

## 1906 and 1908



[A letter from Annie Besant to the *Daily Telegraph* in Sydney regarding the accusations against C. W. Leadbeater.]

The following letter was sent by me to the Sydney *Daily Telegraph*, in answer to an attack which appeared in its columns, repeating, slanders circulated by a little group of members of the T.S. in Sydney, whose cause the paper seems to have taken up, judging by its subsequent issues. As the vindication of my friend (now the Regionary Bishop of the Liberal Catholic Church in Australia, which they wish to discredit) in 1908, by the Governing Body of the whole Theosophical Society, is carefully ignored, while attacks are founded on the report of a small body of English members in 1906, I sent the following to the newspaper, and re-publish it for the information of younger members, who naturally know nothing of the affair.

I have corrected a few misprints in the letter, as it appeared, and in para. 6, line 14, have added the words “at various periods” before the words “for two years,” as on reading it over, I thought the “for two years” might be taken in indicate a continuous period. The original statement in the paper was headed “Grave Allegations.”

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(To the Editor)

Sir—Will you allow me to make the following comment on the article in your issue of today, headed as above.

The object of my coming to Australia for a very brief visit had nothing to do with the Liberal Catholic Church, though, to my surprise, a small group of officials of the Sydney Lodge, Theosophical Society, have just taken advantage of the publicity attendant on my visit to make an attack, which has been for some years carried on against the Liberal Catholic Church.

They gave me a very warm welcome on May 11, and six days afterwards I read the above statement in your columns. Let me premise that I am not a member of the Liberal Catholic Church, not being a Christian, but I accepted an invitation to speak to its Sydney congregation, as I have spoken in other

churches in England, on the Continent, and in America. As a Theosophist I am at the service of any religion, and have never refused an invitation to lecture in any temple, church, or chapel, or to take part in any service connected with any of them. The Theosophical Society has no connection with the Liberal Catholic Church any more than it had with the Buddhist temples, though Colonel Olcott, its President, and Mme. H. P. Blavatsky were professed Buddhists. In 1919, to avoid misunderstanding, I reiterated the fact that the Society served all religions in their own territories, but drew no man away from his own faith.

An attack was made on Bishop Leadbeater in 1906, on account of some advice he gave to three boys, in "a few extreme cases," he said, with a view to weaning them from vice; he was misrepresented, and was blamed both by Colonel Olcott and myself, who disapproved the advice, and he resigned rather than cause trouble in the Society. We both found out the misrepresentation, and Colonel Olcott, in a Convention address in December, 1906, dictated as he lay on his death-bed, said: "I firmly believe Mr. Leadbeater's motives are absolutely honest, and that these teachings are intended by him to aid, instead of to harm, his pupils." He cabled to Mr. Leadbeater apologising, and I wrote in the same sense. In the autumn of 1908, some important evidence having come in, the whole matter was gone into by the European officials, and six out of nine European general secretaries signed a letter clearing him. At the Annual Convention the General Council of the 14 general secretaries of the then 14 countries in the Theosophical Society, with the four highest officers and seven additional members, voted on a resolution declaring that there was no reason why he should not return to the Society which he had "served so well". Of these 25, forming the ruling-body of the Society, two only voted against, and one did not vote. All the representative members were in his favor.

I notice that those who attack him never refer to this acquittal, unsought by him, but demanded by public opinion in the Theosophical Society. I talked with the parents of every boy who had been in his care—except those of the three "extreme cases"; all these were unanimous in enthusiastic gratitude to him for the improvement in character of their sons. Mr. Leadbeater, however, had said in 1906 that, as respected friends disapproved the advice he had given, he would never give it again. There was never against him the smallest hint of crime, and even those who bitterly hate the Liberal Catholic Church have not ventured to include him in their attack. They fall back on 1906, and conceal the decision of the General Council of 1908.

As to the other accusations made, I have seen no evidence, save that of one hysteric, who, for no apparent reason, confessed that he had committed crime and accused others; then took it all back. If there is any evidence, those who have it should, as decent citizens, have handed it to the police, and have said nothing. They have preferred to circulate gross charges, to do nothing while one of the men accused was in the country, and they attack him when he is out of it and cannot answer. In England they would have been held to have compounded a felony, leaving the alleged criminal to continue his vile behaviour, corrupting others, and they would be liable to prosecution. They have persecuted

this unfortunate man for two years, to my knowledge, and when, in weary disgust, he has resigned all connection with the Society and the Liberal Catholic Church, the accusations appear in a public, paper. He was within their reach at various periods for two years, and they boasted how he would be arrested, but the arrest has never taken place. Now they publish accusations and revive charges against one of the most revered members of our Society of which he was acquitted in 1908—charges 16 years old, now impossible to re-investigate.

One man named in Mr. Martyn's letter—only on the confession above-named—has been acquitted by a court of honour, and is bringing a suit for libel in London. Others may follow, but few decent people care to go into the filth of such a trial. They are known, and honored, in their Church. It appears from the letter of one of the accusers that they want to drive me to resign! I am just re-elected for a third term of seven years, elected twice unanimously, and for the third time with 85 votes against me in a Society of over 40,000 active members.

The trouble in Australia is made by a small knot of people in the Sydney Lodge, who were able in the Annual Convention of the Theosophical Society in Australia to muster 15 delegates' votes against 86 on a vote of confidence in Mr. Leadbeater and myself. Fourteen of the 15 belonged to this little group, and the other was a Hobart friend of theirs. The "accusers of the brethren" are few all over the world. How much they are moved by religious hatred is shown by the fact that the group accused of a ghastly crime are members of the one little Church which they hate.

ANNIE BESANT, D.L.  
President of the T.S.

Sydney, May 17. [1922]