

XXIV

On June 30, 1906, Mr. Leadbeater wrote as follows to Mrs. Besant.

Permanent Address :—10, East Parade, Harrowgate,
June 30th, 1906.

MY DEAR ANNIE,

Your letter of the 7th has just reached me, and I will try to answer it as clearly as possible. I do not know what you have heard, but evidently some exaggerated or distorted story. I held back nothing consciously when we spoke at Benares—why should I from you, whom I have always so fully trusted? Besides, you are perfectly able to see all for yourself, so I could not conceal anything even if I would. I could ask no better statement of my case, if it had to be stated, than that which you yourself suggested in one of your recent letters. But, dear, you are now bringing in all sorts of occult and complicated reasons which for me have not existed. My opinion in the matter, which so many think so wrong, was formed long before Theosophical days, and before I knew anything about all these inner matters. I did not even originate it, for it came to me first through ecclesiastical channels, though I should be breaking an old promise if I said more as to that, save that there also there were unquestionably none, but the highest intentions. It was put somewhat in this way. There is a natural function in the man, not in itself shameful (unless indulged at another person's expense) any more than eating or drinking; but, like them, capable if misused and uncontrolled of leading to all kinds of excesses and sins. The Church would say that a very few, the great saints (as we should say, those who had practised

celibacy in past lives) can altogether repress this and rise above it, just as a very few have been able in ecstasy or trance to pass a long period without food ; and certainly where that is possible it is the highest course of all. But for the majority this function also will have its way, the accumulation takes place, and discharges itself at intervals—usually a fortnight or so, but in some cases much oftener the mind in the latter part of each interval being constantly oppressed by the matter. The idea was to take in hand before the age when it grew so strong as to be practically uncontrollable, and to set the habit of the regular, but smaller artificial discharge, with no thoughts at all in between. This, it was said (and I think truly enough) would prevent the boy from turning his attention to the other sex, save him from any temptation later towards prostitution, and bring him to the time of his marriage (if he was to marry) without previous contact with any other woman (prostitution was always held up to us as the summit of wickedness because its effect on the woman, its degradation of another to minister to our lust). I have known cases in which precisely that result was attained, though I think the suggestion was intended chiefly for those who were-expected to adopt a celibate life as priests or monks. The interval usually suggested was a week, though in some cases half that period was allowed for a time. The recommendation was always to lengthen the interval so far as was compatible with the avoidance of thought or desire upon the subject. Of course, you will understand that this sexual side of life was not made prominent, but was taken only, as one point amidst a large number of directions for the regulation of the life.

I knew this to have worked well with many in Christian days, to have saved many boys from the constant and uncontrolled self-abuse which is very much more common among boys of fourteen than any one who has not had the opportunity of enquiry can possibly imagine, and from the looseness of life which almost invariably follows a few years later ; and when I learnt from Theosophy a so much wider view of life, there seemed little to alter these considerations. The power to see the horrible thought-forms which so frequently cluster round children of both sexes, and since even more fully than before the widespread of evil among the young, were, if anything, additional arguments in favour of definite regulations. So when boys came specially under my care I mentioned this matter to them among others, always trying to avoid all sorts of false shame, and to make the whole appear as natural and simple as possible, though, of course, not a matter to be spoken of to others. If you read any of my notes to the boys referring to this (I am told some of them have been pilfered and circulated) you will find me asking carefully for exact particulars, and cautioning them on no account to shorten the period prescribed, whatever that may have been—for it naturally varied in different cases a week being the most usual. The regularity is the preliminary step ; it makes the whole thing a matter of custom instead of irregular yielding to emotion, and also makes the habit of keeping the thoughts entirely away from it until the prescribed moment.

Pardon me for going into these distasteful details but I do not wish to leave anything unexplained. I thought I have conveyed all these in my letter to Fullerton (please look at it again and see) and in our conversation at

Benares : but now at least it is surely clear. It appears to me that arguments hold good...that probably on the whole this is the least dangerous way of dealing with a very difficult problem ; but, as I told you at Benares, I am entirely willing to defer to your judgment, and since so many good sensible friends, besides yourself, are decidedly against my view, I am ready to yield my opinion and refrain from mentioning it in the future ; so you will not hear any more of it.

Now that I have tried to make everything as plain as I can, may I in my turn seek for a little light as to what is happening ? You know the American Officials wanted me cast out lest they should be supposed to be identified with this opinion which they abhor ; well, practically that has been done. I have resigned, and all connection is severed. *What more do they want ?* They apparently blame you for affording me sympathy and countenance and they talk as though you were resisting my expulsion from the Society even though I am already outside it ! Do they wish to interfere with our private friendship ? One would suppose so, since that is all that is left...though indeed that to me means everything, and I care little for the outer form of association, pleasant though that was too while it lasted. Assuredly, I am sorry to leave the Society to which I have loyally devoted twenty-three years of service ; yet I know that I, inside, am in the same as ever, and that if my friends will not let me do the work of the Masters in one direction, they will find means to employ me in some other. I cannot now hold any office in the Theosophical Society or the Eastern School, but if in my private capacity I can help you in any way (as, for example, by answering questions from those

who are still friendly to me) you know how glad I shall be.

You speak of *defending* the advice I gave ; but you cannot defend it, because you do not agree with it, as you have said clearly from the first, therefore the clamour of the American section against you is silly. All that you can say when you think it necessary is that you know my intention in giving such advice to be good ; but it is not a matter of great importance whether other people recognise that fact or not, for surely it matters little what opinion they hold of me. " To our own Master we stand or fall"; and He understands.

I wish very much that we could have been together on the physical plane to meet all these "charges"; so many people seem to be *anxious* to create misunderstanding between us, and their poisonous work is easier when we are thus far apart. Yet they *shall not* succeed.

With very much love

I am as ever,

Yours most affectionately,

(Sd.) C. W. LEADBEATER.

Some three weeks ago Basil sent you a copy of a letter of mine to Fullerton on some of these points ; I suppose it reached you safely !

XXV

Mrs. Besant wrote the following letter to Mr. Leadbeater on July 14 1906,

SRINAGAR, July 14, '06.

MY DEAR CHARLES,

Thanks for yours of June 19th, that came to me by the last mail. A week is lost on the journey here.