

# **THE CHARLES WEBSTER LEADBEATER AFFAIR, 1906-1908**

**AN INTRODUCTION by Alan Bain (c) 1996**

## **PART ONE**

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### **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

by Alexis Dolgorukii

The following articles were assembled by our fellow "Ouroboroan", DR. ALAN BAIN and posted by him on THEOSOPHY INTERNATIONAL and on the Theosophical History section of Theos-List. As I assume most people who turn to Ouroboros will not have read them I am posting them here. I make many references in my various essays on Theosophy referring to Charles Webster Leadbeater, and I certainly view Alan's articles as an invaluable adjunct to my own remarks. I hope they will prove useful.

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In 1906 a former Anglican Clergyman and member of the Society, later to become prominent in the Liberal Catholic Church, was called before a committee headed by the President-Founder of the day, Colonel H.S.Olcott, one of the co-founders of the Society together with Madame H.P.Blavatsky, W.Q.Judge and others.

The charge against him was twofold: firstly that he taught young boys to masturbate (then also called "self-abuse") on a regular, sometimes daily basis, as necessary to their development and to help avoid the temptations of the flesh in the future with women and "bad men." In today's world, such advice might not be regarded with as much horror, if any, as it was in late Victorian England, and there were those who, whilst embarrassed by such teaching, could see far enough ahead to understand that, in itself, such advice might not be necessarily a bad thing.

Among the grounds of complaint however was the fact that he was giving such teaching to boys placed into his care by a parent or parents with spiritual motives, but who were not informed of this aspect of his teaching, and only found out via their children or other informants.

The second and more serious charge was that he encouraged the practice by boys who had not yet reached an age where they would otherwise have thought of it for themselves, nor in whom a physical sexual attraction to girls, women, or "bad men" had begun to develop.

Even more serious was the charge that in the course of his "instruction," he handled the boys intimately himself.

Leadbeater denied none of the charges - he admitted them. The committee which sat to hear them had only, therefore, to decide which course of action would be best taken in the interest of the welfare and reputation of the Society. They could expel him, or in their wisdom, suggest to him that he resign. He willingly resigned his membership of the Society in the interest of the greater good, according to his own account, which was not disputed.

The affair was not made public at the time, for obvious reasons, and as the offender had resigned, there seemed little need to do so, not least perhaps because the more serious aspects of his behaviour would, in England and elsewhere, possibly or even probably have been grounds for criminal charges to be brought against him.

With some relief at the avoidance of a potential international scandal which would have harmed the Society enormously, the T.S. got on with its business without him.

The calm was to be short-lived, for in 1908, the International President, Annie Besant, sought his return to the theosophical fold, and encouraged by supporters of Leadbeater, issued a letter to members retracting her 1906 condemnation of his behaviour as part of this campaign, which would become successful. In the process, however, the very scandal which the Society had discreetly avoided in 1906, erupted into the international arena of the T.S., and damage was done which had lasting effects, many of which plague the Society to this day.

There were to be later scandals surrounding the name of Bishop Leadbeater, particularly in Australia, and some account of these is given in "The Elder Brother," a biography of Leadbeater by Gregory Tillet, published in 1982.

I have chosen to begin this series of historical studies in the country from which CWL, as he is often referred to, began his career, and which is also my own homeland.

The article which follows is an account of the reaction to Annie Besant's actions by members of the British Section of the Theosophical Society, and is self-explanatory.

Some readers will wonder why I have not begun with the President's letter mentioned above. This will become clear in later documents, as there was also considerable dispute about the veracity and honesty of some of the claims made in the letter which resulted in the publication of a number of "open letters" and pamphlets, some of which have become very scarce.

In the interest of historical research, however, I intend to make Annie Besant's letter the next article in this series.

For a short time, in 1908, in Chicago, Illinois, a journal dealing primarily with the details and campaigns within the American Section was published under the banner of "The Theosophic Voice" which went to only three issues. The first of these is available as a 32 page reprint, and readers can contact me for further information. For members of Theosophy International, I will post brief details on theos-buds.

In the meantime, the result of "The Leadbeater Affair" in his own country can be revealed through the words, published in 1909, of those who initiated the protest within the British Section - including some important and respected theosophists of the time - and which now follows:

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To the Members of the Theosophical Society

#### THE LEADBEATER CASE.

THE Protest Committee of the British Section appointed at the Caxton Hall meeting on December 19, 1908, having issued on February 20 last the following Final Protest Resolutions for signature by members of the British Section, have now to place on record the result of their appeal to the Section.

#### RESOLUTIONS.

THAT WHEREAS, at the last Convention of the British Section of the Theosophical Society, a Resolution was passed calling upon the President and General Council of the Society to take such action as would ensure "that the repudiation by the Society of this pernicious teaching (the teaching which determined the resignation of Mr. C. W. Leadbeater) may be unequivocal and final":

AND WHEREAS the President has replied to this Resolution in a printed Letter to the Members of the Theosophical Society, dated November, 1908, in which Letter she not merely declines to take any action to free the Society from any taint of participation in this scandal, but even seeks to condone Mr. Leadbeater's offence, thereby reversing her own previous judgment of the matter; and further announces her willingness to welcome Mr. Leadbeater back to membership in the Society without his repudiation of the teaching above referred to:

AND WHEREAS the General Council of the Society at its Annual Meeting at Adyar, in December, 1908, also refused to accept the appeal of the British Section, and not merely declined to take any action to repudiate, in the name of the Society, Mr. Leadbeater's teaching of self-abuse, or to prevent the identification of this teaching with the Society, but, on the contrary, has taken the very course which will ensure the opposite effect, and has passed a Resolution stating that, "there is no reason why Mr.

**C.W.Leadbeater should not return, if he wishes, to his place in the Society"; and has thereby reversed the wise judgment and action of the late President-Founder, Colonel H.S.Olcott:**

**AND WHEREAS this disastrous policy on the part of the President and General Council must inevitably result - and indeed, has already resulted - in the gravest public scandal, and in the association of Mr. Leadbeater's degrading teachings with the Society itself:**

**NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS HEREBY AFFIRMED AND RESOLVED -**

**(1) That we, the undersigned Members of the Theosophical society, desire to express, in the first instance, our deep regret that the President and General Council should not merely have refused to take any steps to free the Society from this grave scandal but should actually have taken the most effective means to identify it therewith.**

**(2) That we hereby desire to protest in the strongest possible manner against this disastrous policy, to which the Society has now been committed by its highest officials.**

**(3) That we hereby place on record our deep abhorrence of the gross sexual practice into which Mr. Leadbeater - on his own confession - was guilty of initiating certain boys.**

**(4) That we desire to express our conviction that the question at issue is simply one of morality, but that it has been largely obscured by a false glamour of so-called "occultism" and a specious appeal to so-called "liberty of opinion."**

**(5) That we do not feel called upon to judge Mr. Leadbeater's motives, nor do we condemn any who, in this matter, have honestly thought that his further identification with the Society was desirable; but we protest most strongly against the good name of the Society being sacrificed for any one individual.**

**Three hundred and twenty-four members have signed the above Resolutions. Of these members 206 have severed their connection with the Society, or have notified their intention of doing so, and have signified their willingness to have their names published in connection with this Protest.**

**Fifty-three other members have also signed the Protest and resigned, but do not wish to have their names published.**

**Thirty-five members have signed, but have not yet decided as to resignation.**

**Thirty members have signed, but have signified their intention of remaining in the Society, in the new International Section, or otherwise.**

There have also been a very large number of resignations by members who have not signed this Protest, but who signed the first Resolutions sent out in November last with the Reply of the Protest Committee to the President's Letter.

The following members of the Executive Committee have resigned, and have left the Society:

HERBERT BURROWS. G.R.S.MEAD.  
A.M.GLASS. A.P.SINNETT.  
W.KINGSLAND. EDITH WARD.

The following Lodges have severed their connection with the Society.

ADELPHI President, J.M.Watkins.  
BATTERSEA " A.P.Cattanach.  
BRISTOL " Miss G.Platnauer.  
DIDSBURY " E.E.Marsden.  
DUBLIN " G.W.Russell.  
EXETER " Lt.Col. Montague.  
HULL " H.E.Nichol.  
LONDON " A.P.Sinnett.  
MIDDLESBROUGH " W.H.Thomas.

The following is an analysis of the signatures, and the names of the 206 members above referred to, who have resigned and consented to the publication of their names.

**ADELPHI LODGE:-** J.M.Watkins (President). - Mrs. Watkins. - H.J.Dyer. - Miss Saunders. - C.W.C.Barlow. - Miss Howsin. - A.F.Winckley.

**BLAVATSKY LODGE:** - G.R.S.Mead (President). - Mrs. Mead. - Miss Eardley-Wilmot. - C.J.Barker. - Mrs. Barker. - Miss Tisdale. - Miss M.Wolff van Sandau. - Mrs. E.Wood. - J.F.Tilly. - Mrs. Tilly. - Miss J.R.Willats. - Mrs. A.M.A. Rice. - G.A.Simmons. - Mrs. William Sharp. - J.R.Foster. - H.Burrows. - F.G.Castaneda. - V.C.Turnbull. - Miss S.B.Wilson. - Mrs. C.A.Baynes. - Miss A.Claxton. - Mrs. M.M.W.Kidston. - W.Theobald. - Mrs. Theobald. - Miss M.Theobald. - Miss A.G.Theobald. - B.G.Theobald. - Mrs. F.E.Marshall. - Miss C.E.Marshall. - W.T.Harrison. - Miss L.A.Peile. - Miss G.Linde. - P.Hookham. - Miss L.Henderson. - Mrs. C.Macrae. - Dr. C.G.Currie. - Mrs. Currie. - J.S.Brown. - Mrs. S.F.Dudley. - Miss S.E.Hall. - H.A.Colvile. - Miss A.L.Gaimes. - J.A.Kinnison. - Mrs. Kinnison. - H.R.Hogg. - Mrs. Hogg. - Mrs. Hoffmeister. - Mrs. M.H.Malan. - Miss T.J.O'Connell. - W.F.Kirby. - J.R.Acton. - Mrs. A.K.Ledger. - Miss J.Spence. - Miss E.M.L.Scull. - Col. R.H.Forman. - A.M.Glass. - H.E.Colbett. - H.L.Shindler. - Thirty-five other signatories.

**BATH LODGE:-** F.Bligh Bond.

**BATTERSEA LODGE:- A.P.Cattanach (President). - Mrs. Cattanach. - Miss H.R.Gutteridge. - W.Hewett. - One other signatory.**

**BOURNEMOUTH LODGE:- E. H. Bellairs.**

**BRIGHTON LODGE:- Dr. Alfred King (President). - Mrs. King. - J.F.Bigwood. - Four other signatories.**

**BRISTOL LODGE: - Miss G.S.Platnauer (President). - T.R.Freeman. - Miss F.K.Simmons. - S.W.Smith. - F.H.Stevens. - Mrs. A.K.Furnival. - Miss A.Dobbie. - F.H.Palmer. - One other signatory.**

**DIDSBURY LODGE:- E.E.Marsden (President). - Mrs. Marsden. - Mrs. E.E.Worthington. - H.Levy. - Miss H.D.Mackie. - Miss F.Jackson. - F.H.Clarke. - Mrs. Clarke. - Mrs. E.Harrold. - W.G.Wilson. - Mrs. Wilson. - Miss K.Whitehead. - Miss E.Booth. - Miss L.Peck. - C.Midgley. - Mrs. Midgley. -Five other signatories.**

**DUBLIN LODGE:- Mrs. M.E.Greene. - Mrs. G.E.Jones. - Mrs. L.Robinson. - Miss. M.Kelly. - Mrs. Kelly. - J. Tingly. - Mrs. E.S.Thornton.**

**EDINBURGH LODGE:- Mrs. Drummond (President). - Miss E.Drummond. - Mrs. M.H.Darlison. - Mrs. L.Handyside. - Mrs. M.H.Hebdens. - J.J.Bell. - Miss Edith Grant. - Miss Cochrane. - Miss I. Cochrane. - Mrs. Frater. - Miss Raeburn. - Miss E.C.Raeburn. - Mrs. Cragie Proffit. - Miss White. - Five other signatories.**

**EXETER LODGE:- Lt.Col. L.A.D.Montague (President). - Miss Wheaton. - Miss Z.L.Montague. - Miss F.Lake. - Miss E.E.Snodgrass. - Five other signatories.**

**GLASGOW LODGE:- R.H.Andrews. - Miss M.S.Ferguson.**

**H.P.B. LODGE:- H.E.Parry. - Miss C.E.Woods. - Mrs. C.F.Buller. - S.A.Mappin. - Mrs. Mappin. - Mrs. C.B.Fernandez. - Five other signatories.**

**HARROGATE LODGE:- Mrs. B.Ringrose. - Miss A. B. Woodhead.**

**HULL LODGE:- H.E.Nichol (President). - Mrs. Nichol. -J.W.Burton. - Mrs. E.B.Burton. - Miss C.A.Eccles.**

**LONDON LODGE:- Lady Raines. - Mrs. B.H.M.Riddle. - Mrs. E.R.Cull. - Mrs. C.G.R.Smith. - Mrs. K.Baldwin. - Mrs. H.Huntly. - Mrs. N.Malan. - Mme. Gennadius. - C.B.Wheeler. - Mrs. J.M.S.Walker. - Mrs. V.B.Thompson. - Three other signatories.**

**LIVERPOOL LODGE:- Mrs. C.B.Avery. - Mrs. M.Fulton. - Mrs. L.M.Queen. - Miss M.Barber. - Miss B.M.Mylehrest. - Three other signatories.**

**LEEDS LODGE:- C.N.Goode. - Mrs. Goode. - A.W.Waddington.**

**MANCHESTER CITY LODGE:- J.Mayo. - Mrs. Hadfield. - Miss Hadfield. - Two other signatories.**

**MIDDLESBROUGH LODGE:- W.H.Thomas (President). - Miss M.E.Thomas. - Baker Hudson. - Mrs. M G.Macfadzean. - J.A.Jones. - One other signatory.**

**NORTH LONDON LODGE: - V. Lewis. - Mrs. E.C.V.Worley. - One other signatory.**

**SHEFFIELD LODGE:- C.E.Young (President). - R.Cheatle. - R.Pexton. - Mrs. Pexton. - J. Abey. - J.Wood. - One other signatory.**

**WEST LONDON LODGE:- Miss E.Ward (President). - Mrs. F.Ozanne. - Mrs. G.B.O'Donnell. - Miss Fortescue. - Mrs. A.Mallaloe. - W.A.Carson. - Mrs. Carson. - Mrs. E.J.Beatty. - Two other signatories.**

**UNATTACHED:- Mme. de Steiger. - E. de M.Malan. - G.H.Popplestone. - I.L.F.Paynter. - Mrs. M.C.Brown. - Mrs. E.Kilburn. - O.Firth. - W.H.Bean. - Miss H.K.Burke. -Miss H.Bloxam. - I.H.Mitchell. - Mrs. Mitchell. - E.Melland. - Miss G.H.Minet. - Miss H.G.Micklethwait. - Miss A.M.Bostock. - W.Kingsland. - J.Dowall. - Mrs. J.Dowall. - Mrs. E.Schaub. - G.Graham. - Miss M.Scott-Kerr. - Eighteen other signatories.**

**BRUSSELS:- Seventeen signatories.**

**OTHER BRITISH LODGES:- Ten signatories. At the Caxton Hall Meeting above referred to, the Protest Committee were empowered to "receive, consider and report on any suggestion that may be made as to the best manner of keeping together those who feel compelled to withdraw from the Society."**

**No suggestions, however, have been received by the Committee; but the formation of a Society on the lines outlined by Mr. Mead at the above meeting is now an accomplished fact.**

**The name which was then proposed for this Society was, "The Mystical Research Society." This, however, has since been changed to "THE QUEST SOCIETY." Full particulars of this Organisation can be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, THE QUEST SOCIETY, 16, Selwood Place, Onslow Gardens, S.W.**

**A Conference of members and ex-members of the Theosophical Society, living in the North of England, was held at Manchester on January 19, 1909; at which Mr. G.R.S.Mead was also present. The Conference resolved to form Local Societies on lines more or less similar to those of the Quest Society; and also to federate such Societies when constituted.**

**Mr. W.H.Thomas, The Ness, Linthorpe, Middlesbrough, consented to act as Hon. Secretary, pro tem., and will be pleased to supply all particulars to intending members.**

**It may also be mentioned that in most cases where Lodges have resigned their Charters they are continuing their work under some different name.**

**The work of the Protest Committee is now practically finished. The subscriptions which they received have been most generous and ample, and a small balance is still in hand. It is proposed to retain this for a short time, in view of any eventuality arising which might necessitate its being called upon; but in due course a balance sheet will be sent to each subscriber, and suggestions will be asked for as to how the balance should be disposed of.**

**THE PROTEST COMMITTEE.  
16, SELWOOD PLACE, ONSLOW GARDENS,  
LONDON, S.W.**

**May 1, 1909.**

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**THEOSOPHY INTERNATIONAL  
Ancient Wisdom for a New Age**

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