

Fragments of Autobiography of Russell Balfour-Clarke



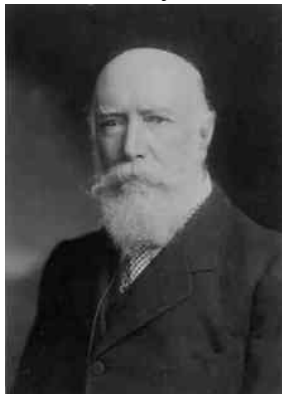
**CWL and The Manor's residents at a picnic in Sydney circa 1925.
Dick Clarke appears as the second person from left to right**

Russell Balfour-Clarke, who was well known as Dick Clarke, was an associate of C.W. Leadbeater, both at Adyar as well as at The Manor in Sydney Australia. These short autobiographical notes, which are preserved in the TS Archives at Adyar, cover the period of 1885 to 1945 and make for interesting reading. It is unlikely that he may have met Dr Anna Kingsford in London as he seems to believe for he was three years old when she died. We have preserved the original spelling of Mr Clarke's text. His recollections represent an important testimony of someone who did not shy away from looking critically at aspects of CWL's work, while admiring his contribution to the work of the Theosophical Society and other organizations he worked for. Like his statement from 1976 regarding CWL's integrity, which can be seen in the following link <http://www.cwlworld.info/html/archives.html>, these short autobiographical fragments show the life-long positive effect that the TS and its leaders at that time had on a young Dick Clarke. PO

I was born on 2nd June 1885 at 11.12am in North London. My parents were English; mother by birth Protestant, and father not irreligious, but he liked ritualistic church services with music. He often took me with him to a Catholic cathedral – St. Joseph's Retreat near Waterloo Park in High Gate, near our home. My mother was of an artistic temperament and came from a well-to-do family of only two children i.e. herself and her sister. My father also came from an old English county family in Norfolk. When studying at Cambridge University, he had a desire to become an architect. He often showed me very beautiful and fine drawings and designs which he had made in his youth. But his father, my grandfather, William Clarke, was an old fashioned country squire, who owned many farms and much land in Norfolk. He refused to assist his son to become an architect; he gave him 100/- and sent him to London to stay with some acquaintance who introduced my father to a businessman in the iron trade. Through many years of work, he became the senior London Director of a business having its iron foundries in North England, Halifax, and was for some years quite well off.

I received my education through the usual grading of a small Kindergarten school for children near our home, then to a High School, The Stationers Hall Company School also near my home. Afterwards I was sent as a boarder to Lord William's School at Thame, near Oxford from where I went to a minor public school, Kings College School, Wimbledon, from where I matriculated and studied at King's College, University of London, at the age of 17, taking up a B.Sc. Course in Electrical and Mechanical Engineering. Fortunately or unfortunately, a severe illness – typhoid fever – broke up my studies for a year and instead of going back to the University, I became an engineering apprentice in the Metropolitan Railway at its Works at Neasdon outside London. When I was half way through my apprenticeship the whole railway was electrified and so I gained experience and training in both mechanical electrical lines. I worked there till 1906 for a total period of about three and a half years. Towards the end of my apprenticeship I was offered an appointment by a firm of Consulting Engineers, Messrs. Burstall & Monkhouse, to proceed to Nairobi in B. E. Africa to assist in the construction of an hydroelectric scheme for the Nairobi Lighting Company as Assistant Engineer from 1906 till (the conclusion) of that scheme in 1908.

A little before my illness and during my study at Kings College University I had formed a growing interest in religious and philosophical thought which lad me out of Christian Churchianity and I felt strongly attracted to the wider field of Buddhism as presented by Sir



A.P. Sinnett

Edwin Arnold in his long prose poem *The Light of Asia*. During my illness a trained nurse – Nurse Knight from the Nightingale home, brought me in touch with Theosophy, and the Theosophical Society.

Under the aegis of meeting the members of the Theosophical Society in London at the T.S. Headquarters, I had the good fortune to meet A.P. Sinnett, Bertram Keightley, Mr. and Mrs. G.R.S. Mead and also Colonel H.S. Olcott, who handed me my diploma of membership in 1904, shook hands with me and wishes me well and Mr. Sinnett made me a member of the London Lodge when I was about 19. I may have met Dr. Anna Kingsford who was working with many others (whom I do not now remember) in the London Lodge. One

outstanding memory of my association with Mr. Sinnett is that he invited me to his home, introduced me to his lady and placed in my hands a pile of the original letters from the Master M. and Master K.H. to him, now known as *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett*. I met him many times on several occasions and he told me much about his interesting contact with H.P.B. and his correspondence with the two Grand Men, Masters M. and K.H. These two and other Masters of Wisdom became living men for me and I am ever grateful to A. P. Sinnett for his help.

I was born a little too late to have the privilege of meeting H.P.B. herself before her death, when I must have been a small boy of 6 years of age, knowing nothing at that time as to all the subsequent happenings in my rather long life, but I was living in London when she was there.

As already stated, at the age of 21 I had my first job as Assistant Engineer to the Nairobi Power and Lighting Company, to be established in British East Africa. I had sailed there in 1906 and returned to England after having taken part in the construction of the Hydro Electric and Lighting Plant at Nairobi. Before leaving Nairobi, I established a small group which we called “The Occult Group” which I am told was the nucleus of what has now become the East

and Central African Section of the TS. I remember there were only three of us; one of them a young journalist, who edited probably the first newspaper in Nairobi. When I sailed for Nairobi, took with me £5/- worth of Theosophical literature which I studied ardently during the lone nights in an encampment, 25 miles from Nairobi City, known as “Ruera Falls” where we were constructing the dam and flume at the higher level and the power station at the lower level, which gave Nairobi power for its first electrification.



Annie Besant

When I returned to England in 1908, I had the inestimable privilege and fortune to meet Mrs. Annie Besant, my Spiritual Mother. I met her as a result of having written letter to H.S. Olcott who had gone to Ceylon, to which she graciously replied because of his death. In her letter, she suggested that if I happened to be in England when she returned there, we might discuss the matter of my desire to plunge into some theosophical work.

When I received this letter from Mrs. Besant, I received simultaneously another letter from Messrs. Preece & Cardew (Consulting Engineers to Govt.) offering me another engineering appointment in West Africa; the contents, of these two letters seemed to have brought me to cross-roads.

Feeling already convinced of the existence of Living Men, such as Masters M. and K.H., that these two Great Sages were known personally and in the flesh to H.P.B. and H.S. Olcott, an intense desire, if it were possible, to receive a hint from Them as to the decisive action which I might take at these crossroads. With my hands placed on these two letters, I wished with utmost earnestness that such a hint be given. A direct answer flowed into my head in the following words:

“Choose the way of unworldly wisdom, and you will never really regret”.

I picked up my pencil and wrote these words down in my own handwriting. I was interested afterwards to find that I had used a blue pencil and remember it having been said that sometimes the Master K.H. made comments in blue pencil in the margin in the letters addressed to Them. In spite of this, I do not wish to flatter myself by presuming that I had received a message from Them, though it did seem so. I steered my course in the direction which had been indicated; refused the offer of the engineering appointment in West Africa and remained in England, awaiting the arrival of Mrs. Annie Besant. As soon as I heard of her arrival, I wrote to her with reference to her letter to me, obtained an appointment and had what was to me a momentous interview with the great lady. As I sat before her, I felt very young and shy, while she silently looked at me for what seemed to be rather a long time and then she said, “So you wish to throw yourself into the Theosophical stream?” I said, “Yes, I do”. She considered this for a moment and said, “Well! I did it myself. It is not for me to say ‘No’”. After further thought, she remarked: “I would like a young Englishman like you to see India, as I would have him see it, and not as you would most probably see it, if you came out to India either in commercial or official service.” I said, “I would very much like to visit India in the way you suggest”. She explained that if I came out to India in a way of which she was thinking, I would meet Indians of different castes and religions, some of whom had more culture and refinement in their little fingers

than many of their British rulers had in their whole bodies. Some three weeks after this we met again, when she invited me to visit India for a year or perhaps more as her guest, counselling me to consider the matter carefully, before accepting. Within three days, I accepted her generous offer. She paid my passage and handed me a cheque for my sea passage with a letter of introduction to her agent in Adyar, Shri Subbaya Chetty.

I sailed on a British India boat travelling second class, with a vegetarian diet arranged for. During that voyage, I became friendly with members of the crew. One day, a young engineer strolled up on deck and found me reading one of Mrs. Besant's books and he made a *very* derogatory remark about her, suggesting I was wasting my time in reading such a book. Immediately I got up and hit him and told him not to insult one whom I regarded with the same respect as I would give to my mother, though I don't think she would have approved of my action. He hit back, but he ultimately apologised for his insulting remarks. All the same I arrived in India and at Adyar, with the remains of a black eye!

I was taken to the hexagonal bungalow where C.W.L. lived and worked by a peon whom I had requested to tell Mr. Leadbeater that I had come from the President. To my horror, I heard the peon say at the doorway, "Please, Sir, the President has arrived." I heard C.W.L.'s surprised remark to Mr. Earnest Wood in a matter of fact way: "I suppose she must have materialized in the hall. Let's go and see". When he came out of the door, I said apologetically, "I'm sorry, but it's only me"; when he laughed and shook hands with me and gave me a very warm welcome.



Bungalow at Adyar where CWL lived and worked

And so it was, I arrived at TS Headquarters at Adyar in about August 1909, where I had the privilege and pleasure of meeting Brother C.W.L. whom I recognised having met him some five years previously in a vivid dream; we might call it a second occult experience.

In this dream, Bro. C.W.L. showed me my aura and pointed out certain dull and undesirable colours, while explaining that if I hoped to make any progress in this incarnation, I would have to clean up the undesirable colours, replacing them by bright and clear coloring which he actually showed me in a second picture of my aura. After having this dream which followed upon reading his book *Invisible Helpers*, I had written him a letter requesting him to help me towards being an awakened invisible helper and expressing a desire to meet him and work for and with him in future. So it was that my advent at Adyar was the fulfilment of my wish. He welcomed me and I am interested to remember that he made no comment about my black eye!



Krishnaji

Within a few days, I found myself in daily contact with him, Mr. Ernest Wood, Krishnamurti, his brother Nityananda and their father Sri Naranaiya, and Krishnamurti's elder brother Shivram and a little younger brother whose name I do not now remember but who died at an early age. From 1909 to 1914 (with a short break while J.K. and his brother Nityananda were in Italy with C.W.L., A.B., Dr. Arundale and C. Jinarajadasa, when certain initiations were taken. We were told that certain highly magnetic articles and jewels were buried in Taormina near

the hotel where they were stayed, some time before), I took part in the early physical training and general upbringing of the two brothers which continued in England after their sojourn in Italy. Again, I accompanied them, when they were in England and under the charge of Mr. Jinarajadasa for nearly a year in a beautiful home in Sussex lent by Lady Delaware. The party consisted of Krishnaji, Nityananda, Reginald Farrer, Basil Hodgson-Smith (he was the boy Cyril in C.W.L.'s book *Invisible Helpers*) and myself under the charge of Mr. Jinarajadasa. A second group was then formed consisting of Krishnaji, Nityananda, Miss Francesca Arundale and myself, with Dr. Arundale in charge, when we spent another six months in the Vicarage in Bude, Cornwall. This ended when the First World War broke out in 1914.

We left Bude for London. Dr. Arundale and Krishnamurti began work under the British Red Cross in a newly formed hospital in London. I joined the army as a sub-Lieutenant, underwent some months' training until I proceeded on active service in France in 1915. At the end of hostilities in about 1918, I had the substantive rank of Captain since May 1917, with a mention in despatches, and was offered further service in Turkey in the Army of the Black Sea, where I commanded a unit of the Royal Army Service Corps in Istanbul, in the Turkish Naval Dockyard.

We were in a state of armistice with Turkey and consequently there were sentries at the gates of the dockyard belonging to four different nations exchanging cigarettes with one another and there was a notice on the board in the Club D'Constantinople that there was to be no fraternization between British and Turkish ranks in spite of which, Generals of both armies played cards together upstairs. While returning one evening from the city to our mess in the dockyard, I heard a revolver shot very near to me and felt a jerk in my left arm as I was taking a cigarette from my mouth. I quickly extinguished the cigarette and hid behind a boat under repair and crept as silently as possible to the mess, feeling and looking rather pale and discovered a bullet hole through the sleeve of my rainproof coat; a narrow escape from an unknown enemy.

From there, I was offered further service in India, in Baluchistan and onward in Meshad in Persia. I brought a Greek servant, Dimitrius Dragajikis with me. His parents were very happy that I'd be taking him from Turkey, as he was giving them a lot of trouble. So he came with me on my return from Meshad, Quetta, to Baluchistan, I was transferred from the Royal Army Service Corps to the Royal Engineers Service and was appointed as the District Garrison Engineer, Electrical and Mechanical (E & M), Baluchistan District, under the Chief Engineer, Western Command, Colonel Close, C.M.G., Royal Engineer, where I served until about 1924, was offered a regular Commission, but did not accept it, and retiring after ten to twelve years' military service, when I visited the International Convention of the Theosophical Society at Banaras and met Dr. Annie Besant again. She suggested that it was time that I should come nearer to the centre of things and I should write to C.W. Leadbeater and find out whether I might visit him in Sydney in Australia. She kindly explained that during these 10 or 12 years of war service, I had not been able to follow strictly the discipline according to the rules of the Esoteric Section of the TS and she suggested that no one could help me more to be cleaned up more efficiently than could be done by C.W.L. In reply to my letter to him as suggested by Dr. Besant, I received a very warm welcome to the Manor, Mosman, Sydney, where he was residing.

Arriving at the Manor in Sydney in about 1924, I found the atmosphere around C.W.L. very much changed from the atmosphere which we had shared in Adyar in 1909 to 1912.



The Manor in the 1920s

This new atmosphere might be described as the atmosphere of a Christian Bishoprick with an odour of incense with every kind of Church service of the newly established Liberal Catholic Church along side with attendance at various meetings of the International Co-Masonic Order. I had entered the Co-Masonic Order under the aegis of my meeting Dr. Besant in 1908 and my masonic progress had lain dormant during the intervening years. In order to be of more use to C.W.L., I was ordained a priest in the Liberal Catholic Church and my Masonic membership was renewed and brought up to some higher degree in the Order.

I was given to understand by C.W.L. that the inner side of his work in Australia was to establish a centre for the work of the Great Brotherhood as Their Centre for the Southern Hemisphere. While at the same time, an experiment was being made by gathering together a group of fairly advanced egos in young uncontaminated bodies, with the intention that they may be helped to make contact with the work of the Masters, before they would run the risk of becoming immersed and entangled in the worldly life. C.W.L. told me that such an experiment had been tried some 2000 years ago in Egypt without much success. Now a similar experiment was being tried through him. In previous years, he had already found by clairvoyant observation various hopeful young people such as the young C.J. [C. Jinarajadasa] when a boy in Ceylon, Hubert Van Hook, son of Dr. Weller Van Hook of America, J. Krishnamurti and his brother from India and a first group of young people mostly from Dutch Nationality whom he had gathered round him during the early part of his residence at the Manor. Soon after my arrival at Sydney, we toured through Indonesia where he found several young sons and daughters of members of the T.S. and arranged for them to come to the Manor as members of a new group of young people there.

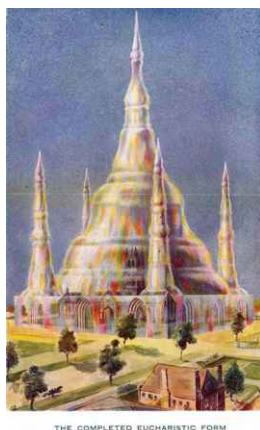
Our daily life at the Manor consisted of well-ordered daily routine, early rising in the morning just after sunrise, shortened celebration of the Holy Eucharist Service in the little Liberal Catholic Church Chapel situated on the lower ground floor of the Manor. Full Church Service was sung and celebrated in a fairly large church building in Sydney on Sundays and



Altar at The Manor Chapel circa 1925

Special Festivals. These included Benediction on Sunday evening, Healing Services, Marriages and Baptisms and Confirmation, Burial and other religious ceremonies. There were three vegetarian meals, breakfast, lunch and dinner in the evening, with a cafeteria for of service. C.W.L. held meetings of the group half an hour after breakfast and afternoons were spent in different forms of recreations, as decided by the young people. We would often go along with walking expeditions, sometimes for the whole day with C.W.L. usually to some place suggested by him, when he would describe some interesting details of the hidden side of nature around us – Great Devas and areas of space under their control and the work of the various types of nature spirits. C.W.L. avoided anything in the nature of school atmosphere during the group meetings when he endeavoured to convey the basic conceptions of Theosophy, with perhaps special stress on

the subject of the Masters and the Path; this information was summarized in his subsequent book *The Masters and the Path*.



From CWL's *The Science of Sacraments*

He explained to me that the purpose of assembling such groups was to create an atmosphere in which psychic and spiritual forces could be radiated, which would tend to tune the physical and subtler bodies in order to quicken the response of the ego and personality to the impulses coming from the Monad.

He told me that in our daily life on our physical plane, we would seek to create a happy carefree atmosphere, when the young people should not suffer too much from heavy personal problems, such as many young people suffer when they are made to attend the School which may be sometimes rather boring and monotonous. He sought to protect the personality for a period during sojourn at the Manor, from any sense of irksomeness. But this was easier said than done. There had to be some kind of orderliness and daily routine and hence it was impossible to please everyone and to obtain complete harmonious cooperation. For example, C.W.L. considered it extremely helpful in pursuance of the underlying purpose of our life at the Manor that young aspirants to chelaship and initiation should receive the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist in the early morning of each day and quite a number of these young people attended this ceremony regularly against their wishes to please their kindly friend C.W.L. without too much complaint to him.

I often found myself going and knocking at the bedroom doors of these young people, bidding them hurry up and come to the Chapel, when I heard definite signs of distaste and whispered revolt. Accordingly, I approached C.W.L. asking him whether it was really helpful or advisable that any of them should be pressed to receive this daily blessing, when he replied "Surely, none of our young people would be so ungrateful to our Masters". This, of course, defeated my well-meant (though perhaps ignorant) effort.

Towards the end of these five years of residence at the Manor with C.W.L. he made a temporary recovery from all his ailments, Diabetes, Rheumatism and some heart trouble and undertook a long tour to Europe and the United Kingdom when I had the privilege of accompanying him. On the first part of the journey we had with us Miss Elly Kastinger and Deena Billimoria. Elly Kastinger was returning to Vienna and Deena Billimoria was to rejoin her patents in Milan. When C.W.L. was approached with a view to making this tour, he



CWL in Masonic attire

expressed a doubt to me about being too old for the job, with which I did not agree and I did my humble part in encouraging him to make the tour. The tour was a strenuous and an exacting and very inspiring and helpful to many.

In each T.S. Centre he worked as a priest of the Liberal Catholic Church, being its presiding Bishop, as a High Mason in the Co-Masonic Order, as a senior representative of the O.H. of the E.S., while delivering public lectures on Theosophy as well as attending Lodge meetings. He carried all these through magnificently and to the great benefit and blessing of all those whom he met.

While in Geneva, I again met Miss Paula Hamerster, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. A.J. Hamerster. She was one of the teenage girls of a special group with C.W.L. at the Manor in Sydney where and when I

fell in love with her but was helped by C.W.L. and Master K.H. to realize that I would have to wait until she was old enough to know her own mind on the matter. I proposed marriage, was accepted and I immediately discussed the matter with C.W.L. who remarked “Well, of course, it was inevitable” and he kindly suggested that if Mr. Henry Fry would take over my position, I would be free to marry. It was arranged that my return ticket from Toulon in France to Bombay would be transferred to Mr. Fry who met us there when C.W.L. gave me his blessing and good wishes for my married life with Paula and they, C.W.L. & Fry, sailed for India in about 1929. (Sketch of my love life yet to be written.)

I went to London and obtained an appointment with the BEMA – The British Electrical and Allied Manufacturers Association with the kind help of its Director Mr. D.N. Dunlop who was a very old member of the T.S. and who had transferred his allegiance to Dr. Steiner’s Anthroposophical Society in Germany and elsewhere. I returned to Geneva for the following Christmas and was married at Geneva Town Hall in 1930. We proceeded to London, where I took up my new appointment in 1930 until 1932, assisting with the editorship of the magazine journal called “World Power”; not political power, but dealing with engineering sources of power. My young wife Paula joined the Royal Academy of dramatic Art, to membership of which she was sponsored by The Lady Emily Lutyens with



**George and Rukmini
Arundale**

whom I had stayed some years before, when she resided in Tavistock Square in London. Paula obtained a gold medal at the end of her study at the Royal Academy of dramatic Art and was selected to play the part of Juliet in the “Little Theatre” in London at the yearly festival. Rukmini and George Arundale were present. After two years of this life in London where we found the climate very trying we managed to come to Adyar, Madras, where Paula cooperated with Srimati Rukmini Devi in various theatrical and dance performances as well as appearing in various productions of the Madras Dramatic Society at the Museum Theatre. I obtained an appointment as General Works Manager of Massey & Co., an Engineering Company, in Madras, which was owned by Spencer Company, in 1932 to 1935.

Thereafter, I became the Deputy Director of H.E.H. the Nizam’s Electricity Department in Hyderabad in 1935 to 1941 and we set up our household there with our daughter Heather who was born in England. During our residence at Olcott Gardens at Adyar, Paula went to England for the birth where the child was born in the Stonefield Nursing Home near London which was run by Drs. Pink and White, both of them T.S. & E.S. members and highly qualified doctors. She returned with the baby when we resided with her mother and father in the upper flat of Olcott Gardens which I always remember as the most beautiful residence Adyar Estate.

I had obtained the appointment as General Works Manager of Messrs. Massey & Co., as I have already said, and was able to purchase a six cylinder Wollsey-Hornet car which served me well in Madras and later on in Hyderabad (Deccan), until I purchased a Drop-Head-Phaten, Auburn car.

After serving for some seven years in the aforementioned Electricity Department, I was offered on or about 9.5.1941, a war job in Delhi as a Deputy Director of the Vehicles Directorate in the Supply Department of the Central Government of India at the latter half of the Second World War. After some months in Delhi I managed to have myself posted in

Madras and to establish an office of the Directorate for control of body building on mechanical transport vehicles used by the army in Burma and elsewhere. This work was being done in the Workshops of Messrs. Simson. & Co. and Messrs. Addison and Company, neither of whom liked this imposition of control by Govt. and so my task was not an easy one, however tactful I might try to be.

Towards the end of the war, the Supply Department closed its Vehicles Directorate at Madras in 1945 and I proceeded to Delhi where I met Mr. Hashler who was vacating the post of the Director of Disposals, Shipping, in the Supply Department and he recommended me to fill the post, which he was vacating. I was interviewed by the then Head of the Supply Department and was offered the appointment of the Director of Disposals, Shipping. I was informed that I would get the papers my appointment within 3 days, but this never occurred. A New Govt. Department was to be opened, the Directorate of Employment, India. I applied for the post of the Director, was interviewed by the Public Service Commission, Delhi and was informed there and then that I had been selected.



Dick Clarke in his old age