

HPB and CWL

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A number of theosophical pioneers, coming as they did from different backgrounds, were able to establish a deep and enduring connection with the profound purpose at the heart of the Theosophical Society. In spite of many difficulties and struggles, over many years, they found within themselves the necessary strength, understanding and equanimity to continue in their work for the Society. They were also able to inspire several generations of its members, thus laying a strong foundation for the future work of the organization. One of such pioneers was Charles Webster Leadbeater.

From the year he met her, in 1884, until her passing in 1891, the attitude of Madame Blavatsky to C. W Leadbeater was always one of support, encouragement and affection. Her letters and messages to him, although few in number, express her warm and sincere regard for this young clergyman who traveled with her to India in 1884 and who devoted his life and energy to the cause of Theosophy and to the work of the Theosophical Society.

CWL was ordained a priest in the Church of England on 21 December 1879 and took residence in the village of Liphook, with his mother, as Assistant Stipendiary Curate in the Parish Church of Bramshott, Hampshire. At Church he organized several activities for young people. He was also very interested in psychic phenomena and conducted his own investigations in the Scottish Highlands.

After he had read *The Occult World* by A. P. Sinnett he corresponded with the author and eventually met him in London. He was eagerly keen to meet Madame Blavatsky also, which he did in October 1884. In his short autobiographical book *How Theosophy Came to Me* he recalls their first meeting which was marked by HPB's outspoken sincerity:

Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott both accompanied our party to Mr. Sinnett's house, and stayed there until a late hour, Madame Blavatsky expressing vigorous condemnation of the inefficiency of the officials in not managing the [London Lodge] meeting better. I was of course presented to her, and Mr. Sinnett took occasion to tell her of my letter to the spiritualistic journal *Light* [which HPB later incorporated into her Scrapbook] on the subject of the spirit Ernest's disavowal of our Masters. When she heard that little story she looked at me very searchingly and remarked:

'I don't think much of the clergy, for I find most of them hypocritical, bigoted and stupid; but that was a brave action, and I thank you for it. You have made a good beginning; perhaps you may do something yet.'

You may be very sure that after that I missed no opportunity of attending any meeting at which she was present; and though I was far too shy to push myself forward and ask questions, I nevertheless listened eagerly to every word that fell from her lips, and I think that in that way I learnt a very great deal.

Significantly, CWL also recalled another aspect of his impression about his first meeting with HPB: her capacity to see through people, to perceive them as they are, beyond appearances:

The impression that she made was indescribable. I can well understand that some people were afraid of her. She looked straight *through* one; she obviously saw everything there was in one—and there are men who do not like that. I have heard her make sometimes very disconcerting revelations about those to whom she spoke.

In March 1884, before CWL had met HPB for the first time, he had written a letter to Master K.H. offering to become his disciple and asking some related questions. He had sought the help of William Eglinton, a respected medium who had lived in India for a short while and who both HPB and the Mahatmas admired. The letter was sent through one of Eglinton's 'controls', 'Ernest'. In his reply to CWL, on 31 October 1884, the Master pointed out that although the letter itself had never reached him, due to the agency employed, its contents had. He then proceeded to reply to CWL's questions and

suggested that he should go to Adyar for a few months. CWL then decided to show the Master's letter to HPB on the very eve of her departure to India. He describes the events that then ensued:

Even at that hour a number of devoted friends were gathered in Mrs. Oakley's drawing-room to say farewell to Madame Blavatsky, who seated herself in an easy-chair by the fireside. She was talking brilliantly to those who were present, and rolling one of her eternal cigarettes, when suddenly her right hand was jerked out towards the fire in a very peculiar fashion, and lay palm upwards. She looked down at it in surprise, as I did myself, for I was standing close to her, leaning with an elbow on the mantel-piece: and several of us saw quite clearly a sort of whitish mist form in the palm of her hand and then condense into a piece of folded paper, which she at once handed to me, saying: 'There is your answer.' Every one in the room crowded round, of course, but she sent me away outside to read it, saying that I must not let anyone see its contents. It was a very short note and ran as follows:

Since your intuition led you in the right direction and made you understand that it was *my desire* you should go to Adyar *immediately*, I may say more. The sooner you go the better. Do not lose one day more than you can help. Sail on the 5th, if possible. Join Upasika at Alexandria. Let no one know that you are going, and may the blessing of our Lord and my poor blessing shield you from every evil in your new life.

Greeting to you, *my new chela*.

K.H.

The significance of this event cannot be overestimated. In a letter to Col. Olcott, before his arrival in London in September 1888, one of the Masters stated the following in regard to HPB: '*With occult matters she has everything to do. ... She is our direct agent.*' Therefore it was HPB who mediated the crucial contact that caused CWL to go to Adyar as a chela of the Master. Given the many testimonies about the integrity and uncompromising honesty of HPB, both as a person as well as an advanced Occultist, it would be simply impossible to entertain the notion that she would have acted towards CWL in the way she did were he not worthy of it.

He eventually met her in Egypt, traveled with her and her group to Ceylon, where he took the *Panchasila* and became a Buddhist, and finally arrived at Adyar in December 1884. HPB, due to extreme ill-health, left Adyar in March 1885 and from 1886 until 1889 CWL helped Col. Olcott in his work for Buddhists in Ceylon. Mary K. Neff, in an article in *The Theosophist* (August 1928), recalls CWL's work during that time:

In 1885 he acted as Recording Secretary of the Theosophical Society at Adyar, succeeding Damodar K. Mavalankar; but in 1886 he went to Ceylon to work among the Buddhists. Mr. Jinarājādāsa tells how he tramped from village to village on Sundays, teaching at the Buddhist Sunday Schools which he had organized; how he aided his (C.J.'s) brother and later himself, 'helping them in their school work and doing all that could be done by an elder friend to help a younger'. It was he who founded the institution which is now Ānanda College, Galle; and it was while he labored there that he erected the slab at Vijayānanda Vihāra. During his years in Ceylon, he went as a delegate to the Conventions at Adyar and spent there the three months of vacation from school work laboring at Headquarters. In 1888 he arrived from Ceylon to become a permanent resident at Adyar, and took charge of *The Theosophist*; on November 28th, 1889, he sailed for Europe, taking with him his brother of earlier years, his pupil later, and now his co-worker; thus accomplishing his last and perhaps greatest work for Buddhism in this incarnation, by giving the Theosophical Society its Buddhist Vice-President, Mr. C. Jinarājādāsa.

While in Ceylon he received a letter from HPB from Elberfeld, dated 23 June 1886. He had asked her to forward another letter of his to the Master, which she declined saying: 'I really do not take it upon myself to send it. I *cannot* do it, my dear friend; I swore not to deliver any more letters and Master has given me the right and privilege to refuse it. So that I have put it aside and send it to you back as I received it.' However, when CWL opened the envelope containing HPB's letter he saw the following message, written in blue pencil across the writing of the last page:

Take courage. I am pleased with you. Keep your own counsel, and believe in your better intuitions. The little man has *failed* and will reap his reward. Silence meanwhile.

K.H.

The subject of HPB's letter was the problems created by 'Bawajee', who was short in stature. His family name was S. Krishnamachary, a young Tamil Brahmin from Tanjore. He had left for Europe with HPB and Dr Franz Hartmann and Miss Mary Flynn on 30 March 1885. Mr Jinarājādāsa says in a note to the publication of the letter in the February 1927 issue of *The Theosophist* that 'Bawajee was sent to assist HPB, but he got his head turned by the adulation given to him by his western admirers. Finally, he suffered from such excessive "swelled head" that he considered himself superior to HPB.'

In the letter, while describing to CWL the extent of 'Bawajee's fall, HPB makes two references to CWL as a chela (disciple) of the Master:

Bawajee is entirely against us and bent on the ruin of the T.S. A month ago he was in London and ready to sail back to India. ... Moreover, he has slandered persistently Subba Row, Damodar, Olcott and everyone at Adyar. He made many Europeans lose confidence in them. Subba Row, he says, never said a truth in his life to a European; he bamboozles them always and is a liar; Damodar is a great liar also; he alone (Bawajee) knows the Masters, and what They are. In short, he makes of our Mahatmas inaccessible, impersonal Beings, so far away that no one can reach Them!!! At the same time he contradicts himself: to one he says he was 10 y. [years] with Mahatma K.H.; to another 3 years, again he went several times to Tibet and saw the Master only from afar when he entered and came out of the temple. He lies most awfully. The truth is the he (B.) has never been to Tibet and has never seen his Master 100 miles off. NOW, I have the assurance of it from my Master Himself. He was a chela on probation. When he came to Bombay to the Headquarters, your Master ordered me to tell all He accepted Krishnaswami, and had sent him to live with us and work for the T.S. ...

When I showed him Master's writing in which your Mahatma corroborated my statement and affirmed that he (Bawajee) "had never seen HIM or go to Tibet" -

Mr. B. coolly said it was a spook letter, for the Mahatma could neither write letters, nor would He ever say anything about his chelas. ...

She ends the letter with a message of encouragement and affection for CWL: 'Good bye, my dear fellow, don't lose courage however. The Masters are with us and will protect all those who stand firm by Them. Write to Ostende, poste restante to me, I will be there tomorrow. Yours ever faithfully, H. P. Blavatsky'.

Writing in *The Path* (December 1886), HPB gives a rather graphic statistics about how difficult it is to tread the spiritual Path, which helps us to understand the 'Bawajee' episode, referred to above: 'During the eleven years of the existence of the Theosophical Society I have known, out of the seventy-two regularly accepted chelas on probation and the hundreds of *lay* candidates – only three who have not hitherto failed, and *one only* who had a full success.'

In the book *Talks on the Path of Occultism*, vol. 1, CWL comments on the influence HPB had on him and on others that came into close contact with her, while also expressing his gratitude to her:

It is not the method of great spiritual teachers to make everything easy for us. I first came into touch with occultism through Madame Blavatsky. She gave occasional crumbs of knowledge to her people, but she constantly applied rigorous tests to them. It was a drastic method, but those who really meant business remained with her, while others very soon abandoned her. She cured us of conventionality, but there was much searching of hearts among her followers in the process. Many people said she did things which a great spiritual teacher ought not to do. My own feeling was always this: "Madame Blavatsky has this occult knowledge, and I am going to get that knowledge from her, if she will give it to me. Whatever else she does is her affair. I am not here to criticize her; to her own Master she stands or falls, and not to me. She may have her own reasons for what she does; I do not know anything about that. She has this knowledge, she speaks of these Masters. I intend to get this knowledge; I intend, if it is humanly possible, to reach the feet of those Masters." I gave up everything else to follow her lead, and I have never regretted the confidence I placed in Madame Blavatsky. If one is critical by nature it is his karma; he will learn much more slowly than the man who is prepared to accept things reasonably.

After his arrival in London from Ceylon, at the end of 1889, she wrote a dedication on his copy of *The Voice of the Silence*, a book which had been published in that year: ‘To my sincerely appreciated and beloved brother and friend, W. C. Leadbeater, H. P. Blavatsky’. And as if to ratify her feelings towards him for posterity, she wrote in his personal copy of *The Key to Theosophy* which she presented to him in 1891, the year she died: ‘To my old and well-beloved friend, Charles Leadbeater, from his fraternally, H. P. Blavatsky.’

As Mr Jinarājādāsa pointed out in his article ‘What H. P. B. Thought of C. W. Leadbeater’ (*The Theosophist*, February 1927), ‘she did not call every Theosophist round her a “well-beloved friend”.’ The evidence presented in this article suggests that HPB considered CWL not only worthy of encouragement in his work for the Theosophical Society but also as a dedicated servant of the Elder Brethren who work for the regeneration of the human consciousness.

The young man HPB brought to Adyar in 1884 went on to become an international lecturer for the Society, a prolific writer as well as a seer, and to him was given to discover, in 1909, on the beach at Adyar a young boy, J. Krishnamurti, whom he predicted one day would become a spiritual teacher and a great orator. Some of his views were controversial, as were the views of many a theosophical pioneer when looking at life beyond the scales of human conditioning. Through his investigations on the subtler realms of existence and their logical presentation countless people, over the past one hundred years, in many countries, have found inspiration, solace and meaning that moved them to lead nobler lives of service and self-responsibility. His work helped the light of Theosophy to travel far and wide in the world.

As stated previously, when CWL first met HPB she said: ‘You have made a good beginning; perhaps you may do something yet.’ She was right for he was always ready to serve. When he became a Bishop in Sydney, in 1916, he chose as his episcopal motto the Latin expression *semper paratus*, ‘always ready’, ready to do the Master’s work. He was one who endured until the end, for he had seen God’s plan, and could not help ‘working for it and making himself one with it, because it is so glorious, so beautiful.’