

and esoteric aspect of at least one of them, the *Eglise Gnostique*, founded by Jules Doinel in 1890).

B) *The Theosophical Society*

Founded in 1875 in New York by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (known as H.P.B., 1831–1891), Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907) and William Quan Judge (1851–1896), the Theosophical Society—having nothing to do with Freemasonry—has undergone variations in form and ramifications throughout its history. However, the latter have conserved the same common denominators: they do not propose any degrees or ranks of initiation; they teach no doctrine (despite the title of the book *The Secret Doctrine*, 1888); and H.P.B.'s books serve as reference (besides the above mentioned, there is also *Isis Unveiled*, 1877). When it was founded, the Theosophical Society established a threefold goal, respected by all branches that developed from it: a) to form the nucleus of a universal fraternity; b) to encourage the study of all religions, philosophy, and science; c) to study the laws of Nature as well as the psychic and spiritual powers of Man. Through its content and inspiration, it is largely an offshoot of Oriental spiritualities, especially Hindu, reflecting the cultural climate in which it was born. It was the wish of H.P.B. and her society to always show the unity of all religions in their esoteric foundations, and to develop the ability to become theosophers in those who so desired. The Theosophical Society, especially in the beginning, dedicated a large part of its activities to the psychic or metapsychic fields, so popular at that time.

H.P.B. left for India in 1878, founded her journal *The Theosophist* there in 1879, and installed the official headquarters of the Theosophical Society at Adyar, near Madras, in 1883. She was well-thought of by the natives of the country, who had little trouble detecting a very tolerant mind behind this movement. H.P.B. returned to Europe in 1885. After her death, the history of the Theosophical Society's branches became complex (the most interesting case probably being that of the United Lodge of Theosophists, founded in 1909 by Robert Crosbie). The diffusion of this movement is widespread on an international scale (it is now rooted in most Western countries) and favored by three factors. First, there is the presence of such remarkable personalities as Annie Besant (1847–1933) who became president in 1907, Franz Hartmann (founder of the German branch in 1886), and Rudolf Steiner (Secretary General of the German section in 1902). Just as he left the Ordo Templi Orienti, Steiner broke away from the Theosophical Society (cf. *supra*) in 1913, claiming that the inclination toward Oriental traditions did not seem to be quite compatible with the Christian, Western character of his own theosophy. Before him, Anna Bonus Kingsford (1846–1888)—an outstanding figure in the feminine, Christian esotericism of the seventies and eighties—made the separation for the same reason, and permeated her newly founded

Hermetic Society with Christianity (cf. her wonderful book *The Perfect Way*, 1881). By creating their own organizations, figures such as Steiner and to a lesser degree, Anna Kingsford actually helped contribute to the extension of the mother society's teachings, even though under a modified form. The second factor are the numerous links that the various branches maintained with most of the other esoteric societies; the International Spiritualist and Spirit Conference (1889) and the Masonic and Spiritualist Conference (1908) which met in Paris both represent and are good examples of these crossroads of ideas and tendencies (the divisions between most of the movements are not tight, and opposition and fulminating excommunications arise mainly within each group). The third factor is obviously the high percentage of artists who are known to have felt the influence of the Theosophical Society.

C) Esoteric Arts and Literature

Among the great French writers, Gérard de Nerval is the one who integrated the largest number of esoteric elements in his writings (*Voyage en Orient*, 1851; *Les Illuminés*, 1852; *Les Chimères*, 1854). The sonnet of Charles Baudelaire (*Correspondances*, c. 1857) became a kind of poetic "Emerald Tablet," and his texts on the creative imagination are akin to some of the most classical esoteric texts. The literature of Victor Hugo (1854) in *Les Contemplations* at times becomes that of a visionary theosopher (that same year Hugo's spirit is said to have conversed with the spirit of Shakespeare). In France, occultism found its best fiction writer in the person of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam (*Isis*, 1862; *Axël*, 1888), and some presence in Saint-Pol-Roux (1861–1940) (*Les Reposoirs de la Procession*, 1893). It inspired the spectacular saga of J. Péladan (*L'Éthopée*, 1886/1907). The exhibitions of the Salons of the Rosy-Cross, tied to the order founded by Péladan, correspond to one of the most aesthetically fertile periods of the occultist movement. Works by Félicien Rops and Georges Rouault were admired there from 1893 to 1898, and Erik Satie was present too. In Germany between 1843 and 1882, the work of Richard Wagner, which incorporated into the Belle Époque the idea of music elevated to the heights of religion, always had (text and score) a privileged hermeneutical place for esotericists; however, if there is any esotericism, it is most often found in their interpretations. This remark can be applied just as well to the painter Arnold Böcklin (1827–1901) or to Gustave Moreau (1828–1898). Esotericism, however, is explicit in the architectural undertakings of Rudolf Steiner who, like Wagner in Bayreuth, created a *Gesamtkunstwerk* ("total artistic work," a very Germanic idea) in Dornach (in the vicinity of Basel). Construction of the building, the Goetheanum, began in 1913. Steiner's four dramas (1910/1913, *Die Pforte der Einweihung, ein Rosenkreuzermysterium* in 1910) are performed there, along with some of Edouard Schuré's plays. Another example of *Gesamtkunstwerk* is the project