

my side, for nothing will change my affectionate feeling towards all its members.

Yours ever most cordially,

(Sd.) C. W. LEADBEATER.

P. S.—I see that there is one point in Mrs. Dennis' letter on which I have not commented—her reference to a conversation on the necessity of {purity for aspirants for occult development and to the fact that (for a certain stage of it) one life without even a single lapse is required. It is of course obvious that the lapse mentioned meant connection with a woman or criminal relations with a man and did not at all include such advice as is suggested in the body of my letter, but {since there has been so much misunderstanding it is better for me to say this in so many words, so please paste this slip at the foot of my letter on the subject.

Mrs. Besant sent the following reply to Mrs. Dennis :—

SHANTY KUNJA, BENARES CITY.

Feb. 26th, 1906.

MY DEAR MRS. DENNIS,

Your letter causes me some grief and anxiety, and I think I shall serve you, Mr. Leadbeater and the Society best by perfect plainness of speech.

Mr. Leadbeater is very intimately known to you, and you have had definite experiences in connection with him on super-physical planes ; you know something of his relations there, and the impossibility of the existence of such relations with deliberate wrong doing. All this must not be forgotten in the midst of the terrible trial to which you are subjected.

I know him better than you can do, and am absolutely certain of his good faith and pure intent, though I disagree with the advice he has, *in rare cases*, given to boys approaching manhood.

All who have had much experience with boys know that as puberty approaches, they stand in great peril ; new and upsetting impulses come to them, and very large numbers of boys ruin their health for life at that age from sheer ignorance, and suffer all their lives hopelessly. Some are ruined by self-abuse, some by seeking immoral women. Also, even when they resist these, they are tormented by sexual thoughts which poison the whole nature. Most boys are left to struggle through this period as best they may ; they learn about sex from other boys, or from servants, or bad men, and are ashamed to ask help from parents or teachers.

Some think no one should speak to them beforehand. Others think it wiser to speak to them frankly, warn them of the dangers and tell them to ask help if necessary.

Personally I think the latter course the right one. A boy should learn first of sex from his mother, father or teacher. Then comes the question, what advice should be given when sex thoughts torment him. Many doctors advise commerce with loose women ; this I believe to be ruinous. Others, knowing that nature gives relief under these conditions, when they become severe, by involuntary emission, advise that rather than let the mind be full of unclean images for a long period, when the torment becomes great, the whole thing should be put an end to by provoking nature's remedy, and that this, rarely necessary, is the safest way out of the trouble, and does less harm than any other. This I learn is Mr. Leadbeater's

view, a rare hastening of the period of discharge that nature would later cause. I do not agree with it. I think it might cause a very evil habit, and though this evil habit is lamentably common, I would close the door on it by prohibition, and await the natural involuntary relief. I can, however, understand that a good man might with many a precaution, look on this as the least of many evils. (Personally I believe the right way is careful diet, plenty of exercise, occupation and amusement, and rousing of the boys' pride and self-respect against yielding.) Mr. Leadbeater would do all this, but as a last resort the other. While we may dissent from this, it is very different from the charge of teaching boys self-abuse, pre-supposing foul intent instead of pure. He says he has in three or four cases given this advice believing that it would save the boys from worse peril.

..... case is different. The boy had fallen into bad hands, and Mr. Leadbeater's help was invoked. He explained the way of diet, etc., mentioned above, and also the last resort; the boy selected to try the former. Since Mr. Leadbeater left America the boy wrote saying he could not bear the strain, and Mr. Leadbeater explained the other way, to be used only under great stress. As the boy's letter was written since Mr. Leadbeater left the States, his account, as given now, is obviously false. Mr. Leadbeater says, that when a clergyman, he found that some young men in danger of ruin were saved by this advice and gradually obtained complete self-control.

I have explained to him my reasons for disagreeing with him, though I know that his motives were pure and good, and he has agreed with me not again to give such advice. He offered at once, if I thought it better, to retire

from active work, rather than that the Society should suffer through him. Believing as I do in his perfect honesty of purpose and knowing him to be pure of intent, though mistaken in his advice, I am against the retirement. All of us make mistakes at times, and where the mistake is honest and will be avoided in future, it should not carry with it disassociation from T. S. and E. S. work.

Most profoundly do I hope that you will see the matter as I see it and recognise in the light of your own knowledge of Mr. Leadbeater, the impossibility of the dark charges made. I fully understand the horrible shock, but I know that all who approach the path have to face those searching ordeals, and hold on through all. As one who has passed through many such trials, I say to you, have courage, be steadfast. Even if you blame Mr. Leadbeater, do not let that reflect on Theosophy or lessen your devotion to it, since his view on a most difficult question is his own, and not Theosophy's. Nor must you forget the immense services he has rendered, and the thousands he has helped. He has written to Mr. Fullerton and I think you should read the letter, as should the other signatories and your husband. It is not just to condemn a man unheard, on the statement of two boys, one of whom has not spoken frankly as is shown by his dating his objection from a supposed occurrence at—whereas he wrote to Mr. Leadbeater for a help long afterwards. Your husband is an upright and an honourable man and it would be to him a matter of lifelong regret if he condemned unheard a friend and afterwards found he had condemned unjustly

With constant affection,

Yours always,

(Sd.) ANNIE BESANT.