotion" emphasising devotion, courage, obedience and self sacrifice to develop spiritually. Twelve months later, Mr. Ray was back in town, this time he presented "Thought and Thought Forms" at the Mechanics Institute. The Institute and Public Library, as it was called, has in excess of 18,000 volumes, with reading rooms and space for public meetings. It would hold up to three hundred in it's meeting hall. Mr. Ray of Melbourne was Launceston's delegate at the Easter 1903 convention, further binding Launceston and Melbourne in particular but Launceston to the mainland generally.

Dr. A. Marques, a close friend of Olcott, with business interests in Hawaii, returned to America. The last in a series of stop gap General Secretary's the national organisation needed stability. In 1902 ex-Brisbane president W.G. John was persuaded to take on the job and from then until his death in 1916 he encouraged weaker branches through his lecture tours and raised the profile of Theosophy as a result. Numbers rose, new branches were formed. ²⁸

He visited Tasmania in March 1903. He gave three public lectures reported in the local press. March 28th to April 3rd he gave the local Theosophists "hope" members were "stimulated to renewed activity in the interest of the cause and the purpose for which it was founded - viz. "the evolution of Humanity". ²⁹

²⁸Jill Roe Beyond Belief Theosophy in Australia 1879 - 1939 (Sydney 1986) details the difficult early days and the instability of the section establishment at this time. Lack of mainland support would be a regular complaint by the isolated Tasmanian lodges.

²⁹ Launceston Lodge Records 14th May, 1903.

The branch grew in confidence even if not in numbers, with some members regularly attending meetings in Hobart and giving presentations there. The Worth's in particular were regular visitors, even becoming regular speakers on Hobart's lecture programme as well as on Launceston's.

The indefatigable Mrs. Petley who from the start was a principal source of literature for the Launceston group and an enthusiastic proselytiser for "Theosophical thought both orally and by lending literature" also travelled to attend Theosophical conventions and kept in touch with Melbourne and Sydney groups and subscribed to journals that she then endowed the society with.

Launceston seemed to suffer from a rapid turnover of members in its early days, which did much to keep its numbers at a low level.. Miss Lithgow, wife of the local chemist was seriously ill, needing "months to effect a cure" which meant she resigned from her position as Vice President in October 1901, eight months after the branch began. Mrs. Petley, who readily travelled to Melbourne and Sydney, found she had trouble attending meetings since moving to a new house over the river. By January 1902 there were only eight members, still in May 1905 it had grown to 10 (Hobart for the same period had 19 members in March 1901 but had fallen to 11 in May 1905). Among these numbers, a very few occupy the leadership and lecturing positions.

In 1903, the President Mrs. Lithgow, the Vice President Mr. Worth, the Secretary Mrs. Worth, the Treasurer Miss Noble. The Auditor was Miss McEvoy. The Librarian was Mrs. Worth. The membership dues indicate that this was virtually the entire society at that point ³⁰

Parallelling this with the speakers list for the first half of 1903, there were twelve meetings, Mrs. Worth took three meetings, Mrs. Petley two, Joseph Benjamin from Hobart two.

Launceston, however small its numbers, however, remained confident and optimistic. In March 1904, following a letter from Hobart, the Launceston Executive agreed to join with Hobart at 1 p.m. each day "giving out good thoughts" - the content of this mantra would be "May Theosophy grow in Tasmania. May the Divine Wisdom descend into the hearts of the people of Tasmania". The hearts of many were certainly touched, especially by visitors.

³⁰ Launceston Lodge Records Subscription Account July 1903, see also List Of Officers and Names of Executive Council 1903.

The importance of visitors for expanding the group was underscored by the visit of Miss Edgar in April 1904. She gave four public lectures at the Mechanics Institute, two addresses to members at drawing room meetings and two afternoon meetings. From 19th April until the 30th when she left for Melbourne. Tim A reported on her visit to Tasmania. She gave three lectures in a week in Hobart then ten days in Launceston. It noted that "one of the local clergy urged his congregation not to attend her lectures". Miss Edgar's comments were that there was a "good opening in Launceston, quite new ground for Theosophy publicly represented" and that her stay "was, for Tasmania, surprisingly successful". 31

Certainly, her presence sparked media interest which both Launceston and Hobart tried to capitalise on, with Hobart being more successful, noting in Tim A in October 1904 that there has been "a partial conquest of the press" in Hobart and similar comments from then on in May saying "The local press now report nearly all the meetings at considerable length". 32

31 Theosophy in Australia May 1904.

32 Theosophy in Australia October, November, December 1904.

Launceston seems to have not made any great inroads into the local populace and certainly not winning over the local press. In fact, it seems to have disappeared from public attention until the Reverend C.H. Shedden's attack, mentioned earlier, in June 1905, W.H. Dawson's defence has been noted earlier. "Wayfarer" and FTS" were both clearly members of the society but also to their identity it would only be a guess but one must be Mrs. R. Worth.

Secretary in 1903 and in 1906 its not unreasonable that given her position and her profile as a regular lecturer to the Launceston group and to the Hobart group she would defend the Theosophical Society. "Wayfarer" makes the general point that Theosophy is now religious in a sectarian sense merely a group seeking after truth. "FTS" notes similar points arguing against Shedden's view that Blavatsky's writings represent a doctrine since Theosophists are open to all. Whether "Wayfarer" or "FTS" (my guess is "Wayfarer") looking back over Mrs. Worth's lectures both in Launceston and Hobart, we see a more mystical bent to her presentations - Leadbeater's "Man Visible and Invisible", "General Presentation of Theosophy", "Death Viewed Theosophically" "The Law of Harmony" or her 1908 lecture in Hobart "Some Impressions of the Astral Plane". In 1904 one address on "Sacrifice" received a whole column in the local paper in Hobart. notes Tin A in December 1904.

Eventually the Worth's moved to Hobart and Mrs. Worth rose to be Secretary of that group during the 1920s. At the risk of projecting the understanding of one period back into an earlier stage, Mrs. Worth was a strong defender of the "old guard" in opposition to "neo-Theosophy" (Leadbeater, LCC and the Esoteric Section trying to control lodges) in the 20s and these views parallel well the views expressed in 1905 when Theosophy still was pioneering in Australian non sectarian, not distracted by the development of side issues.

Launceston, however, did diversify its activities. In January 1905, a Lotus circle was established by Miss Allen (who became assistant Librarian in 1906). Introduced to Australia by Cooper-Oakley in 1893 they became widespread groups equipped with locally produced books and offering a thorough plan of work, examinations and studies. They were Theosophical "Sunday Schools", for children. How important in creating members is doubtful, however.

In 1905, following the Reverend Shedden's attacks, the fastest rising star in Theosophy arrived in Australia, Charles Webster Leadbeater. Already well known as the author of numerous treatises on the astral plane which he had been clairvoyantly exploring, his reputation as a Theosophical lecturer in London and then America where he had been touring for a number of years was high.

After Melbourne, Leadbeater arrived in Launceston on October 1st. He was interviewed by the Examiner and a column length report written headed "Theosophy: What is it?" on Monday 2nd of October.

"One of the good things about Theosophy" said Leadbeater "is its definiteness. We are never in doubt for by study and reflection we are enabled to ascertain the truth. We know, for instance, that there is no death. That when we pass out of this life we enter another sphere of existence which is better and brighter and happier and thus death which is generally regarded with grim fear, or awe, has no terror for us".

Leadbeater gave two special public lectures "Life After Death" and "Man, Visible and Invisible". The ad published in the Examiner on Tuesday the 3rd of October was headed "Life After Death"..."Fact, Not Theories". Held in the Mechanics Institute.

The records of the Launceston Lodge, at this time still only ten in number, show they had 1,000 leaflets printed advertising Leadbeater's lectures. (£3 for rent of hall for two public lectures £1-1-0 for hire of lantern and magic lantern operator) but with 260 people present at each of the two meetings, it was a great success.³³

Leadbeater continued on to Hobart, returning on the 14th to catch the steamer Loongana back to Melbourne. Grateful remarks were published about in Tin A but within a month, Leadbeater was obliged to resign from the Theosophical Society when charges of immorality were pressed against him by Theosophical parents outraged that his tutorship of their sons included masturbatory practices. They demanded an inquiry, duly held in London in 1906.

³³ Launceston Lodge Records October 1905.

Annie Besant came through in 1908. In 1907 she had attained the presidency of the Theosophical Society and during the winter of 1908 she returned to Australia, bringing a new vigour to Australian Theosophy. No record exists of her Launceston Stay but a lodge met there. Launceston, it seems, went through a period of decline, perhaps following the scandal of Leadbeater's difficulties but around 1909 Charles A. Ogilvie became President and during his thirty year period in office a new stability came to Theosophy in Launceston. It was under his guidance that a permanent home for Theosophy was gained. ³⁴

Launceston also played host to visitors from Melbourne and Hobart. A regular lecturer of the Hobart Lodge, H.H Hawthorne also visited Launceston. This New Zealand theosophist was also a dedicated palmist, astrologer and interpreter of dreams in addition to clairvoyant investigator of the astral plane. Dominating the lecture record of 1908-10, he then spent time working for the Theosophical Society in Adyar and Blueares. At the

³⁴ The Theosophical Society in Australia 75th Anniversary commemoration Sydney 1970, also interviews with relatives of Mr. Charles Ogilvie and his son, succeeding President.

1913 Annual Conference of the Australian Section Hawthorne's offer to lecture was refused (13 noes to 10 ayes - including 4 proxies) what "charges reflecting on Mr. Hawthorne" were not made clear but he disappears from the record from this time on. His Unorthodox interests going with him.

Charles A. Ogilvie came from an auctioneering background. He married a Miss Herd and joined his brother-in-law H. Herd when he opened his auction rooms in York Street, Launceston. They auctioned property, had stock and skins, hides and fur auctions, live animals and furniture too. His son, Frank A. Ogilvie entered the business at the end of World War I and shared his father's interest in theosophy, succeeding him in 1939 from which time he was continuously President for thirty years.

Launceston didn't escape the split which affected theosophy in Australia during the twenties. The adventism which sprung up as a result of the unease and upset by the war had its theosophical version. Annie Besant, speaking at the Golden Jubilee of the Theosophical Society at Adyar in 1925 emphasised that the World Teacher would soon arrive and with that Krishnamurti came forward. Those theosophists who supported the order of the Star of the East were vindicated, those who

doubted would soon be left by the wayside. In addition, the activities of the Liberal Catholic Church lead by Bishop Leadbeater also had been disturbing the Australian Section. Matters came to a head in 1922 when Annie Besant arrived in Australia. The dissidents were expelled from the Esoteric society run by the President and a new lodge was established for the faithful. With that done, she returned to India. The repercussions locally were to cause resignations and splits.

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During the early twenties, information on Launceston activities are few but that the lodge had been decimated by the events of the twenties comes in an "Australian Theosophist" article of October 1926. Headed "Sunshine at Launceston" we read "we are happy to report a welcome change. During September matters led up to a final clearing up of all the old discord and unrest which has gripped this lodge for many years. Since this has been removed the Sunday night attendance at lectures has increased from 5 to 22 and all this within a few weeks." Launceston lodge remained loyal during the crisis, Hobart sided with the dissidents, by and large.

1926 saw the visit of Miss Mary Katherine Neff, "the noted American lecturer, who is at present on a visit to Launceston in the interests of the Theosophical Society". As national lecturer she toured from one end of the country to the other, but her stay in Launceston was to see a flurry of press excitement. Her first lecture was on evolution, the root races and the coming of a great teacher.

"Under the title of "The Mystery of Evolution" Miss Mary K. Neff ... delivered an arresting address at the Theosophical Hall, Elizabeth Street". The Examiner article then gave a detailed outline of

the lecture. "Working under the principle that theosophy is the synthesis of all the accumulated knowledge of the universe, from whatsoever source, the lecturer first braced the origin of the solar system" ... "was there not also an evolution of the life, the soul? Here theosophy took up the tale, and told of one life, God's life, dwelling in all forms from the savage to the civilised man of today, by means of reincarnation which is the process of the evolution of the soul". ³⁵

Friday November 5th saw "Old Salt" writing to the correspondence page of the "Examiner". "Theosophy ... quite opposed to the creation of mankind as stated in the Bible, that book of books ... the word of God. One would naturally think that at least one or two of our clergy who are paid to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, would attempt to refute some of the statements", laments "Old Salt" but in their absence he argues that miracles mentioned in the Bible prove special creation - pointing to divine intervention as God's methodology.

³⁵ The "Examiner" November 1, 1926. However, in the week preceding this Miss Neff was interviewed for the Woman's World column (October 26, 1926) which gives a detailed summary of her TS career. Monday saw A.M. Evans respond to "Old Salt"

encouraging him to read theosophical literature directly rather than respond on the strength of a newspaper report. Mary K. Neff, also, responded to "Old Salt". "Its as quite true that theosophists do not believe in "a sin cursed world" as does "Old Salt". It is incredible, she continued, that God would create something and then curse it. "Neither does the theosophist hold that the death of Christ lifted that curse, but to him the life of Christ has helped to "at-one" (not atone) made and God - i.e. aided man's education.

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The battle lines were drawn, then between "Old Salt" standing for traditional fundamentalist Christianity on the one hand and theosophy on the other. Theosophy had its converts "J.B." on Tuesday notes "I learned more in that lecture room in a few hours about visible and invisible things that I ever dreamt of before during my 68 years...." but traditional evangelical opponents were highly vocal. "Anglican" on the same day notes "many people are very ignorant on the subject

of such religions, and did they but know the fact about them and their origin.... If Mr. Ditterich (visiting Anglican Priest coincidentally in town on a lecture tour) could arrange to give some lectures in exposing the heresies of the above-named and other beliefs, I am sure many would thank him".

Wednesday's "Examiner" carried an article on the final lecture given by Miss Neff. "Theosophy in Everyday Life". "Theosophy" is "practical idealism" "Family" is the "meeting place of a group of souls, to help each other in their evolution toward perfection" "Parents" "furnish such conditions that the germs of good shall thrive while the germs of evil are starved out". "Pets" our duty is to "lessen its animal attributes to savagery as far as possible and cultivate its affection for what is animal today will some day be human". Usual theosophical themes.

Debate continued to rage. "Christadelphian" took theosophists to task for quoting the Bible while they refused to believe in the fall, a "fundamental of Bible teaching". "Old Salt" returned to the fray to oppose evolution. God made the stars, the stars don't change since "the God of nature doesn't change" evolution is an impossibility.

Mary Neff's frustration comes through on Thursday, November 11th. "The attacks on theosophy so far launched through the Launceston press show a lamentable lack of knowledge.... In this instance, as always, it is true that the harshest critics are those who know the least". Launceston Lodge member J.H. Wilson of Hadsden invited "Anglican" to call in to see for himself or perhaps that "would be considered too great a risk". ³⁷

Saturday, November 13th saw "Anglicans" reply "any so-called religion which robs Jesus Christ of his divinity, flouts his injunctions as to prayer, ignores Him as the one and only saviour from sin... is not God". Quoting the "great Australian journalist and methodist preacher Dr. Fitchett" theosophy is a false religion so its faith "is a perverted sort, with no relation to reason, its actual root is in insanity".

³⁷ Captain J.H. Wilson, as well as fellow lodge member Frank Ogilvie, were both ex-servicemen. During the 20's and 30's they were noted for establishing a fund raising entertainment group which continued for many years raising funds for charities in Northern Tasmania.

The following week, opponents to theosophy based their attacks on the premises that the scriptures are literally true, that Christianity is superior to all other religions and that theosophists are at best naive since they don't know that being a member of the Christian church should separate them from "other beliefs" through to, at worst, "idolaters" "hostile to Christian beliefs" "their source is from beneath".

Mary Neff rejoined the debate on Wednesday the 17th. Theosophy has no "doctrine" or "believe". "It is an attempt to form a nucleus of human brotherhood, to draw together adherents of all the religions of the world and to bridge the gulf between science and religion".

The following Monday, in addition to publishing more letters, an article titled "The Cult of Theosophy" by Rev. C.H. Shedden was printed being virtually word for word his letter published in 1905 just prior to C.W. Leadbeater's visit. "I shall use many of the arguments and quotations which appeared in my letters to the press some years ago on this subject he writes "This can hardly be avoided as I used the same notes and consulted the same author as I did on that occasion".

Given the great heat, if little light, created by the correspondence, the Editor of the Examiner wrote a balanced approach to the issues. "We do not know that a great deal of good is likely to come of this exchange of views, but at least there has been a stirring of interest and there can hardly be harm". "Christianity is hampered by its own greatness. Its trouble, if it has any, is that it is taken too much for granted. If a Christian Minister in his church stated doctrinal truths and they were published in the press, they would excite no comment. When a theosophical lecturer does the same thing the matter becomes one of immediate concern".³⁸

The Australian Theosophist noted the Launceston situation "all Launceston is buzzing" Miss Neff writes "the controversy in the Launceston Press still ragse.. .This island is at least fifty years behind the times in "Aussie". Most of the people are Bible-worshippers pure and simple".³⁹

Nevertheless, the publicity doesn't seem to have harmed the Launceston group. The secretary Mrs. Reid was overjoyed by the results - five new members, several on the point of joining for a total of 23 members.

³⁸ Examiner, November 19th, 1926 Editorial.

³⁹ The Australian Theosophist December 1926 p.214.

The next two years were quiet. As Launceston faced the thirties it was in a good position - it had it's own building which paid for itself, an established long-term leadership and members who were also record-holding, long-term loyal activists such as Mrs. Reid who died in the late sixties after fifty years membership of the Lodge.

CHAPTER FOUR: LATROBE AND DEVONPORT

"Helping the Angel Kingdom..."

- Latrobe Lodge Report 1929

Latrobe was settled later than the twin towns of the lower Mersey, Torquay and Formby and by 1881 it was the largest town on the North West Coast. In 1885 the railway arrived, further boosting its importance. The extension of the railway to Formby began the decline of Latrobe as a port of commerce further diminished when a bridge over the Mersey at Devonport lessened the importance of the bridge at Latrobe. During its heyday, however, its population was five times that of Torquay and Formby combined.

Potatoes and timber were early exports but following closer settlement legislation, land was purchased, divided and resold, often to be turned into apple orchards.

The "Weekly Courier" Thursday, May, 1912 surveyed the spread of apple orchards in the North West. "Along the Sassafras Road, Mr. W.G. Elliston has about 20 acres in. The trees are up to four years old and have made good growth".

Exactly how or when he became interested in theosophy is unknown but he was a well-read theosophist, on his death, his family donated many rare and interesting books to the Launceston Lodge.⁴⁰

How the Latrobe group began is likewise, too, unclear but during the twenties it is mentioned in Tin A and TAT and certainly William Gore Elliston, mentioned at various times as secretary along with Mrs. Mary Mundy, a fellow orchardist, as President, were the key movers of this small group who had links with Launceston and with a school-based group in Devonport called "Olcott Lodge" but never large in numbers.

In 1910, Dr. G.A. Walpole and his wife Margaret arrived in Devonport from the West Coast. Margaret established a school in her home "Riverscourt". Her sister, Miss Alice Andrews took language and music and Lilian Outhwaite taught basic education studies. Margaret taught history, geography, dancing and Greek dancing or eurhythmics. In 1913, Lilian was appointed principal of the new school built adjoining the "Riverscourt" home and this was called St. Margarets.

⁴⁰ Interviews with family members and the Theosophical Society in Australia 75th Anniversary commemoration, Sydney, 1970. Also, interview with Mrs. Vernon, friend of the Walpoles, for other information on Devonport.

Miss Peggy Mundy, a niece of Mrs. Margaret Walpole taught the younger children by the Montessori method, joining an expanded staff. How "theosophical" these connections were is disputed but Tin A in January lists Mabel Ponsonby as secretary of Olcott Lodge -

"Public meetings monthly. Student's meetings monthly at Mrs. Walpole's residence, "Riverscourt", Devonport to whom visitors are referred".⁴¹

Whether Margaret herself was interested or merely dabbled, following her death in 1920, Lilian Outhwaite married Dr. Walpole and was very involved, responding to a Hobart circular letter sent to lodges both in Australia and overseas requesting support in its campaign to oppose "Neo-Theosophy". The Hobart minutes note Lilian M.O. Walpole's "want of sympathy" with the circular letter sent on 1st October (1923).⁴²

⁴¹ Theosophy in Australia, January 1920.

⁴² Hobart Lodge Records, Minutes of the Executive July 1923 - December 1938 NS859/5.

Lilian didn't enjoy good health. Her brother had died of TB and she, herself, had been affected. She died in 1928 aged 48 and TAT annual report for January 1929 notes "one charter has been returned from the Olcott Lodge Tasmania". At this stage, membership figures for the Australian section note that Olcott Lodge had three members.

St. Margaret's then may not be a theosophical school like Morven in Sydney but some of the progressive flavour of theosophical attitudes to children and education can perhaps be seen in the monthly evenings for the senior girls which included attending talks by visiting speakers such as Dr. Bean. Other suggestions of theosophical flavour include the discipline policy - no corporal punishment, which theosophists believe coarsened the spirit and the emphasis on physical education, especially on eurhythm.

The Latrobe group in May 1929 had nine members. As noted before Mrs. Mary Mundy, sister to Margaret Walpole was an orchardist at Latrobe, on "Avro", a property owned by Dr. Walpole's son Eric. After education at Wesley College, Melbourne and in England he returned in 1910 and joined with his father in buying land and establishing orchards. "Avro", also later in the twenties, was the largest and best equipped poultry farm in the state and best equipped poultry farm in the state.

The June - July 1925 issue of "Star in the East", the journal of the order of the Star in the East notes that among "Gardens of the Star" to date N° 17, donated by Mrs. Mundy, is "Avro". "This land is near the country road, and the donors wish to provide there "a cup of cold water" together with some Star literature for the passer-by, and later on perhaps; a shrine might be built there". ⁴³

Meetings of the Latrobe group seemed to have been initially at "Avro" but for a time they were held at the Devon Hospital, Miss E.M. Crane was the Matron from 1928 - 1933 and during that time, she seems to have replaced Mrs. Mundy, representing Latrobe at the 1932 and 33 Conventions after the Lodge called on a proxy for 1931. Mrs. Mundy represented the group in 1930 but after Miss Crane's time, meetings from then on are held at W. Gore Ellison's place "Cherry Hills".

September 1929 TAT has a brief report by the then secretary W. Gore Elliston. "Our activities have been talks and readings on the World Mother movement, etc. Our meetings are held in a hospital and we think that our meditations and talks may be helpful to the Angel Kingdom in their work for the sick".⁴⁴

⁴³ Star in the East, June - July 1925.

⁴⁴ The Australasian Theosophist, September 1929.

The Latrobe group regularly took part in gatherings at "Riverscourt" it seems when Lillian was alive but once the interest ended with her death it came to rely more and more on the Elliston family to keep the flame alive both through local meetings but also through contact with Launceston and hosting visiting lecturers to a couple of days stay while in the north of the state.

Loyalists to the Adyar leadership, they represent a contrast to the Hobart group, who nearly split with the TS over the Leadbeater affair and the LCC link. Launceston remained loyal and so did Latrobe. Lillian certainly kept her loyalty - she and Dr. Walpole were married by an LCC priest, something Hobart would have looked on with suspicion and opposition.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE PARTING - THE VIEW FROM HOBART
1920 - 1930

"In adhering to the original presentation of Theosophy its our duty to the Masters - to the Lodge - and to the public - that we do not fail".

Annie Besant's assumption of leadership carried Theosophy in new directions along paths some would not follow. Following the "Judge Affair" which saw Vice-President William Judge accused of forging letters from the Masters behind the society expelled, Besant became the Outer Head of the Esoteric section. Established by Madame Blavatsky in 1888 for "advanced students" it provided an important means of spiritual initiation and progress. Being a secret society within the larger Theosophical Society it was a source of loyal supporters for the Head and could be a source of cohesion or, given the dual allegiance it created, it could be destructive of unity, too.

Early in the twentieth century, the co-Masonic movement was introduced as a movement reviving occult ritual and symbol.

Madame Blavatsky nominated 1975 as the beginning of the sixth round, to be heralded by another great religious teacher, Besant developed this inheritance emphasising the signs of the coming as imminent. Emphasis shifted decisively from the Masters of Blavatsky to the messiah and Leadbeater found him in Krishnarmarti, a motherless Brahmin boy who lived on the Adyar estate with his father and brother and with whom Leadbeater had been conducting clairvoyant experiments. With Besant's endorsement, the Order of the Star in the East was created to prepare the way for the World Teacher. Initially Krishnarmarti was Head of the new order and edited the Star journal.

By 1912 there were 620 members of the OSE in Australia. By 1918 the order of the Star conference attracted 200 people and with a membership of 1664 the order was almost the size of the TS itself.

In 1916 Leadbeater, resident in Sydney, was consecrated a bishop in the Old Catholic Church, writing to Besant "the movement would fill a niche in the scheme" and Besant, faced with the coup, loyally supported it on the grounds that it would

be the future Christian church when the World teacher arrived. The first services were held in Melbourne in 1916 but by the twenties there were many ordinations of long term theosophists which created huge tensions in the once firmly anti-clerical and strictly neutral and non-sectarian world of theosophy.

T.H. Martyn, General Secretary of the TS; whose personal wealth had for sometime supported the Sydney Lodge set about campaigning for a "Back to Blavatsky" movement - Theosophy without the personality cults, occults pronouncements, the OSE, the coming and the LCC. To support his efforts, Martyn formed a TS Loyalty League in Sydney. He was opposed by Leadbeater's followers and conflict simmered before it finally exploded at the Australian TS convention which began on Good Friday, 1922.

In Hobart, a special general meeting was held on Friday, 8th April, 1921. 18 members (and 10 proxies) gathered to consider the application of Mr. A.S. Kirby for admission to the Lodge. Information had been gathered from Melbourne Lodge as to Mr. Kirby's status. Mrs. Worth, librarian of the Hobart Lodge and longtime member tabled the charges against Mr. Kirby - he would not pay his

arrears of dues and suggested holding LCC services in the lodge room on Sunday mornings. Mr. Kirby maintained he didn't owe money but that the charges of hoping to hold LCC services were untrue. Mr. Benjamin testified that he'd heard the proposal made by Mr. Kirby after one meeting. At this point Mr. Kirby withdrew his application "The lodge has broken all the laws of hospitality and of brotherhood". Hobart would remain implacably opposed to confusing TS and any other movement and would follow the growing crisis in Sydney with increasing anxiety and anger.

Hobart sent three delegates to the 1922 conference, Messrs. Susman, Raism and Prentice and the real fight began with a motion of confidence in Leadbeater, coupled as was inevitable with Mrs. Besant. The storm went on for about two and a half hours and when the vote was taken 85 support Leadbeater and 15 were against including Martyn and Prentice.

⁴⁵ Hobart Lodge Records Special General Meeting 8th April, 1921.

John Murdoch Prentice (1886 - 1964) had been in the AIF in Cairo and London and France. Prentice's theosophical beliefs were shaken by the wrong turn theosophy had taken, he believed in the LCC and the World Teacher movement, becoming an implacable opponent of Leadbeater and Besant. Back from overseas, Prentice settled in Hobart and by 1922 was vice-president of the Hobart Lodge and in 1923, President.⁴⁶

With the expulsion of the Loyalty Leaguers from the Esoteric section and a separate lodge was established for the faithful, in 1923 "the Theosophist" initiated a series of articles defending Leadbeater and attacking his critics.

⁴⁶ Jill Roem, *Beyond Belief; Theosophy in Australia 1879 - 1939* (Sydney 1986) gives more detail on J.B. Prentice's life and opinions prior to his arrival in Tasmania.

In June, 1923, Adyar cancelled the diplomas of twelve FTS including the Martyns and Prentice. On July 13, 1923 the Hobart Lodge executive met with Prentice in the chair. A resolution was carried "that a special general meeting of the Lodge be called to consider the reply of Mrs. Besant to the Resolutions and that action be taken as then deemed necessary".⁴⁷ The special general meeting met in August. Mr. Prentice the chair, Messrs. Susman, Smith, Benhamin amongst the men and Mrs. Worth among the women present. Prentice announced his expulsion from the TS and handed the meeting to the Vice President Mr. Maurice Susman. Loyally rallying around, prentice, the lodge passed a series of resolutions, firstly declining to recognize the cancellation of Prentice's diploma and then considering Dr. Besant's reply to resolutions calling for an inquiry unto Leadbeater's activities to be "evasive" and "discourteous".

Hobart then decided not to elect a new president and preferring to be without representation on the Executive of the section than recognise Prentice's expulsion. Finally, they decided to decline to participate in the upcoming convention to stress its "disapproval of the arbitrary actions of the General Secretary and the Executive Committee in regard to the persecution of the Sydney Lodge".

⁴⁷ Hobart Lodge Records, Meeting of the Executive Minutes, July 13, 1923

This heated meeting also produced a circular letter to be sent to all odges in the Australian section and to the general secretaries throughout the world asking their attention and opinion on the events and power exercised by Adyar.

A lodge was established prior to these events which maintained its loyalty to Adyar and the new leadership in Sydney. Mr. Modridge headed the Dâna Lodge, and as events developed and Hobart became alienated from the Australian section, relations between Hobart and Dâna Lodge also became strained.

By October 1923, Hobart was finding itself under attack. Miss Beaufoy, former Launceston secretary was now at sectional headquarters and informed Hobart that since it chose not to elect a president it was no longer represented on the section executive and until they do they would no longer be sent executive minutes. This latest insult, for so it was so interpreted, sparked another flurry of letters. "We challenge your statement" they wrote to General Secretary Dr. J.W. Bean "that we have ranged ourselves with those who have been expelled from the society.... we have tried to aid those fellows who have been literally persecuted out of the movement by officers much less worthy of being inside the movement".

By the end of 1923 Prentice had departed for the mainland after nearly three years work in Hobart. A farewell lecture dealing with "Parsifal - A Musical Drama of Initiation". Prentice's own search for the Holy Grail would ultimately take him to America.

The "brain drain" to the mainland continued, too. The Dears, long-time lodge members had moved to the mainland, ultimately joining the Blavatsky Lodge. Mr. Dear continued his practice as a lawyer in addition to his priestly work with the LCC.

The importance of dynamic speakers from the mainland for renewing lodge life was underscored by the procession of Independent Theosophical Society speakers - firstly the American Charles Lazenby for a month, followed by the Gillespies and Miss Lambrick, the Melbourne theosophical lecturer. A regular visitor since the first decade of the century, she was a known women's activist as well as theosophist lecturer.

⁴⁸ Hobart Lodge Records 14 September, 1923.

Hobart seemed keen to try to continue to keep good relations with section Headquarters and occasional motions to definitely withdraw from the Adyarites and throw in their lot with the independent Theosophical Societies, particularly pushed by Vice-President Benjamin usually came to nothing nevertheless they kept their loyalty to Prentice, opposing vigorously any attacks or criticisms, and in protest to comments by Besant, editor of "The Theosophist" the lodge discontinued subscription during 1924. The lodge voted unanimously to give Prentice an honorary life membership at the AGM in February 1924.⁴⁹

By the end of 1924 the lodge was split. Half the lodge left to form Dâna Lodge under J. Modridge, former vice-president of Hobart Lodge, the rest stayed in Hobart.

⁴⁹ Hobart Lodge Records 22 February, 1924.

During 1925, Hobart continued to grow, hosting visits from mainland speakers and to hold out against the Adyar loyalists. "Having made the stand that we have in adhering to the original presentation of Theosophy it is our duty to the Masters - to the lodge - and to the public - that we do not fail" - so wrote the Secretary, Mrs. Worth. 50

1926 Hobart was set back by resignations, ill health of important members like Joseph Benjamin and the death of members like Octavia Susman. Attendance was considered "fair" by the public but "not satisfactory" by members in the eyes of the Secretary.

At the same time Dâna Lodge experimented with a new way of conducting its Sunday evening meetings - "instead of a formal lecture the room is arranged more in the style of a social gathering, and then, after gramophone music a member addresses the gathering in an easy way for about a quarter of an hour on the advertised subject. This is followed

⁵⁰ Hobart Lodge Records AGM Meeting, 26th February, 1926.

by discussion, which members keep brisk in order to encourage non-members to join in. More music is played before leaving. In the event of there being only members present, instead of the elementary address a different one is given, suited to members, by another speaker" ⁵¹ by having two speakers ready, one for inquirers and one for members then its ready for whatever situation and abandoning formality they expect to attract inquirers. Members contributed much to increase the attractiveness of the Dâna Lodge rooms with a gramophone, fancy cups and saucers, a supper cloth, flowers and running occasional socials to increase lodge funds. They hosted Miss Neff's visit following her stay in Launceston. Hobart Lodge had been approached to co-sponsor the visit but they declined.

For Dâna Lodge, Miss Neff's visit was the "all eclipsing event". Six lantern lectures on the main teachings of Theosophy, two lectures under the auspices of OSE on the Return of the World Teacher. The results were two new members and four others expected to join. 1927 was looked to as an era of expansion but by the end of the year, the annual report published in TAT noted sadly "Dâna Lodge continues to hold its ground in a very unresponsive

⁵¹ The Australian Theosophist, 15 November, 1926.

city. Occasional recruits only serve to counter balance the continual drift of members to Sydney. The lodge has four lecturing members and the need for visiting lecturers was regarded as critical to keep up the interest and a full range of activities such as distributing publications, fostering star work etc." 52

Actually, Hobart and Dâna Lodges' fortunes both seem to decline as the depression gripped. Both dropped separate mid-week meetings concentrating on their Sunday groups, the traditional evening for Theosophical meetings, both tries to gain a wider public - Dâna Lodge by a more relaxed setting, Hobart by broadening it's public lectures to include topics such as a lantern slide programme by the curator of the Launceston Museum on cathedrals in England, a series by Mr. G. Roberts, Director of the Nature Cure Rest Home in Launceston on vegetarian cooking and health. A talk on spiritualism at the beginning of 1928 Mr. B. Finkenagle from Sydney titled "The Spooks of Spiritualism - what are they?" caused some members to resign over the word "spook". Numbers continued

52 The Australian Theosophist, 15 February, 1928

to decline, causing regular comment on the need for attendance by members "Attendance is most important. All efforts are necessary to help stem the tide of materialism and to aid the Masters in their endeavours to reach all who have problems to solve. Finding Theosophy has been described to be much more important than birth or marriage." ⁵³

By 1930, following Krishnamarti's renunciation of his World Teacher role and dissolution of the order of the Star in the East and the decline which followed those who were discouraged, depressed, despairing or even merely bored, drifting away and the fact Leadbeater and Besant were both ageing now, changes of a reconciliation between the different lodges seemed more likely. Hobart felt "it is cheering to note that the gloom which has hung over the society in general thereby hindering much of the good work seems to be slowly lifting...

..."while there are three members faithful", writes Secretary Worth, "the TS cannot fail".

⁵³ Hobart Lodge Records AGM Meeting January, 1929.

⁵⁴ Hobart Lodge Records AGM Meeting January, 1930.

By 1931 Mr. Benjamin had become reconciled with the way things had developed "owing to the various lodges becoming more in accord with our views that we be represented at convention." For the first time in eight or nine years Hobart re-entered the TS mainstream. Perhaps it was an appropriate moment for in August 1931 Joseph Benjamin "passes over" and from that point on, Hobart was again within the bosom of the Australian section. Dana Lodge rejoined around this time, too.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The history of the Tasmanian Theosophists shows that the most vexing problems that faced the society were shared by the society nationally and even internationally. In fact they represent permanent challenges and dilemmas embedded within the deepest layers of the movement.

There is one central ambiguity that underlies all the rest, which can be seen as the conflict between a mystical ideal and institutional reality. "Theosophy" is the mystical ideal, the "soul", while the "Theosophical Society", "the gross and imperfect body", is the organisational reality.

The relation between mysticism and religious institutions has been explored by the sociologist of religion Ernst Troeltsch.

Mysticism often occurs within an established tradition. When religious forms become hardened, religion can be transformed into a purely personal experience - mysticism. But mysticism can also occur outside established religion. Troeltsch called this second type "technical mysticism". It is the type to which Theosophy belongs.

"Technical mysticism" makes a break with traditional religion and understands itself to be an independent principle - the real universal heart of all religions. All that is organised, historic, dogmatic or objective is regarded as that which causes that personal experience which alone is valuable.

Another aspect of Troeltsch's discussion is important to an understanding of Theosophy. Troeltsch discussed three types of groups to be found in Christianity, the church, the sect and mysticism. The "church" represents the embodiment of religious ideals in organisational forms that are thought to have objective value. The "sect" is a voluntary group of believers attempting to lead a pure religious life. "Mysticism" is an individualistic form in which persons seek an inner knowing.

Troeltsch understood these three to interact with one another and believed that more than one and often all three ideal types are present in a specific, concrete Christian group.

In such settings, the mystical emphasis on a spiritual fellowship occurs in the context of an institution, which is also given religious value, when, as in technical mysticism, mysticism occurs outside traditional religion, such balancing factors are lacking, and an ideal of spiritual fellowship is contrasted with institutional forms, which tend to be viewed as provisional or as part of the profane world.

The belief in a mystical ideal and in the denigration of organisational forms lies at the heart of the problems to be discussed in this conclusion. It contributes centrally to the conflicts over succession, it is bound up with the difficulty of determining what is validly Theosophical belief and practice. Evoking commitment from religious seekers, too, is difficult and contributes to the devaluing of intellectual analysis. All of which makes for unstable or even ephemeral groups.

The sociologist of religion Max Weber has noted that religious organisations originate with the religious experiences of the founders and their disciples and that this "charismatic" experience is gradually transformed into stable forms, or "routinised."

Both charismatic and organisational forms of authority were present in the early history of the Theosophical Society. Madame Blavatsky was the charismatic figure, whose authority rested on her contact with the Masters, the "real founders" of the society. Olcott held a position that gave him power in the formal organisation of the society. The struggle between the two founders in the last years of Madame Blavatsky's life was a battle between two forms of authority. There was a tension between authority based on charismatic ability and authority based on the holding of an office.

The tension between these two forms of authority has never been resolved fully in the Theosophical movement. The value given to the organisation as such as lessened permanently by the fact that the charismatic figure was not the leader of the formal structure and, in fact, acted at times to undermine the structure.

The appeal to charismatic abilities against the authority of the formal organisation was central to the first and most serious schism in the history of the movement. William Judge's efforts to gain greater power in the society rested on his claim of contact with the Masters. The letters and notes purporting to emanate from them, gave him an authority seen by some as more valid than the power vested in Olcott as President. The ability to limit such claims and to channel charismatic gifts to the purposes of the organisation requires mechanisms for controlling charisma, which in turn rest on giving value to organisational forms and to established means of succession.

The Tasmanian groups seemed to have escaped disputes over leadership internally and within the democratic process of annual elections, the long terms and unopposed elections characteristic of all Tasmanian groups go beyond the lack of candidates as the explanation for such a situation to parallel the leadership of charismatic individuals within organised forms. Skilled Theosophists rose to leadership in a combination of charisma with organisational authority. This maintained stability over a long period with sudden, dramatic changes to punctuate the history of all the Tasmanian groups.

A further set of ambiguities and dilemmas for Theosophical groups is rooted in the paradox of their having no official beliefs but having developed a set of ideas which are widely identified as Theosophical - doctrine without dogma.

A problem to which this dilemma led was the difficulty determining what could be judged a valid Theosophical idea. The issue came to a head in the conflict between the "Neo-Theosophy" of Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater and the "Back to Blavatsky" movement. The results of the psychic investigations and intuitions of Besant and Leadbeater led to the development of ideas that were a departure from and sometimes in direct conflict with the teachings of Madame Blavatsky. Leadbeater's prominent place in the TS gave his views a legitimacy a Theosophical teachings. Those opposed to his ideas were relatively powerless to counteract them since there were no means to press their claims on an official level. As we saw, if the President decided for or against an individual or lodge, he or she could withdraw diplomas or cancel charters and effectively expel dissidents.

The relevance on psychic pronouncements also highlights the problem of by what means can so new teaching be accepted as orthodox and another rejected. The terms "orthodox" and "heterodox" are terms foreign to Theosophy, but the issue is real. Those, like Prentice and the Hobart Lodge, who opposed the changes could only complain, protest or seek other lodges' support in their opposition. Schism was always a possible response.

A final set of problems concerns commitment. Troeltsch highlights the characteristic of mystical groups that they are loose and informal, constantly forming and reforming as the spiritual needs of the participants demand. The problem this raises for Theosophy and similar groups is how to hold members tolerance and a minimal profession of belief are certainly major attractions but they cripple or limit the group's effectiveness by lessening the commitment necessary to a vital organisation or in reverse, there can be an unofficial commitment of the group to policies not acceptable to a large number of the members. The difficulties of the isolated Tasmanian groups to keep up membership runs through all the records of the groups as members fell away or moved interstate to be more involved. One factor for maintaining a consistent group is a long term leadership group, a characteristic of both Launceston and Hobart

groups. The fate of Olcott Lodge show the importance of a charismatic leader - once the leader died, the group disappeared, while Latrobe continued because one family, the Elliston's handed on the tradition. The reverse, too, is illustrated by the split between Hobart and the Australian section over the links between the TS and the LCC and Krishnamarti. The instability this creates is a continuing feature of TS lodges today.

The ambiguities and opportunities within Theosophy captured a hearing across Tasmania, it reflected the same problems on a national and international level that the Theosophical Society experienced. The differences that emerged between Hobart and Launceston were important for a time in the twenties but disappeared with a new generation of leaders. Theosophy continued to offer a place for seekers after truth, who shaped their society by their search.

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