The much-debated question of whether the emphasis in the history of science should be on external or internal factors can be examined on a time plane: the farther away an event is, the more closely it appears to be connected with general trends in the culture of its own period. In founding the « apostolic » Duodecim Society together with eleven friends and fellow students Matti Ayrapää’s (1852-1928) belief that the society would one day have its place in Finland’s general cultural history, seems to have been based on a similar idea: only with hindsight do we realize the affinity of various aspects of culture and are able to assess the real significance of events better than at close quarters. In the following review of the early days of Duodecim, I believe, like Ayrapää, in the usefulness of the cultural historical perspective and am convinced that the society he founded continues to have lasting importance in the cultural history of Finland.

Duodecim was founded as an unofficial student society on November 18th, 1881, only a few months after the death of Johan Vilhelm Snellman (1806-1881), the leading figure in 19th century Finnish philosophy and national thought, and for all his Hegelian idealism, a social pragmatist. Snellman’s 75th birthday, celebrated a few weeks before his death, had greatly inspired all those who had devoted themselves at his instigation to the service of the national ideal and to seeking Finland’s national identity, and who, like Snellman, considered nationality to be inseparable from language. Snellman’s programme consisted of «education of the people and nationalization of the educated class». The breaking of the link with Sweden after many centuries in 1809 had created a completely new cultural-political situation in Finland, annexed as it was by Russia and given the status of an autonomous Grand Duchy. Largely owing to Snellman’s influence, Finns became aware of this and Finnish-language culture gradually emerged to take its place alongside the Swedish cultural heritage and the growing Russian influence.

Thus there is no reason to doubt that Duodecim was primarily an outcome of the cultural policy of the national movement largely created by Snellman. Confidence in the future among nationalistic Finnish students had been strengthened by their achieving in Helsinki University — the only university in the country at the time — the majority they had coveted in the student union which played an important rôle in the formation of Finnish political parties. Arvid Järnefelt (1861-1932), a historically important chronicler of the period, provides the following interpretation of the emotions aroused by the festivities arranged at the Student House in honour of Snellman’s birthday in a novel called Isänmaa (The Fatherland): «They bore him on their shoulders as if they were bearing their own future ideal and they shouted as if to their own hopes for the future.» Recalling
the founding of Duodecim over forty years later, Mati Ayräppä, belittling his own role, made a revealing comment: «We have only put up signposts on the road built by Snellman.» It is significant that one of the founders of Duodecim was Snellman’s own son Wilhelm (1851-1933), who later served for many years as a municipal and railway physician — a messenger, as it were, straight from the great ideological master of the Duodecim group!

The 1880s was a time when Finland found new spiritual bearings, a period when many of the principal trends in European thought found their way even to Finland’s distant shores, and in many ways a time of farewell to the idealism of national awakening propagated in the first decades of the century. In spite of this ideological withdrawal, the national movement inspired by Snellman continued its triumphant progress for many years and the classically pure and patriotic poetry of Johan Ludvig Runeberg (1804-1877) retained its position as an important element of school education for decades. The great work of compiling the Kalevala, performed by Elias Lönnrot (1802-1884), originally a doctor of medicine who worked for some time as a district physician, communicated an unshakable belief in the possibility of a Finnish-Language culture at a time when our mostly Swedish-speaking educated class was worrying about maintaining the standards of the existing culture from the democratic cultural aspirations and the intermittent but uncompromising demands for hegemony from the most radical young academics. In founding Duodecim, however, Matti Ayräppä, like Snellman, thought it was the duty of the educated class to service the people and he shunned «the linguistic and intellectual distinction between intelligenzia and the common people.» He thought the university should take the lead in the national movement by accepting the majority language as the principal language of university instruction. The expectations of the Duodecimians were naturally primarily directed at their own faculty, the Faculty of Medicine, which at the time was almost entirely Swedish-speaking.

The national ideology of Duodecim was thus no longer based on abstract philosophic principales but on the demand for justice and practical needs. The priorities on their list were: to develop the medical vocabulary of Finnish, to draw up outlined skeems for case histories and records of operations in Finnish and to provide opportunities for passing examinations in Finnish. Communication difficulties between doctor and patient were felt to be a particularly sore point: of the non-educated people only about 14% spoke Swedish as their mother tongue. Ayräppä and his friends thought the Finnish Society of Physicians, Finska Läkaresällskapet, which had been founded back in 1835, had not paid sufficient attention to these problems. The fact that most of Duodecim’s founders did their life’s work in various parts of Finland was perhaps a moral decision, especially since the choice must have been made all the more difficult by the fact that these men, coming as they did from Swedish-speaking homes and having a poor command of Finnish, often settled in a completely Finnish-speaking community. Ayräppä himself, however, became the first teacher of dentistry at the University of Helsinki after gaining his doctor’s degree. He was made honorary professor for his scientific merits in 1904, and in 1919 he was awarded the University’s first honorary doctorate in odontology. He was chairman of Duodecim for the first twenty-five years of the society’s existence. It was largely due to Ayräppä’s efforts that dentistry as a whole became a university subject in Finland.

Since the Duodecimians belonged to the generation of students who adopted the new ideals of the ’80s, it was natural that their linguistic and cultural aims were in the practical, moderate and liberal spirit of the changing times. Although the group advocated the same aims as the vanguard of nationalistic students, they set themselves in opposition to the methods of the most uncompromising line of the Fennomaniacs. With their sound scientific training — they all had
to take a master’s degree in the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics before
launching on their medical studies — they were hardly able or even willing to
reject the liberal scientific world view of « their own » decade. The same natural­
istic, empiricist and positivist ideas that had arisen further south in Europe some
time before were in fact breaking through in Finland in the ’80s. Realism became
the dominant trend in Finnish literature and art, not least due to French influence.

The standard-bearers of the new trend were Hjalmar Neiglick (1860-1889),
a philosopher who died young, and Edvard Westermarck (1862-1939), a sociologist
who later won international fame with his studies on the history of marriage and
and morality. The two men shared a hostile attitude to Hegelian philosophy and a
high opinion of empirical research. Robert Tigerstedt (1853-1923), a famous physio­
logist who became internationally known through his studies on the circulatory
system, had adopted the same values as a young student. The position of Darwinism
at the University was secured when Johan Axel Palmén (1845-1919) was nominated
professor of zoology in the early 1880s. Darwinism became acceptable to Duodecim
due to the influence of A. J. Mela (1846-1904), a zoologist, who was invited to
join the society in 1822. Mela has been called the First Prophet of Finnish­
language Darwinism, as he had created a stir in his student days ten years before
by speaking publicly in favour of Darwin’s theories. Like his medical friends,
Mela successfully worked for the development and establishment of a vernacular
vocabulary in his own field.

In 1889 Duodecim received Government’s approval of its rules and became an
official medical society. Even before this, the society has published two medical
glossaries — valuable work that has continued up to the present day — and
started publishing a journal entitled Duodecim (in 1885), which gradually came to
have the largest circulation of all Finnish medical journals. Along with this
publication, the society edited and published a magazine called Suomen Ter­
veydenhoitohehti from 1889, the year when it became official medical society, right
up to the 1970s. This publication found a wide readership from an early stage and
played a pioneering role in general health education in Finland. The work of
Konrad Reijo Waara (1853-1936) as long-time editor of both publications deserves
special mention, especially since, being a district physician, he had to start the
job far away from Helsinki. The Duodecim society launched its Acta series in
1919, the modern descendants of which are the series Medical Biology, Annales
Chirurgiae et Gynaecologiae and Annals of Clinical Research, all in
English. All of these publications have shared a tendency away from reporting
merely national achievements towards dealing with universal scientific problems.

Of the many other initiatives taken by the society, its role in providing
Finland with its first tuberculosis sanatorium and in setting up a general hospital
of its own should be mentioned. The former of these projects was completed in
1903 and the latter after a number of preliminary stages in 1932. Duodecim gave
up the administration of the sanatorium for financial reasons in the early 20s,
but the society’s own hospital, « Mehiläinen », is still Finlands biggest private
hospital. Initiatives of members of the society have likewise led to the founding
of various commercial enterprises, among them one of Finland’s leading pharma­
ceutical firms and an instrument company.

The «language battle» gradually died down with the improvement of the
status of the Finnish language leaving Duodecim free to concentrate increasingly
on international scientific subjects and problems. This led to changes in the rules
of the society, the latest rules from 1971, stating, « The Finnish Medical Society
Duodecim is a scientific body which works for the promotion of Finnish and
international medical publishing and the furtherance of international medical
cooperation. » Meanwhile, however, the national significance of the society increas­
ed considerably with the growth of the network of local societies. The national
operations of the society have in fact played a crucial role in nationwide postgraduate scientific training. In awarding its annual Matti Ayräpää and Konrad Reijjo Waara Prizes, the Society wishes to emphasize both the international and the national significance of science: the former is awarded in recognition of scientific merits, while the latter is awarded for a distinguished career in practising medicine.

BIBLIOGRAPHIE