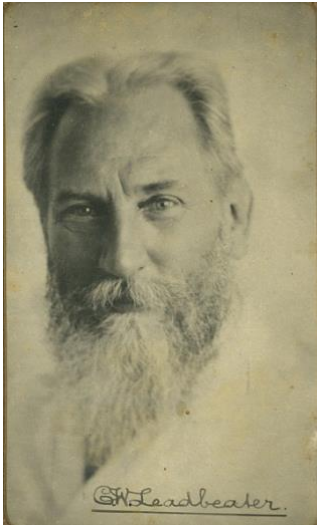


C. W. Leadbeater's Teachings

By Alfred Taylor



[**Alfred Taylor** was an American Theosophist and author of the book *A Human Heritage: The Wisdom in Science and Experience* (Quest Books, 1975). He was a dedicated student of the writings of H. P. Blavatsky and the Theosophical literature. Many of his articles were published in the international journal of the Theosophical Society, *The Theosophist*, including 'Science and the Universe', 'H P Blavatsky Brings to Mankind the Light of the Timeless Wisdom', 'The Problem of Inner Development', 'The Radiance of Reality', 'Science and Religion', 'Theosophy and Science' and 'Freedom and the Quest for Truth'. This article was published in the June 1964 issue of *The Theosophist*.]

From time to time there has been much discussion of the validity of the ideas and observations given in Theosophical publications. All of us are faced with the problem of assessing the values in Theosophical literature, especially as we encounter concepts or data which are not in accord with our previous thinking, or which seem to be incompatible with religious or scientific experience. Many people have left the Society because they considered certain thoughts advanced by Theosophical students to be in error. In the early days of the Society, Madame Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* provoked much adverse comment, and the same was true for her later work, *The Secret Doctrine*.

In more recent times the writings of Annie Besant and Bishop Leadbeater have been the target for critical appraisals. These individuals have been accused of expressing views that were contrary to *The Secret Doctrine* and the book known as *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*. The charge, too, has been made that certain works of these authors should be discounted because of incompatibility with modern scientific viewpoints. Some of Bishop Leadbeater's reports have been considered to be discredited on the basis that the clairvoyant observations, upon which so much of his writings is based, were not always reliable.

We are aware that one of the principles of The Theosophical Society is the freedom of the individual member to accept, reject or withhold judgment on Theosophical or any other teachings. It is our responsibility to build up our own concepts or viewpoints of man and the universe. We cannot relegate this task to others even though they may be much wiser than we are. We are, of course, influenced by judgments of others. This is as it should be, since the evaluations of a number of people will tend to bring out the strengths and weaknesses of a particular teaching.

A study of Theosophical literature reveals that there are what might be termed different value levels. In *The Secret Doctrine* we are first introduced to general principles or concepts, and then there is the demonstration of their application to particular situations and circumstances. In all systems of knowledge there is the division between principles and the data or factual information which establish the reliability such principles. For example, in science, there is the concept of the conservation of energy which can be stated very simply and briefly, and then there are the great number of facts which attest to the truth of this law.

In the beginning of the first volume of Madame Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*, the thesis for the total work is given in few pages called the Proem. If we can comprehend, in some degree, what is involved in this thesis, we approach the essentials of Theosophical teachings.

The remaining extensive contents of the work lead us through science, philosophy, religion, and by way of the thinking of the past and the present in a demonstration of the tenability of concepts given in the beginning.

It is obvious that errors in the factual basis of a principle are secondary to a defect in the principle itself. Thousands of facts may support a principle or law in science. We might discredit a few items from such supporting data without affecting our confidence in the principle involved.

Theosophical teachings are based essentially on the concept of evolution, or the emergence of all beings and things from a common source. This concept of evolution is also the dominant note in the much more restricted domain of science. The data of science increasingly support the idea that the universe has evolved from electromagnetic energy, that all the diverse forms, from pebbles to stars, from insects to human beings, are fabricated from one source material. This evolution proceeds according to the law of action and reaction, or cause and effect, and necessitates the passage of designs through numerous embodiments. For example, an oak tree is the embodiment of oak design or organization, and this design is passed to new oak tree embodiments by acorns which contain, in code, oak design and the information necessary to materialize or actualize it. Apparently, the same principle is illustrated in human constructions. The evolution of the automobile has proceeded through the sequence: blueprint, or car design—embodiment—experience—improved car design—new embodiment.

Theosophy includes evolution as it proceeds in physical forms, but extends this principle so that it applies to the total reality of the physical and superphysical cosmic manifestation. In *The Secret Doctrine* the idea is set forth of the Absolute which is unknowable but out of which arises the progenitor of spirit matter. The universe evolves from spirit, matter and their connecting link, *fohat*. There is a progression of forms which manifest ever more of the One Reality. Without some of material vesture there can be no evidence of life or spirit, and without spirit there can be no phenomenal nature.

It is not necessary for the purpose of this report to go into further detail about Theosophical basic teachings. Enough has been given to make clear that in evaluating Theosophical literature we must differentiate between basic concepts or principles and the data which support them. In this connection, it is interesting to note that among the various writers on Theosophical subjects, we do not encounter disagreement with regard to fundamental teachings. The differences which have arisen appear to be concerned with secondary values. The validity of the main thesis advanced by H. P. Blavatsky has not been questioned. The same situation can be noted among scientists. There is much controversy about secondary values, but almost unanimous acceptance of fundamental laws or concepts.

It is important for us to keep these distinctions in mind. Otherwise we may get the idea that because the ideas advanced by a particular Theosophical writer have been considered questionable, Theosophical teachings have been discredited. The most able people are liable to be in error, and since the Society is based on complete freedom of thought, each individual has the right to point out what seems to him to be defects in a report. We can be sure that *The Secret Doctrine* itself has its due share of mistakes in the material cited to support its conclusions. Man longs for infallible scripture, containing the knowledge and wisdom he seeks in life and death. Such a message would relieve us of the responsibility of thinking things out for ourselves. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why such infallibility has never been discovered.

The present report is concerned with something more than simple evaluation, or criticism. It seems to me that some of the questions raised about Bishop Leadbeater's work are of a more

serious nature and merit thoughtful consideration. The factual errors which have been claimed with regard to his teachings are not so important as is the implication that in important aspects of his clairvoyant work he was misled in believing that his own thought-creations were real experiences and contacts. E. L. Gardner, in his publication *There is No Religion Higher than Truth*¹ (The Theosophical Publishing House, London, 1963), states that “the Lord Maitreya and the Masters with whom Leadbeater was on such familiar terms were his own thought-creations”. Mr. Gardner goes on to say that “there was no intention to deceive,” and that “his clairvoyance was unquestioned”.

Charges of this nature invalidate not so much a particular teaching but rather discredit the teacher himself. We can accuse a person in ordinary life of misinterpreting phenomena, but our accusation becomes much more serious if we claim that such a person is unable to discriminate between objective reality and the product of his imagination.

Bishop Leadbeater has written much on Theosophy and related subjects. His works have had, and still have, a very great influence on the thinking and understanding of many students of the Ageless Wisdom. His writings are characterized by clearness, by logical consistency and by painstaking thoroughness where clairvoyant observations are concerned. While many have come to appreciate Theosophy through his publications, others have been antagonized by his works. The spectacular nature of some of the subjects he dealt with, and the fact that very few of those who study his reports are able to check directly his sources of information, naturally arouse adverse criticism. Many people tend to shy away from new ideas which are based on privately perceived situations. Such reactions are especially pronounced when any aspect of the superphysical is present.

Among Bishop Leadbeater’s co-workers there were some individuals who were able to check his observations and data. Annie Besant, in particular, was associated with him in some most spectacular clairvoyant studies. In the Adyar pamphlet No. 36, entitled *Investigations into the Superphysical*, Annie Besant explains how she and C. W. Leadbeater proceeded in some of the clairvoyant work they carried out together. She states that “in making the observations now embodied in *Man: Whence How and Whither*, the two seers [A.B. and C. W. L.] observed at the same time, stopping and re-examining any obscure point, discussing with each other – while the objects were being looked at—any difficult matter, while two scribes took down, independently, everything that was said, even to the most ejaculatory sentence.” In the foreword to Mr. Leadbeater’s book, *The Masters and the Path*, the work which Mr. Gardner especially condemns, there is statement by Annie Besant: “I desire to associate myself with the statements made in this book, for the accuracy of nearly all of which I can personally vouch.”

From these statements by Annie Besant, it becomes obvious that if the beings “with whom Leadbeater was on such familiar terms were his own thought-creations,” then we have to assume that Annie Besant was even more mistaken since she was deluded into accepting as real, the thought-creations of another person.

In one area of investigation, Bishop Leadbeater’s clairvoyant powers have been dramatically vindicated. His work with the Sumerian civilization of past ages was later confirmed in considerable detail by archeological investigations. Also, his chart of the size and shape of the ancient Gobi Sea is in close agreement with later scientific discoveries (*Where Theosophy and*

¹ For a critique of Mr Gardner’s booklet please see:

<http://www.cwlworld.info/There is No Religion Higher than Truth.pdf>

Science Meet, Vol. I).

It appears that the main area of controversy stimulated by Bishop Leadbeater's writings was associated with religion. He was considered to have been mistaken in his report that the World Teacher proposed to initiate new religious teachings. Also, his association with the formation of the Liberal Catholic Church has come in for criticism. Mr. Gardner in his booklet referred to before, quotes passages from the book, *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, which are supposed especially to discredit Bishop Leadbeater's work in establishing the Liberal Catholic Church and in formulating its liturgy. In one of these quotations, there is the statement that "nearly two thirds of the evils that pursue humanity . . . [have been due to] religion," but the writer of this sentence goes on to make it plain that it is the abuse of religion which is condemned.

A study of Madame Blavatsky's works discloses that she was very much aware of the need and the place of religion in human affairs. She emphasizes that one of the objectives of Theosophy is to serve as the basis for the "Wisdom Religion". In the booklet entitled *Is Theosophy a Religion?* she states "unity of everything in the universe implies and justifies our belief in existence of a knowledge at once scientific, philosophical and religious, showing the necessity and actuality of the connections of man and all things in the universe with each other; which knowledge, therefore, becomes essentially Religion, and must be called in its integrity and universality by the distinctive name of Wisdom-Religion." In this same publication Madame Blavatsky considers the fact that each of great religions was "pure in its early beginnings". Also, in this connection, a letter from the book, *Letters from the s of the Wisdom, First Series*, contains the statement: "The Theosophical Society was chosen as the corner-stone, the foundation of the future religions of humanity."

It would appear that Bishop Leadbeater was fulfilling one the most important objectives of Theosophy when he and Bishop Wedgwood established a church which is based squarely on the teachings of the Ageless Wisdom. And it is understandable that he would merit and receive help in formulating the liturgy and arranging other aspects of the service.

The episode of the predicted release to humanity of new teachings by the Lord Christ is beyond anything but speculation by most of us. In this connection, A. G. Vreede, Presiding Bishop of the Liberal Catholic Church, replying to Mr. Gardner's charges, has summarized his thought on and experience in this affair in an editorial published in *The Liberal Catholic* magazine for February 1964. Bishop Vreede's account should be read by all who have been puzzled by strange sequence.

There is one bit of Theosophical knowledge we should keep in mind. This is not a universe where things happen with mechanical perfection. The whole course of evolution, both as known to science and as given in Theosophical teachings, proceeds through trials or experience, and the gradual accumulation of capacity by which a particular objective is attained. Mr. Gardner emphasizes this in his booklet *Heavenly Man* (Theosophical Publishing House, London, 1952) when in the beginning of Section VII, he states: "The occult records that tell of mistakes and non-success when the Elohim, the world-builders, were engaged with planetary creation, may encourage us at humbler levels to realize that on the loftiest scale a successful achievement can be preceded by failures."

Bishop Leadbeater appears to have reported the simple facts as available to him, but the plan to release new teachings to humanity depends upon human co-operation for its success. The majority of us are not in a position to check directly Bishop Leadbeater's or anyone else's clairvoyance. Therefore we cannot unconditionally accept knowledge coming to us from the use of such capacities. It is admitted that there may be misinterpretations of what is contacted through the use superphysical capacities. We must proceed through reason, knowledge from

other sources, and intuition or our inward sense of truth, to the evaluation of reports based on such observations. But when charges are levelled against the authenticity of teachings based on superphysical work, need to scrutinize not only the reality of the teachings under attack but also the concepts involved in the criticism. The idea that a strong, sane, well-integrated, psychically health individual can be easily deluded into mistaking thought- creations for objective realities is just speculation. It would require years of careful research, with full recognition of individual differences, to establish such a concept. The fact that certain people in mental institutions, as cited by Mr. Gardner, are deluded into believing they are Napoleon or some other such personage is completely irrelevant, since in such instances we are concerned with the mentally ill.

It is fitting to close this paper with some appropriate quotations from Bishop Leadbeater himself, as taken from Adyar Pamphlet No. 86, entitled *Masters of Wisdom*. With regard to the reality of his contacts with the “Great Ones,” he states: “The only objection which is made . . . is that we may have dreamt these things, or we may have been deluded. . . . But since many of us are, and have been for many years, daily communication with these Great Ones, it would surely need a somewhat phenomenal power of dreaming, if all our experiences of this kind are but vivid dreams.” He continues: “I myself . . . can bear witness that I have seen two of these Great Ones when both they and I were in our physical bodies. In one case . . . I had the fullest possible proof of physical existence, and . . . I had previously seen the same Great One many times in the astral body. . . .”