

Ernest Egerton Wood was born in England in 1883 and joined the Theosophical Society in 1902. He lectured for the Society for a period of 30 years in 40 countries. He came to Adyar, the international Headquarters of the TS, in 1908 and assisted Annie Besant in educational work, scouting and other areas. He was the founder of the Theosophical College in Madanapalle, which is also the birthplace of J. Krishnamurti. He was also the founder and once the Principal of the Sind National College in Hyderabad. He served for several years as secretary to C. W. Leadbeater at Adyar.

Below is the letter he sent to the 'Indian Patriot' regarding the accusations against C. W. Leadbeater, which were being circulated in the Madras press in 1913.

Mr. LEADBEATER

SIR, – I have noticed with considerable regret in recent issues of many of the daily papers vast amount of uncomfortable suggestion and insinuation levelled against Mr. Leadbeater by people evidently uninformed on the subject upon which they write. Now, the columns of the daily press are surely the last place in the world in which to discuss the private character of any person, but in view of this continued fusillade of insinuations on a good and unselfish man, I request that you will publish these few words from one who really knows him. There are many who are ready to offer their opinions upon him who do not know him at all, but as I am at present in the almost unique position of being the person who has written for him almost the whole of his correspondence for several years and has discussed with him, written down almost all the books which he has produced since 1908, I feel sure that my statement will carry weight with those of your readers who desire to avoid unjustly thinking ill of another man.

I must explain that, as a friend struck by the remarkable beauty and purity and genius shown in Mr. Leadbeater's life and work, I have gladly assisted him for several years as, as it were, a private secretary. We are busy people, for this assistance means, not the usual office routine of a secretary, with a separate private life and interests outside the work for both master and servant, but on the contrary constant association from daylight in the morning until bedtime at night, generally without leaving the room even for meals. Indeed, with the strenuousness of Mr. Leadbeater's philanthropic work there is no time for anything in the nature of private life, the work itself providing his sole interest and enjoyment in life.

Now during this time I have written to Mr. Leadbeater's dictation thousands, literally thousands, of replies to letters from private people, many of them appealing to him for advice in varied difficulties and dangers of life, most of these latter having no connection with the Theosophical Society. I know of young men who have turned to him in difficulties, and never, in any case during the whole of the time I have been with him; has he advised them otherwise than to hold firm and control themselves by force of determined will, by engaging themselves in good work and keeping their thoughts employed in useful directions. Never once has he advised anything such as has been suggested in several newspapers and heard from

people who ought to know better than to repeat malevolent stories but, on the other hand, hundreds testify that their lives have been lifted by his advice and example to a level of purity and spirituality and happiness which a short time before they had thought to be impossible.

Much sneering talk has centred round the term 'Theosophical virgin,' an expression produced quite accidentally from a misunderstanding of the term Theosophical worthy. But as a matter of fact the phrase is, I am convinced, true as applied to Mr. Leadbeater, though of course it is not the sort of expression that one would naturally use. Mr. Leadbeater's life is more inspiring than that of any other man whom I have met. I have conversed with him by the hour; and the day in the course of his work I have been with him in success and in difficulty, and never once have I heard him use one coarse expression or make one doubtful suggestion. His thoughts and aspirations are all far away from the things with which his detractors are occupying their minds. I know that the whole of his time, the whole of his money, the whole of his energy and thought are, without reserve, spent in seeking to make his fellow man happier, nobler, more joyous than before. Yet in the midst of this endless round of philanthropic work we constantly hear his hearty laughter, and find no trace of sentimentality to mar the good sense of his clear-sighted efforts, to make life better than it is.

Adyar, 12th May 1913.

ERNEST WOOD

**THE HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE BAKEWELL'S
JUDGMENT IN G. NARANIAH,
versus
MRS. BESANT**

(Reprint from the *Madras Standard*.)

On Monday last we published the full text of the judgment delivered by the Hon'ble Justice Bakewell in the case of G. Naraniah vs. Mrs. Besant. 'This case has deservedly attracted a wide public attention throughout India, affecting as it does a Society which has its branches all over the world and counts among its members eminent, men of various nationalities in high social and public positions. Many of our contemporaries have wisely reserved their comments, awaiting, perhaps, public report, but a few have thought fit to pass sonic adverse remarks on the Society relying on the telegraphic summary, which is neither accurate nor complete. We have no Theosophical leanings and our interest in matters spiritual and religious is confined to what falls within the legitimate purview of a newspaper. In controversies of this kind, however, it is difficult for the contending parties to keep a clear vision unaffected by personal likes and predilections and prejudices and consequently more often the discussion in the press is transferred to the law court, on some ground or other. On such occasions, it is needless for us to say, that it is the duty of the public organs to

hold the balance even arid remember that even a Jew is entitled to justice and fair play.

It is from this standpoint that we propose to point out what, in our opinion, are the weak points in Mr. Justice Bakewell's judgment, now that we have before us the full text of it. The judgment and order in the case "gives one" as our French brethren would say, "furiously to think." It gives a quiet recital of the circumstances under which Mr. Naraniah made Mrs. Besant the guardian of two of his sons, declares that "no undue influence was used to induce hint to sign the document," points out that "a very eminent lawyer and ex-judge of this Court, Sir Subramania Iyer, warned him of the legal effect of the assignment of guardianship," and says that "he was well aware that Mrs. Besant's offer to educate the boys was motivated by the ceremony of Initiation to which the plaintiff consented." Further, the learned Judge stated that the plaintiff desired for his sons that which Mrs. Besant offered, an English, *i. e.*, a University, education. He then goes on to say that the plaintiff alleged that he had seen about April 14, 1910—the agreement having been signed on March 6, 1910—"the incident described in para 5 of the plaint and para I of the particulars" (two entirely different descriptions of one act), but that "matters however went on much the same at Adyar and Mr. Leadbeater still took part in the education of the boys." Later on the judge alludes to "discrepant accounts" of an interview which took place between the plaintiff and defendant, and although the six persons present including Sir Subramania Iyer and the defendant all swore that the defendant refused to make a promise to separate the boys from Mr. Leadbeater, the judge airily dismissed the whole of this evidence, and declared that the defendant had it "broken her undertaking."

Are we then to understand that Sir Subramania Iyer with 70 Years of unblemished honour behind him, has perjured himself, and that Mrs. Besant and four Indian gentlemen of respectability have conspired with hint, to give false testimony on this point? This is what the Judge implied. Where is the evidence on which he based his statement? The only thing he had was an admittedly imperfect note of what took place, *written by the defendant herself*, in which the promise was not mentioned. It seems to us that we have here a plain miscarriage of justice. Moreover, the Judge seems to have forgotten that the defendant as guardian, had the right to fix the residence of the boys, without consulting the father.

But worse remains behind. His Lordship declared that the plaintiff's allegations were false, that the act he said *he had seen* never took place, that the plaintiff was "a jealous and suspicious father" and that he made the charges to "influence the Court in revoking the agreement." Further, he said that "the plaintiff's evidence is not reliable," and that the issues charging the offences "must be answered in the negative." This is a plain charge of perjury against the plaintiff, and of perjury of a most aggravated and infamous character. One expects the next sentence to be a direction that the plaintiff shall be prosecuted for perjury. Not at all. His Lordship says:—"Since I have found that the alleged acts were not committed, there is no allegation against the fitness of the plaintiff to be the guardian of his children. He

has, in my opinion, attempted to strengthen his case with lies, but that cannot be said to render him unfit." We rub our eyes, and read it again. To make a charge against his son of an offence punishable with 13 years transportation, and to be declared a perjurer for making it, does not render the plaintiff unfit to have the custody of the injured boy!

Is this the "British justice" which was declared the other day by Lord Meath to be the main justification for British rule in India? We may note, in passing, that whatever Mr. Leadbeater's opinions may be, the plaintiff knew them when he committed his sons to Mr. Leadbeater's care.

Mr. Justice Bakewell awarded costs to the defendant, as a solution, we suppose for the loss of the boys whom Mrs. Besant had treated as her own sons, and also, perhaps, to signify his disapproval of the plaintiff's conduct in the case. To complete this astonishing case the learned Judge, a week later, added to his judgment an Order, in which he described the plaintiff as "unscrupulous" and appointed him as guardian of the Wards of Court! Ought not a guardian of Wards of Court to be a man of respectable character, or are perjuries and unscrupulousness the qualifications sought? We have waited before making any comments on this case, but it is time that some one should speak out. Mrs. Besant must remain silent, as she is going to appeal and some of our contemporaries seem to think—like red Indians — that the right time to torture an enemy is when he is tied hand and foot, so that the amusement is a safe one.