

## Lady Emily Lutyens – Her Impressions of CWL

Excerpted from Lady Emily Lutyens' book *Candles in the Sun*, Rupert Hart-Davis, Soho Square, London, 1957, pp. 46-49. She joined the Theosophical Society in 1910 out of a great admiration for Annie Besant and later on became a close associate of J. Krishnamurti. She would resign from the TS twenty years later. The author says at the beginning of Chapter Five that she had been invited by Mr and Mrs Kirby to pay them a visit at their villa near Genoa [Italy] with her children Barbara and Robert, in order to make the acquaintance of C. W. Leadbeater. Although written in a frank and critical manner, her impressions end with a positive view of the man.



MYSELF IN 1911

Lady Emily Lutyens

I was very much divided in my opinion of C.W.L. I felt the force of his personality, his magnetism and charm on the one hand, but on the other I felt that there was something repellent about him. He was much easier to approach than Mrs Besant, and gave far more time to conversation, and a great deal of his talk was enthralling. We spent many happy evenings either asking him questions or listening to his reminiscences. I used to rack my brains for intelligent questions to start him talking. One evening I took off a ring I always wore, which used to belong to my mother-in-law. It was the old marriage ring of the Cladagh tribe, and obviously phallic in origin. I asked C.W.L. to tell me something about it, thinking it might have an interesting history, but he looked at it with disgust and refused to touch it, saying that he saw a great deal of jealousy connected with it.

He read *Dracula* aloud to the children, making the story even more frightening by recounting his own experiences with vampires and speaking of his belief in them.

The villa had one very large room in which we all sat. C.W.L. was busy working at charts in connection with the "Lives" of Alcyone, while Barbara and I copied them at different tables. There was a piano at one end of the room on which Robert used to strum, and C.W.L.

would bear with this very patiently for the most part but would occasionally go up to him and say: “Perhaps we need not have it *all* day long.”

C.W.L. was immensely attracted by Barbara. He told me that she had the most beautiful aura of anyone he had ever seen. Barbara had not kept such high company as Robert in the recorded “Lives,” so C.W.L. “looked up” some still earlier ones in which Barbara was specially blessed by the King Himself.

One day when we were going for an expedition to Portofino Barbara woke with a headache. C.W.L. was much concerned, and came and sat by her bedside and magnetized an aspirin for her benefit. Throughout the day he kept her closely beside him so that no untoward magnetism should harm her. We had to travel in a crowded train and then take two slow horse-vehicles, and C.W.L. swore loudly at the drivers and at his fellow-passengers in the crowded train. (...)

The following letter to my husband gives my impressions when I first arrived:

Villa Cevasco, September 19, 1912

I must now tell you my impressions of C.W.L. Well, he is in appearance of course like his photos—a very big, heavy man—and yet wonderfully active considering his age [he was sixty-five]—up very early and seemingly never tired. He has rather a funny mincing walk, a rather drawly parsonic voice, but talks a great deal—very agreeably and naturally. He has a very courteous manner and has been most cordial to me, but under all one feels a mild contempt for all women, and I feel I am only tolerated as the mother of Robert. [This was before he had shown his devotion to Barbara.] He has quite a polite way of making one feel small and ridiculous, which is not pleasant. To the children he is perfect—charming to both—and particularly careful that Barbara shall not feel out of it. He is very affectionate—reads to them—talks to them—takes a great deal of trouble to draw them out and make them at their ease—and is evidently really devoted to children, though bored with grown-ups. The Kirbys—or I should say Mrs Kirby, who is very fond of him, is thoroughly conscious of his limitations. Says his great idea is to avoid being bothered—that he has no feeling and is only bored by suffering or trouble. This I can feel is true. He has a slightly mocking way which makes one feel nothing is quite serious with him. One thing agreeably surprised me—that while all his followers talk a great deal about magnetism and vibrations and how you mustn’t wear this or that, he seems singularly unfaddy. He belongs to none of the offshoots of the T.S., except Star in the East, and pours scorn on badges and ritual and dressing up. In fact, I am having a bad time in one way. An idea came to me for starting a kind of staff of the O.S.E. members, to really work, and I spoke of it to Mrs Besant, who promptly turned it into a new grade of the Order. I foolishly suggested another badge, i.e. a winged star, which quite met with her approval, and the scheme was published. Now C.W.L. says he ought to have been consulted, as he is Co-Protector of the Order with Mrs Besant, and he doesn’t like the idea of new grades, and hates the new badge, and is full of ridicule about the winged star—and I feel exceedingly depressed and miserable about it.

Darling, please don’t pass on to anyone else what I tell you in confidence—only I must speak truth to you—and to tell you the truth I am going through a bad moment of disillusionment. Perhaps that is why I came here, and it is very good for me, and will at least show you that I retain my power of judgment. It is not that I believe the stories of C.W.L. I

think they are probably horrible libels got up by the people whose feelings he has hurt. I feel him to be big, but I don't feel him to be spiritual or a bit on a level with Mrs Besant—and I realize that both can be very foolish on the physical plane. What is chiefly upsetting me is that all is evidently not harmonious between them. He is absolutely loyal to her ruling as President, but obviously does not trust her judgment.

Now I have been very frank with you, best beloved, and be gentle with what is really hurting me a great deal. I could not but tell you. I am having a great craving for home and you and the children—and quite normal life. The Kirbys are very normal and nice, and though devoted, not a bit blinded. Barbie and Robert are very happy.

My next letter was less despondent:

Villa Cevasco, September 20, 1912

I am much happier today, so don't take my depression too seriously. C.W.L. was so charming with the children last night. He sat on a sofa with one on each side of him and told them of the occult government of the world. You may say you don't believe his statements, but to say the least of it they are more reasonable than the statements of an orthodox clergyman and quite as likely to be true. I suppose you would not have objected to having them prepared for confirmation in the ordinary way? Anyway, he talked beautifully, reverently, simply, with no affectation or pretension, and so they could perfectly understand. He has a wonderful way with children. He is very like a lion in appearance and in the way he walks. Perhaps always being barefooted or in sandals increases the wild beast walk.

And the next day I was writing:

September 21, 1912

The more I see of C.W.L. the more I like him—and the more I am struck by his wisdom and level-headedness. This afternoon the children went with the Kirbys into Genoa to a cinema and I stayed at home and had a long talk with him. He is greatly struck by Barbie, her beauty, charm and cleverness, and prophesies a difficult time with suitors in the future. Then you would have agreed with all he said about Robert and thought it most sound. He thinks he should certainly have a profession and qualify for it and earn a living. He is most anxious that he should be left perfectly free as regards the future and that if his mind changes as regards Theosophical matters it should be made quite easy for him to do so. He is full of consideration for your feelings and of admiration of your tolerance, and there is not the shadow of a desire to absorb the children and take them away, but only the wish to help. I really cannot tell you how perfect he has been to them or how nice to me. Another thing you would like about him is his joyousness. He is full of *joie de vivre* and has absolutely no cant or sham about him. I really feel very happy about it all and so glad to have met him for myself.