

THE CHARLES WEBSTER LEADBEATER AFFAIR, 1906-1908

AN INTRODUCTION by Alan Bain (c) 1996

PART TWO

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

by Alexis Dolgorukii

The following articles were assembled by our fellow "Ouroboros", 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.

To the Members of the Theosophical Society:
For Private circulation among members only.

THE LEADBEATER CASE

A REPLY

TO THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Of November, 1908

Printed by E.E.MARSDEN, Carr Street, Manchester; and Published by G.R.S.MEAD, HERBERT BURROWS, W.KINGSLAND, & EDITH WARD, at 16, Selwood Place, Onslow Gardens, London.S.W.

NOTE

At a representative meeting of many of the older and well-known members or the Theosophical Society, held in London, on November 13th, the present situation with regard to the Leadbeater Case was fully discussed. The President's Letter in answer to the request of the Convention of the British Section that she should take steps to put an end to the scandalous state of affairs which now obtains in the Society, was carefully considered. In view of the fact that she refuses to take any steps, but on the contrary would welcome the reinstatement of Mr. Leadbeater, and that, too, without the public repudiation which she promised should be exacted of him, it was decided that a Reply to Mrs. Besant's Letter should be issued, and Miss Edith Ward, Mr. Mead, Mr. Kingsland, and Mr. Herbert Burrows were appointed a Committee to draw up the Reply.

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT.

The recent Letter of Mrs. Besant, as President of the Theosophical Society, which has been sent to all the members of this Section (and also to all the other Sections of the Society), purports to be her reply to an earnest appeal, by the British Section in Convention assembled, to the members of the Theosophical Society, and especially to the President and members of the General Council - to unite in putting an end to the scandalous state of affairs which now exists in the Society with regard to what is known as the Leadbeater teaching, so that the repudiation by the Society of this pernicious teaching may be unequivocal and final.

By formal direction of the Convention (held in London, July 4 and 5, 1908), a Special Report of the resolutions and of the proceedings which led up to them (including a full statement of the facts which necessitated the appeal and the debate on the subject) was prepared, by a Special Committee (whom the Convention unanimously appointed), to be issued to the members of the Section. This Committee consisted of Miss Edith Ward, Messrs. G.R.S.Mead, Herbert Whyte, Herbert Burrows, and Mrs. Sharpe, General Secretary of the Section. An account of the proceedings of the Committee will be found in The Vahan of October, 1908.

THE REPLY

This Report, which was duly prepared and passed by the whole Committee, has been suppressed by the General Secretary, who has been supported by a majority of the Executive Committee - nine to five.

The nine are: Miss Bright, Miss Green, Mrs. Larmuth, Mr. Leo, Miss Mallet, Mr. Hodgson Smith, Mr. Wedgwood, Mr. Whyte, and Mrs. Sharpe. (Mrs. Sharpe did not vote on the actual resolution supporting her action, but voted on all other resolutions in the same sense.)

The five are: Mr. Burrows, Mr. Glass, Mr. Kingsland, Mr. Mead, and Miss Ward.

Against this solid majority the minority who have endeavoured to carry out the wishes of the Convention have been powerless. This policy of suppression has been vigorously maintained; and now, more than four and a half months after the Convention, the members are still in ignorance of these important proceedings. In spite of a resolution unanimously passed at the Convention that The Vahan, the sectional organ, should be open to the free discussion of all matters of interest to the Section, Mrs. Sharpe refused to print even the following document:

The Report of the Debate, for which two additional sessions of the recent Convention of the British Section of the Theosophical Society were

required, and which culminated in the passing of two very important Resolutions, has now been agreed to unanimously by the Special Committee appointed by the Convention to prepare it for publication.

The General Secretary, however, refuses to publish the document, and is supported in her refusal by a majority of the Executive Committee. We, the undersigned members of the Special Committee (of five), are prepared to carry out the instructions of the General Council in Convention duly assembled.

The official means of issuing the Report, however having been denied us, we now apply directly to the members of the Section for the necessary funds and addresses (which may be sent to any of the undersigned), in order that we may carry out the imperative duty of acquainting the Section with the present grave state of affairs.

(Signed) G. R. S. MEAD, HERBERT BURROWS. EDITH WARD.

It has thus been deliberately rendered impossible for the facts of the case to be placed before the members. And now with only Mrs. Besant's letter before them, the members are being urged to sign a petition for Mr. Leadbeater's reinstatement. [Mr. Burrows and Mr. Mead have now printed their speeches themselves in a pamphlet, and copies may be obtained from them.]

Even in Mrs. Besant's Letter, which has gone out to the whole Society, as well as to the members of this Section, the very resolution on which she bases that reply, is not given, and it was only at the last moment that the General Secretary of this Section found herself compelled to enclose the bare text of that resolution with Mrs. Besant's Letter as sent out to the Section. [And yet Mrs. Besant (p. 3) claims that she is submitting "the whole case to the judgment of the Theosophical Society."]

Even when this opportunity arose Mrs. Sharpe has still suppressed the following two very important decisions of the Convention.

By 33 votes to 31 the Convention rejected an amendment, moved by Mrs. Sharpe, and seconded by Mr. Ernest Wood (of Manchester):

Welcoming the President's policy of collaboration with Mr. C. W. Leadbeater in any work which he is willing to do for the Society.

This amendment was rejected on its merits before the debate on the Van Hook-Leadbeater resolution (moved as an amendment to Mr. Dunlop's resolution) took place. After the protracted debate which resulted in the carrying of this resolution, Mr. Bell (of Harrogate) moved, and Mr. Wilkinson (of Nottingham) seconded:

That this Convention looks on the teaching given by C. W. Leadbeater to certain boys as wholly evil, and hereby expresses its judgment on this matter.

This was carried nem. con.

The Van Hook-Leadbeater resolution was carried by 38 votes to 4 (all the latter cast by one Belgian delegate), 22 declining to vote, This resolution, moved in the form of an amendment, was as follows:

This Convention of the British Section of the Theosophical Society while affirming its loyalty to the first Object of the Society - namely, "to form a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity" - strongly protests against evoking the sentiment of brotherhood to countenance what is wrong.

Whereas Dr. Weller van Hook, the present General Secretary of the American Section, and so a member of the General Council of the Theosophical Society, in a recent Open Letter which he has subsequently stated to have been "dictated verbatim by one of the Masters," has publicly claimed that the corrupting practices, the teaching of which determined the resignation of Mr. C.W. Leadbeater, are the high doctrine of Theosophy and the "precursor of its introduction into the thought of the outer world":-

This Convention declares its abhorrence of such practice, and, in view of the incalculable harm to Theosophy and of the disgrace which this teaching must inevitably bring upon the Society earnestly calls upon all its members, especially the President and members of the General Council, to unite in putting an end to the present scandalous state of affairs, so that the repudiation by the Society of this pernicious teaching may be unequivocal and final.

Moved by Herbert Burrows; seconded by G.R.S. Mead; supported by A. P. Sinnett C.J. Barker, J.S. Brown, Dr. C.G. Currie, H. R. Hogg, B. Keightley, W. Kingsland, W. Scott-Elliot, W. Theobald, B. G. Theobald, L. Wallace, C. B. Wheeler, H.L. Shindler, A.P. Cattanch, Dr. A. King, Baker Hudson, W.H. Thomas, A.B. Green, J.M. Watkins, E.E. Marsden, H.E. Nichol, by the delegates of the London and Blavatsky Lodges, and by many others.

Immediately after the vote was taken Miss Dupuis, of the H.P.B. Lodge, read the following declaration, in which the majority of the representatives who had declined to vote joined by standing with her:

We cannot vote for this amendment as it is worded. We will not vote against it as it involves so much. We stand and hereby proclaim that we utterly condemn the practices alluded to, but refuse to condemn any individual.

Reply to the President's Letter.

This serious and earnest appeal to safeguard the good name of the Society and to assist in preserving Theosophy from harm, the President now rejects with all her strength. Mrs. Besant's reply takes the form of special pleading in defence of Mr. Leadbeater; she withdraws her former unequivocal condemnation of his teaching and substitutes for it equivocal phrases; humbly apologises to him; and finally invites the Society to vote for Mr. Leadbeater's triumphant reinstatement without further guarantee.

The change in Mrs. Besant's attitude is amazing, but still more astonishing is her forgetfulness of her emphatic pledges given to the Society at the time of her election to the Presidency.

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