

For Private Circulation.

Reprint of Mrs. Annie Besant's letter to the "Indian Patriot," Friday evening, May 2, 1913.

Judges and Opinions.

(To the Editor of the *Indian Patriot*.)

SIR, There is one opinion stated in the recent trial that does not come up on appeal, and to which, therefore, I may call public attention—Mr. Justice Bakewell's opinion that Mr. Leadbeater's opinion on a difficult sex problem is immoral, and that he is therefore a dangerous companion for young boys. And this, although he had only given advice when all else had failed, and although he promised in 1906 never to give it again, and proved his perfect honesty by stating frankly at the late trial that he still held it, when most men would have evaded the admission. As I have steadily said since I first heard this view of the sex problem in 1906, I entirely dissent from it; but then I also dissent from the other popular view which winks at, or even encourages, prostitution. I hold that there is no cure for vice except self-control, and that therefore no advice should ever be given which tends to weaken the rigid rule that to yield to either solitary or associated vice is disgraceful and unmanly. But, holding this view, I yet do not see that it is right to state that all who make allowance for the strength of this passion and try to minimise its evils are dangerous companions for young boys.

I read, for instance, a question from Mr. Snowden, M.P., to the Secretary of State for India: "If circular memoranda are still sent out by the Quartermaster-General to Indian Cantonments ordering the provision for our soldiers there of young and attractive women?" Mr. Montague: "No, sir." But they were at one time; and are Indian women, however old and unattractive, still provided as a matter of course for English soldiers? Every one knows that they are. Then is not everyone who takes part in this a dangerous companion for young boys? They not only hold an academical opinion that women should be thus sacrificed, but they act on it. What about the House of Commons and its Contagious Diseases Acts, against which Mrs. Josephine Butler fought so heroically? What about the compulsory examination of "fallen women" in English garrison towns? What about the abominable publications of army doctors and officers on this subject, and their declarations that all objections to prostitution for soldiers are sentimentality?

What about houses of ill-fame? What about the nautch girls who sing and dance at entertainments given here at religious festivals and before English officials? How many highly "respectable" Brahmans and English officials refuse to go to parties where these "temple dancing girls" perform, as I, the despised Theosophist, have done, ever since I learned what a temple dancing girl means? When I first came to India, a procession was once formed in a town I visited in which the leading citizens, pundits, and priests took part, and these girls danced in front of me. I learned from the *Indian Social Reformer* what these poor girls were, and thenceforward refused to countenance their employment in any function in which I took part. But are all men who employ them or attend where they dance to be branded as dangerous companions for young boys? Surely they

ought to be, for their example encourages young men to frequent the society of these unfortunates. And what about those who are responsible for the existence of the huge Eurasian population? Are all boys to be kept away from their successors? And what about eminent European doctors who advise young men to yield to their “natural passions” for the sake of their health where marriage is delayed? What about Regent Street at midnight? What about the houses frequented by sailors when they come on shore? Ought not every man who condones these evils to be marked down as a dangerous associate for young boys? Or is the whole social view of the sex-problem a ghastly hypocrisy, a whited sepulchre full of ruined women and all uncleanness? Mr. Leadbeater’s opinion may be wrong. I sincerely believe it is; but it is at least more merciful to women than that which is tacitly sanctioned by the vast majority of men who are regarded as safe companions for young boys.

We have had many judges expressing opinions on difficult subjects in the past. All the martyrs of the past have been condemned for their opinions. Bruno was burnt, Galileo was imprisoned for holding that the earth moved round the sun, and that opinion was condemned by the judges who reflected the popular ideas of their time. Lord Coke declared from the Bench his opinion about witchcraft, opinion which justices of the present High Court would scarcely like to endorse. Anyone who cares to read the trials of the past may learn the judicial opinions which time has reversed. For history has strange revenges. And yet people are so sure that their own opinions are the foundation of the world.

Should not judges confine themselves to the punishment of breaches of the law and not wander afield into opinions? For, after all, a judge’s opinion on a subject he has not studied is no more valuable than any other man’s opinion, though such tremendous weight is attached to it because it is spoken from the Bench. The law rightly clothes its officers with dignity and power. The greater, therefore, is their responsibility.

ANNIE BESANT.

P.S.—May I add, with reference to my application for a stay, that I offered, if the stay were extended over the appeal, to undertake that Mr. Leadbeater should not meet the boys during that time. I did so, because when one asks a favour of a Court, one is bound to follow a decision arrived at. That he should not be with them in England was agreed upon by us both when I first took the boys into my care. We came to that agreement not because I in any way doubted his purity or honour, but because he had been attacked in England, and we both wished to save the boys from any disadvantage that might arise from the remembrance of those attacks.

Reprint of letter from Major Peacocke, which appeared in the “Madras Times,” Friday morning, April 25, 1913.

SIR,—As the case “Narayaniah v. Mrs. Besant,” lately decided in the High Court of Madras, has been the means of making public a jumbled mass of disconnected details concerning “Occult” teachings, Superhuman Beings, Initiations, the reappearance of the Christ, and abnormal human faculties, interlarded with opinions upon the unsavoury

but ever-present sex problem and accusations of disgusting criminal practices against a prominent member of the Theosophical Society, and as it would be idle to expect people in general to take the trouble of sorting out these details and of placing them in their proper relationship to one another and to the whole scheme of which they are fragments, I trust that you will permit me, through your columns, to state such facts known to me personally as may assist in preventing seriously, unjust, and erroneous opinions being formed in the public mind concerning both the gentleman who was the real object of attack in this lawsuit, and the Society with which he is so intimately associated. I make this request not to air my own or anyone else's beliefs or opinions but solely in the interest of that fair play of which the public Press must ever be the guardian when the reputation of an individual or of a community is dragged into the arena of public discussion. In the present case there are two weighty reasons why these sections of the public Press which cater for the reputable members of society should grant facilities for the presentation of facts capable of easy verification and of conclusions based upon observation and uncoloured by personal prejudices. For, as public opinion is at present constituted, to allow statements affecting reputation and character, published in respectable journals to pass unchallenged, implies their being probably true. The first of these reasons is that, because a gentleman, Mr. Leadbeater, and a community, the Theosophical Society (including even that universally respected lady, Mrs. Besant, its President), have been grossly misrepresented by the garbled reports of the above-mentioned case and the letters from rabid opponents, which have been given very wide publicity in the Press throughout India, every opportunity should be granted for defending the reputation and character of that gentleman and that community, which latter numbers among its members men and women of repute and standing in every country ; and in this respect I would emphasise the fact that reputation and character have nothing to do with religious beliefs or private opinions, but are always based upon the practical value to the human race of any particular unit, or group of units, in raising or lowering its general standard and in hastening or retarding its upward evolution. The second reason is that, unless the true facts are given as wide a publicity as is being given to misrepresentations, great anxiety and apprehension will be raised in the minds of the relatives and friends of members of the Society, most especially in the case of the large number of ladies and gentlemen now residing at Adyar and those who will presently come here (for many come and go every year). For, as a rule, the relatives and friends of members know little or nothing of the Society or its work, but they have hitherto tolerated it as a body of harmless cranks who were, at any rate, respectable. Now, however, the position has been changed; all sorts of rumours are being circulated, and the Society, particularly as regards Adyar—its headquarters—has been publicly besmirched, and one of its leading members is to-day [sic] being represented in the Press as “a man *declared by the High Court of Madras* to be an immoral person unfit to be associated with.” It is easy to see how, by a very slight twist in the wording of the following sentence which occurs in the judgment lately delivered, enemies of the Society can make the above assertion with a certain substratum of plausibility—a half or a twisted truth being the worst of all lies :—“Mr. Leadbeater admitted in his evidence that he has held, and even now holds, opinions which I need only describe as certainly immoral and such as to unfit him to be the tutor of boys, and, taken in conjunction with his professed power to detect the approach of impure thoughts, render him a highly dangerous associate for children.”

Mr. Leadbeater's opinion, frankly stated in Court as an academic one which he first learned when a member of a private organisation within the priesthood of the Church of England, is briefly this: that in those cases where men are entirely unable to control sex impulse, or where young men have fallen slaves to the vice so common among boys, and when every other remedy has been tried without success, then of two inevitable evils solitary vice is less harmful to the community than prostitution, as only one victim is involved instead of two; and, further, that by treating this matter strictly physiologically as a disease, both a vicious habit inherited from boyhood and uncontrollable sex passion can be ultimately got rid of by following certain advice. Mrs. Besant deems such advice highly dangerous, and it cannot be too often stated that, in deference to her wish, Mr. Leadbeater has promised, and has kept that promise made some seven years ago, never to give it again—he had previously given it in a very few extreme cases to save youths from utter ruin. When Mr. Justice Bakewell in his judgment criticised Mr. Leadbeater as quoted above he was scarcely fair in publicly branding a man of whom he knew nothing, excepting an opinion held upon a difficult problem, as “unfit to be the tutor of boys” and “a highly dangerous associate for children.” I know more than one Judge of the same High Court who, *from personal knowledge of the gentleman*, holds the exactly opposite view as to his fitness to have charge of boys. But, unfortunately, an opinion, however ill-founded, embodied in a judgment carries an amount of weight and a prestige which is very difficult to counteract, and we can never expect to hear the last of the pronouncement quoted. As regards Mr. Leadbeater's “opinions,” Mr. Justice Bakewell was hardly justified in using the term “immoral” *in the absence of any expert medical testimony* about an academic opinion upon such a momentous question as that of how best to combat the ruling vice of humanity. One might pertinently inquire what solution the learned Judge would label a “moral opinion.” Perhaps when women join hands with men, and all cant and hypocrisy is put aside, we may get a solution to this vital problem of how to deal with sexual vice at the least cost to the welfare of the race, and surely the welfare of the race must be the only test of the “morality” or otherwise of any solution. Meanwhile, let us suspend judgment and not label “immoral” the opinion of anyone who has the courage to question our “conventional” opinion, or, at any rate, let him who is without fault throw the first stone.

The fact that the plaintiff failed in the suit upon all the issues excepting the technical one of the custody of the boys (which will doubtless be the subject of an appeal) and was condemned to pay all the costs of the suit, has definitely cleared the good name of the elder boy as well as Mr. Leadbeater from the foul accusation made against them by a father whom the judgment describes as having “attempted to strengthen his case with lies.”

Certain statements made on oath during the hearing of this case are without doubt the most startling ones ever recorded in a court of law. For example, Mrs. Besant swore that she had stood in the presence of the Supreme Director of Evolution on this earth, that she was consciously present at the “Initiation” of Krishnamurti at a certain place in Tibet, that she had every reason to believe that the Christ (or the Lord Maitreya, as He is called in the East) would some years hence take the body of the disciple Krishnamurti as a vehicle for work among men as he took the body of the disciple Jesus 2,000 years ago, and that at a certain meeting in Benares the Christ had appeared and for a few minutes “overshadowed” His “Chosen one.” Mr. Leadbeater swore to similar

statements, and to additional ones to the effect that he had carried out investigations on Mars and Mercury, that he could see people's thoughts, and that he had been charged by certain superhuman Beings a great many years ago with the duty of seeking out promising boys for spiritual work in the future. Several statements in their evidence also implied very constant communication with the "Inner Heads" of the Society, generally called "The Masters."

While some few will deem the credibility of those who made these sworn statements sufficient to warrant serious investigation into the possibility of their being true, the majority must inevitably class them as "blasphemy" or "imposture" or "delusion." A few years will definitely prove Mrs. Besant and those others who, from personal knowledge, vouch for the truth of her statements to have been either self-deluded visionaries or to have been in truth fulfilling the functions of John the Baptist to the twentieth century.

I am obliged to draw attention to these statements elicited in cross-examination, for they were not voluntarily made nor brought out by the "defence," because they furnish valuable aid, that might not otherwise have been available for publication, in any attempt to uphold the reputation and character of Mr. Leadbeater and, incidentally, of the Society that regards him as one of its "worthies." Mrs. Besant's reputation and character are, of course, too well known throughout the world to need any sort of vindication.

What I wish to establish (from actual facts) is this: That Mr. Leadbeater's daily life among his friends and associates is throughout consistent with his beliefs, with his professed abnormal powers, and with his teachings; and that he stands for the highest morality both in practice and by precept. His beliefs may be regarded as erroneous, his powers may be considered the illusions of a disordered brain, and some of his teachings may be classed as fantastic, but if his whole private life is consistent with and regulated by them, and if that life and those teachings be a source of inspiration to several thousands to live nobly and as useful units of the human family, then surely no one knowing these facts, despite a complete disagreement with his beliefs, would, unless blinded by violent prejudice, describe him as "immoral and unfit to be associated with."

Although I am not here concerned with the truth or otherwise of his experiences and beliefs, it is necessary for a clear understanding of his character that I should briefly summarise what he holds to be the *facts* upon which his life is based; I can then proceed to describe his daily life, and I think that the consistency between the "preaching" and the "precept" will be perfectly apparent.

Mr. Leadbeater claims that he is one of a Brotherhood of Initiates in the higher grades of which there are certain supermen called *The Masters*, that for a long time he has been the disciple of one of these Masters, under Whose guidance he has developed his spiritual faculties and serving Whom is the joy and sole aim of his life; that he has acquired abnormal faculties, including the use, with full consciousness, of his non-physical bodies; that he can travel at will in one or other of those bodies and converse with other beings, both human and super-human, and including the so-called "dead"; that initiates generally meet out of the physical body; that the evolution of this earth is under the control of a Superhuman Being (living on it), Who holds His authority direct from the Ruler of the Solar System; that there is a high official (Whom men call the Christ, Jagadguru, or Lord Maitreya) in charge of the religions of the world; that he has seen and

spoken to Him and knows that He is preparing shortly to come out again into the world of men ; and that in addition to his work in this world he has a vast amount of work in the invisible worlds, particularly among the recently “dead” for whose helping and instruction he has been largely instrumental in organising a band of students as “helpers” in this work. He asserts that as a result of this wider knowledge and those larger interests he is utterly indifferent to either praise or blame from men; for, he says, to do what one cannot help doing deserves no praise, and that it is only ignorance which causes men to revile. Consequently he holds that it is a mere waste of time to attempt to defend himself against slander, for while men in general are so profoundly ignorant of the simplest facts of human evolution they cannot be expected to understand, and must be forgiven even as a child is forgiven when it gets into a temper over some trifle.

Such are his claims. I am not here concerned with their validity; nor does it matter, for the purpose of testifying to the personal character of one of this group of people claiming to be initiates, whether or not the teachings be true or the experiences real. Such things are matters for discussion, not for blind faith or thoughtless rejection, by people who happen to be interested in them. Since, however, he will never attempt to defend himself, and since a large number of people are more or less affected by the widely published misrepresentations of his character, it remains for his friends to combat the false impressions, which cannot fail to have been made, by availing themselves of the courtesy of the Press through which alone they can reach a public already in possession of the misrepresentations.

To come now to his daily life among his associates, which is always the surest criterion of a man’s general character, I will, as tersely as possible, state such facts, and such opinions formed by observation as distinct from theory as are pertinent to the object of this letter.

I am no hero-worshipper, although I admire anyone whose attributes are great and independent enough to break the awful monotony of human mediocrity. I am not a disciple of his; indeed, as far as I know he has no disciples, and on some matters I do not at present see eye to eye with him—for instance, when he terms tobacco smoking “an obscene habit” – but as a quite ordinary man who has knocked about the world to a very considerable extent, and as one who first met him some fifteen years ago, who has been for some time living at Adyar with him, and to whom his daily life and most of his opinions are quite familiar, I unhesitatingly declare that Mr. Leadbeater is the purest-lived and purest-minded, the happiest and the gentlest, as well as the most scrupulously truthful and most one-pointedly devotional man I have ever met; and I consider that it would be an inestimable advantage for any boy to be fortunate enough to come under his care. “Has your paragon no faults, then?” may well be asked. No doubt he has, or he would not be a fellow human being: but they are not the faults that his detractors would saddle him with, and I am only attempting here to combat *false imputations*, not to analyse his character.

Mr. Leadbeater stands for absolute purity, and he has for very many years been a source of inspiration to pure living for thousands of men and women both by written and spoken exhortation and by the example of his own life. Although many have aspired to emulate his life, scarcely one has succeeded; for the standard of purity, devotion, and gentleness that he puts forward is one difficult of attainment even for the really “good” person, let alone those of us who can lay no claim to sainthood.

I know that he spends long hours making (or believing that he is making) minute and careful observations in superphysical states of matter, for which work he many years ago laboriously developed and got under control certain organs that are at present inactive in most of us (or deluded himself that he had done so).

I know that he lives in the simplest possible manner, that his personal wants are at an irreducible minimum, and that he gives away any money that may come to him.

I know that he loathes adulation, interviews with strangers (except when help, physical or spiritual, is asked), social functions, addresses and receptions in his honour; and that he detests any sort of "deification" of himself, holding that the development of the powers latent in every human being brings, as the result of a wider knowledge of the real facts of life, a realisation of the essential unity of the human family, a sense of a greater responsibility towards those who have not yet that wider knowledge, and the power to see that every man is a far grander and nobler entity than he seems either to himself or to his friends who can only see the fraction of the whole that is at the moment manifesting through the physical body.

I know that, when relatives of "dead" people write requesting him to find and help the departed one in his new conditions, he is ever ready to search them out when sufficient clues are given and to give what help is possible (or to delude himself into believing that he is doing so).

I know that he regards normal earthly life as most wearisome, and only to be endured for the sake of helping others, and that whenever not actually engaged in useful physical world work, he goes off (or rather deludes himself that he goes off) to one or other of the super-physical worlds, the glories of which he has so often tried to describe, utilising for the purpose one or other of the subtler bodies which he has with long training got under control (or imagines that he has got under control).

I know that he works as nobody works, except Mrs. Besant, day after day, from before sunrise to long after sunset, helping to improve or assist humanity in one way or another; and this continuous service is given free, for he values neither money nor fame nor anything earth can offer. He serves because he knows (or thinks he knows) the general scheme of human evolution, and because he is utterly devoted to his "Master," with whom he is in constant communication (or imagines that he is).

Such is the character and daily life, as seen first hand, of a "man who is immoral and unfit to associate with."

As concluding remarks let me say that neither Mrs. Besant nor Mr. Leadbeater is aware that I am addressing this letter to the Press, and the latter will probably, when he knows of it, take me to task for wasting my time in writing it. But for the sake of truth and of the many thousands who cannot but be caused pain by the rumours circulated by interested parties and by the unfortunate misrepresentations published in a section of the Press, I think that the evidence of "one who knows him" should be put before the public.

He may be "on the threshold of divinity" or he may be nearly as far from it as I am myself; of that I know nothing, but I *do* know that from the purely human aspect, and judged by ordinarily accepted standards, Mr. Leadbeater is a powerful and eminently desirable factor in the moulding of the character of the rising generation, and in influencing young people to become useful, virtuous, and high-souled members of society.

He is said to be an initiate of high degree, and he admitted in Court that he has access to the presence of the Supreme Director of Evolution on our earth (can this be one of the Thrones of the Christian St. Paul?) Of these things I have, of course, no personal knowledge, but I have many times noted with what deep and genuine reverence he always mentions both that Great Official and the Christ. If, however, Initiation means the unfoldment of qualities so apparent in Mrs. Besant and Mr. Leadbeater, self-reliance joined with selflessness, wisdom with harmlessness, rigid personal purity with ready sympathy for the erring, expecting nothing and giving everything, being reviled and reviling not again, taking praise and blame indifferently—then God send us more Initiates to show us how to live as high-souled human beings. And if to be admitted into the presence of the Christ or of the Supreme Director of Evolution means that all thought of seeking aught for self is for ever annihilated, burnt up by the flame of devotion to Those Great Ones, and that to serve them by serving humanity becomes, as they say, the only thing worth the doing, then well may we pray that more men and women may succeed in entering the presence of such Mighty Entities, or, if you prefer to have it so, in being self-deluded to that effect.

C. L. PEACOCKE, late R.A.
Major, Reserve of Officers
Adyar, 23rd April.

Copy of a letter from Dr. Roche published in the "Madras Times," April 21, 1913.

(To the Editor of the *Madras Times*).

“Unconscious Hypocrisy.”

SIR,—As a doctor present during the late trial “Naraniah v. Besant,” may I be allowed to make a suggestion? Only those whose medical work has made them familiar with Maternity Hospitals, Rescue Homes, Workhouses, Asylums, and the like can have any adequate conception of the misery caused by adopting the conventional advice so often given to youth. Mr. Leadbeater’s opinion that “a man, if he will go wrong, should go wrong alone and not ruin a helpless girl,” does not appear quite so startling when placed beside the appalling facts as we know them to exist. He had courageously made an attempt to face the problem of the age—the sex problem—and sooner or later it will have to be faced; it lies at the root of so much human misery. In condemning such an opinion and condoning things as they are, do we not strain at a gnat and swallow a camel? Also, may there not be unconscious hypocrisy in our conventional attitude which condemns a man for advising, under definite restrictions and in certain exceptional cases, a practice known already, only without such restrictions to most schoolboys? Probably few would question that of suicide or homicide the first is the lesser evil, since if a man must injure someone it had better be himself; also the injury under such circumstances is likely to be checked before it becomes serious.

But, doubtless, expert medical advice on this point would have been taken had the judgment really been influenced by Mr. Leadbeater’s private opinions; which latter, judging by history, may conceivably be considered the moral and the conventional the immoral solution of the difficulty within the next decade or so.

M. E. ROCKE, M.D., L.R.C.P. & S.

(Examiner to the Central Midwives' Board. Lecturer to the London County Council, Midwives' Institute, Wimbledon Borough Council, &c. Physician Clapham Maternity Hospital.)

Adyar, Madras, April 18;
and 31A, Mortimer Street, London, W.

Other Comments.

As most of the English papers which have given any report of the judgment in the lawsuit have taken their information from reports of the proceedings which were unfavourable to the defendant, it may interest fellows of the Theosophical Society to see the following extracts from some of the other Indian newspapers which have commented on the case.

The "Madras Times," April 16:

"It is to be feared that issues that were not strictly germane to the suit as framed have been dragged in to prejudice the Court against the defendant and her organisation. At any rate, the Judge has found the very serious criminal charges against Mr. Leadbeater not established, and the plaintiff's evidence and the evidence of Lakshman, the only material witness on this aspect of the case, unreliable.' We do not think the plaintiff would have rested his case so largely on these ugly charges but for the belief, as his lordship says, that otherwise he could not, as he thought, get his rights as a father established in a court of law. This belief had induced the plaintiff, as his lordship says, 'to search for which would influence the Court to revoke the agreement, and that opinion had coloured the evidence in the case.' That is the opinion of the presiding Judge, come to after a careful hearing and a most anxious consideration of the evidence placed before him. It is to be hoped that this will give the quietus to the malicious lie that has been circulated for some time past against a society which might not be above criticism, but certainly has not deserved all the obloquy that has been poured on it."

"Madras Standard," April 25:

"The judgment declares that no undue influence was used to induce him 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. But worse remains behind. His lordship declared that the plaintiff's allegations were false, and 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."

The "Indian Patriot," April 16, 59 13:

“Mr. Leadbeater, of whom enough was said and more than enough, was imagined so as to picture him as an incarnation of the Devil, is adjudged innocent of the diabolical crimes laid at his door by a father in connection with his own children. The judgment of Mr. Justice Bakewell will afford much interest to the public, where he orders that the father, who brought serious charges against Mr. Leadbeater, should bear the whole costs of the case, because the charges were unproved.”

Further copies, if desired, can be obtained from the Lady Emily Lutyens, 29, Bloomsbury Square, W.C.