

## **“Ask the Master plainly whether I am abandoned and fallen, and see what is the reply”:** A Letter from C. W. Leadbeater to Annie Besant



*Having received additional evidence from the American Section of the TS against CWL, Annie Besant issued a circular letter to members of the E.S. on 27th July 1906. It represented a major and dramatic shift in her attitude towards him for she declared that “Mr Leadbeater is so obviously convinced of the propriety of the practice recommended, that he must either be regarded as, on this point, insane, or a victim of that glamour which is the deadliest weapon of the Dark Powers against those who seek to hasten their evolution by treading the dangerous path of occultism. It is this glamour which, I believe, is enwrapping him.” She also wrote: “I have had in Mr Leadbeater a friend, always helpful, always loyal, always kind and considerate, always prompt to sympathize and encourage. My life is the sadder and the poorer for his loss. But the T.S. and E.S. must stand clear from teaching that pollutes and degrades, and it is right that Mr Leadbeater is no longer with us.”*

*After receiving a copy of the abovementioned communication, CWL wrote the following letter to Annie Besant. The crisis, however, was far from over and new and unexpected events would take place. For the historical background of the famous “Cipher Letter”, allegedly written by CWL, please see [https://www.cwlworld.info/The\\_Cipher\\_Letter.pdf](https://www.cwlworld.info/The_Cipher_Letter.pdf).*

10 East Parade, Harrogate, England  
29th August, 1906.

My dear Annie,

Your letter enclosing your circular to the E.S. reached me yesterday while I was writing to you, and my comments upon it were therefore made somewhat hurriedly, as I had to catch a certain post. After a night in which to think it over, it is borne in upon me that I ought perhaps to write a few words more – that if it were thinkable that our positions could be reversed, I should wish to receive from you the very fullest and frankest statement of feeling that was possible. I think I owe it to you and to the loyal friendship of so many years; but I have withheld it so far because I did not wish even to seem to complain or to criticize – because I have to the uttermost that faith in you which you have perhaps somewhat lost in me – also, I think, because I shrank from obtruding my own personality in the midst of a crisis.

As I have said before, when we discussed this matter at Benares, I did not consciously make the slightest mental reservation. I was strongly oppressed by the feeling that the whole affair was taking up much of your time and causing you much trouble, and therefore I proposed as little as possible of alteration in what you wrote to Mrs. Dennis. You may possibly remember that I did make two different suggestions, one concerning that full explanation had never been given by me to Robert Dennis and the other deprecating the emphasis you laid upon the words “in rare cases”. Upon the first you acted, but it gave you the trouble of rewriting a

sheet of the letter; the second you did not notice and I did not press it, not in the least realizing then that it might later come to be a question of primary importance. But in explaining matters to you, I did not speak of rare cases, but all where absolute abstention was obviously impossible. You dissented quite definitely from the advice I had given, but there was no slightest hint then about my having “fallen”, or being the victim of glamour.

Now, dear, I am most anxious not to hurt you in any way, and not to give you an impression of a feeling of blame which is utterly absent from my heart if I know it. But from my point of view nothing whatever has happened since, to account for the tremendous change which has come over your opinion. You have received additional evidence from America which is mostly false, which I have never had the opportunity of seeing or of going over with you; and on the strength of that your proclamation was issued. You yourself put my own case for me in the aptest words when you intimated in one of your letters that I might perhaps find it necessary to publish some sort of statement in contradiction to worse rumours that were flying about; you yourself said how monstrous it was that a man’s character should be taken away by unsupported and unexamined evidence given by a few boys who were being so badgered by excited relations that they hardly knew what they were saying. To that has since been added the report (which again I have not seen) of a savagely hostile committee, obviously bent upon making the worst they could of everything; and that is how the matters stand.

I need not remind you of our long work together, of the hundreds of times that we have met out of the body, and even in the presence of our Masters, and of the Lord Himself. We have a record behind us, and you know me well; was I ever an impure person? I have not changed in the least, yet you say now that I have “fallen” from the path of occultism, or rather, I suppose, that I never was really on it at all. Yet recollect how many experiences we shared, and how often it has happened that they were also corroborated by the memory of others. Have you any evidence of this “fall” beyond your own conviction that because I held certain opinions it must be so? If not, will you in justice to me look at the possibilities of the case, and consider whether it is more likely that both you and I and several others should have lived a whole life of glamour for many years (the result of that being, nevertheless, a considerable amount of good work) or that you should now for this once be misinterpreting something?

Pardon me for suggesting that there may be a mistake, but you have yourself allowed it on a far more extensive scale than this. Your theory implies that I have never seen the Masters, and that it has been an evil illusion that has sustained me by its glory and its beauty through the work and the hard struggles of twenty-three years; yet surely that illusion has led me to do work which could scarcely be supposed to be pleasing to any evil powers. My “illusion” of work under the direction of the Masters continues now as ever, and now as ever but the most elevating teaching comes to me from Them, nothing but the most perfect love and compassion. Would you have me deny Them because They have not cast me off? I will say nothing as to the knowledge that They must have had as to the advice I gave, because you would say that They also must be part of my delusion; but you can hardly think me deluded in knowing that Madame Blavatsky trusted me and worked with me though her insight must have shown her my thoughts. (I am not venturing to suggest that They do not perhaps consider that an honest error on such a point makes a man altogether bad.) I am not venturing

to suggest that They or she would agree with the advice, I am not venturing to suggest that They do not perhaps consider that an honest error on such a point makes a man altogether bad, or makes it impossible to work with him.

I am not for a moment seeking to convince you that my advice is right; I always recognized that there was much to be said on both sides, and I am quite willing to accept your strong opinion as outweighing many other considerations. But may it not be possible that a man who honestly held an opinion differing from yours may yet not be an impure or abandoned person, that Madame Blavatsky and the Great Ones behind her may have recognized a good and pure intention even in this unconventionalism, and may therefore have thought it possible to use the man in the work? But your message states that you cannot work with me, even though I abandoned that advice in deference to your wishes.

A man holding such opinion cannot remain in the Theosophical Society, but must be cast out of it, even though he change the opinion, apparently! Yet even so, it should not be falsehood that he is cast out, and we have had plenty of it both from our poor dear Fullerton and Mrs. Dennis. Your message contains that inaccurate statement about daily practice and the other about epileptic fits, and (what I felt more than all) the suggestion that I was not quite honest with you at Benares. That perhaps was good for me, for it may be that I was unwittingly a little proud of being always open and honest, so that to be doubted raised for a moment a sort of outraged feeling.

Well, the thing is done now, and with all the weight of you world-wide authority I am branded as a fallen person. Even if upon reflection you do not feel quite so sure that you were right at that moment and wrong during all the previous years, there is no undoing such an action as that. I would not for a moment ask it, because to withdraw would, as it were, stultify you and convict you of acting hastily, which would not be good for your people. Yet if you can modify it in any way, or can contradict for me those things which are definitely untrue, it might perhaps be well – I don't know. At any rate, I thought I ought to write to you with absolute frankness, so that there should be no possibility of misunderstanding that I could avoid; if I had only been with you, there never would have been any. Ask the Master plainly whether I am abandoned and fallen, and see what is the reply. Believe me when I say that I have never blamed you; I do not wish to get back into the Society, I do not seek to be rehabilitated; but I do want to clear up the position between us if possible. I know very well how hard it is when the mind is once set in a certain groove to drag it out and judge impartially; yet I hope that you may be able to make this stupendous effort, which few in the world could make. But whatever you decide, my affection remains the same.

Yours ever in love and confidence,

C. W. Leadbeater.