

A Few Hours at Adyar And What They Were Made to Reveal¹

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It was the beginning of October. We were back at a Penang Hotel after a few weeks of rough and tumble in the jungles of Siam and Lower Burmah; spread before us were a telegram, a railway time-table and the shipping advertisements. The telegram informed us that the Australian liner sailed from Singapore at 8 a.m., the timetable with similar precision made the train due to arrive at 8.17; nothing for it but to cancel the passage. The shipping advertisements came in for attention; the next boat for Australia left from Colombo, but there was a whole week to wait for a connecting

¹ The importance of this article lies in the fact that T. H. Martyn was at Adyar when the custody case involving Krishnamurti and his brother Nitya was unfolding in the High Court of Madras. At the centre of the case was the accusation against C. W. Leadbeater that he had sexually abused Krishnamurti, which the presiding Judge threw out. The accusations leveled against CWL in 1906 were also revived by the plaintiff, Krishnamurti's father and published in the local press. The favourable attitude of Martyn towards CWL and Mrs Besant seen in this article would radically change during the crisis of the TS in Australia in the early 1920s. During that crisis Martyn led a relentless, defamatory and insidious campaign against CWL and Mrs Besant. The "received tradition" regarding CWL has always portrayed that crisis with the partiality it is known for. It deserves a complete, documentary-based study.

steamer; but what is this? A British-India boat sailing direct for Madras in three days; just the thing; so it came about that the chance occurred to peep in at Adyar, the Mecca of Theosophists, and it was promptly seized; a few days later the writer himself had become an early morning guest at a Madras Hotel.

The reading-room contained files of the local papers, and one of the first items to meet the eye was a summary of the opening proceedings at the Madras High Court of "Mrs. Besant's Appeal," as the headlines had it. We drove to the High Court, a fine block of buildings of Byzantine design, and soon got lost in a maze of corridors filled with chattering native litigants. But rescue was close at hand in the ample person of an erstwhile army man, now an usher, who expects shortly to retire on his pension and enjoy it in the attractive solitudes of Australia, information which was volunteered at the mention of the latter place, while we threaded our way through the press. I suggested that the old country ought to be more likely to suit him to retire to. "Not for me, Sir," he responded; too much 'Jack's-as-good-as-his-master' here; I've heard Australia's a great country."

There was no time to confirm this excellent sentiment, for we had reached an open door. "Now, there's the Court you want. That's Mrs. Besant herself addressing the Judges—just follow me." And we tiptoed to precincts panelled off for counsel, and my kindly usher silently disappeared. Mrs. Besant stood at the table with a huge brief before her. She was addressing the Chief Justice and another High Court Judge; she had commenced the previous day, and was reviewing the evidence given in a lower Court. The Judges seemed, by their frequent questions and interruptions, to have formed an unfavourable view of her case; that was so at first at any rate; but as she proceeded to work up to and emphasise point after point their attitude seemed gradually to be changing towards a more friendly view. When she showed how in the lower Court opposing witnesses had described events that occurred "*upstairs*" in a room in the month of June, and then proved by the uncontradicted evidence of her own witnesses that the said room had been *downstairs* since the previous January owing to alterations which had been made, the Judges became silent and thoughtful; then they asked for plans, after which they seemed to get really interested. "Is it your contention," asked one, "that the plaintiff's case was wholly fabricated with a view to support his claims?" "Precisely, your Lordship! This is what I am showing that the evidence itself discloses." "Well, that makes the position quite clear anyway," says the Judge, and the argument continued hour after hour. It ran on till nearly five

o'clock in the evening—not a bad example of physical and mental endurance for a woman of 66. I stayed till about 2 o'clock myself. During the whole morning the Court was filled with barristers, interested evidently in following the mind and skill of “the greatest woman of the age.”

Few living persons indeed could speak as did the appellant. Who else, for instance, could disclose the resources of trained clairvoyance or the possibilities of successful meditation? At one stage Mrs. Besant was referring to her own evidence to the effect that at a stated hour a certain person had been engaged in meditation. “I knew that,” she explained to the Judges, “because I could see him at the time; that is, I could see his subtle bodies, which are visible in meditation.”

One might expect such a statement to be passed without comment by, say, an educated Hindu, but I was astonished that the two English Judges sitting on the bench should quietly accept the explanation as they did without moving an eyelid. Evidently the “teachings of Theosophy” are quietly penetrating the consciousness of the more thoughtful of the Westerns.

Another little aside too seems worth preserving. “We will now turn to the evidence given by Mr. Leadbeater,” quoth the President, “and I need only point out to your Honors that Mr. Leadbeater’s evidence may be regarded as absolutely reliable, not because I happen to know him to be a man of perfect honour and truthfulness, but because he could, without fear of contradiction (for there was no one to contradict), have modified his statements and his opinions to suit the case had he not been following the ideal of perfect truthfulness.” This is the sense of what was said, though fewer words were used.

Looking round to the back of the Court there was only one white face, and scribbling a note I passed it on to the gentleman who owned it. It was so I made the acquaintance of Mr. Guest, who with his wife resides at Adyar, and of him I sought directions. “Yes, Mr. Leadbeater is at home; go right up to his room,” he advised. “He is pretty busy generally, and they may try and put you off if you send up a card.”

A drive of half-an-hour from the Court brought us to headquarters, and there was no difficulty in finding Mr. Leadbeater, exciting his great astonishment by thus unexpectedly renewing a physical acquaintance broken by the lapse of many years. ‘A little older looking’ was one’s first impression, but to be instantly forgotten in the light-hearted greeting that followed.

“How long will you be able to stay?” he inquired; and hearing it was only a call, not a visitation, “Oh, I say, we must have a walk round and show you something of the place,” and shown round we were accordingly.

Adyar is a landed estate of between 200 and 300 acres, divided into separated areas, named Gardens. Each Garden has on it a block of buildings, some of them quite huge in size. Thus there are Blavatsky, Besant, Leadbeater, and other Gardens. The buildings on them contain a number of flats or suites of rooms, which are occupied by the permanent residents or by visitors.

My renowned escort pointed out the historical nooks, the original quarters of the Founders, and together we entered the sacred “Shrine Room.” Besides the pictures of several of the Masters, there is in the Shrine Room an excellent drawing, or sketch, of the places of residence of two of the Masters, a sketch which was impressed upon the artists by H.P.B. These homes are situated in the foothills of a mountain range, and are separated by a stream of water, a lake showing in the distance. The figure of one of them is shown, or rather faintly indicated, on horseback, in the left foreground. Another curious reminder of early days is the original “impressed” picture of Stainton Moses, as seen in trance. This is coloured, some of the blues being very fine. I fancy this picture in black and white forms one of the illustrations in “Old Diary Leaves,” Vol. 1.

We found the Lecture Hall downstairs crowded with Indians. “It must be pay-day,” Mr. Leadbeater explained. “Mr. Schwarz is treasurer; we will give him a look in,” and making way through the salaaming crowd, we discovered Mr. Schwarz making up and distributing the month’s wages, for Adyar is to be a self-supporting plantation, and employs a big staff of coolies.

On a recessed platform in the centre of the main hall are the life-size sculptured marble figures of Madame Blavatsky (seated) and Col. Olcott (standing beside her). “Hear the coins on the floor?” asked my companion, as the jingle of silver falling on the marble slabs of the floor attracted his notice. “Yes,” I said, “testing their money?” “No, it is not that, but a caste Indian will not even hand anything to a Pariah, so he throws the money due to him on the floor. Strange to say the unfortunate Pariah quite accepts the position as if it were quite according to the natural order of things.” “Ah! There is Bruno” pointing to a bronze bust of the famous philosopher which occupied a niche in the wall opposite. “That has just been put there in honour of the President’s birthday; you are a little late for that, we have had quite a mild festivity.”

Renewing an old acquaintance with Mr. Van Manen, who has charge of the Library, he accompanied us there, and exhibited some of his more recently acquired treasures with all the enthusiasm of a collector. He has agents everywhere who report any discovery of value, and if the original cannot be secured, copies are obtained. Speaking of the Upanishads, he said no one knows how many of these exist; out of hundreds of volumes comparatively few are regarded as original, and out of this collection about twelve are accepted as beyond doubt. These form the chapters in our (now out of print) translation. By the way, a much improved translation of these is now being made, and should be in the printer's hands before long. It appears that it has been the habit at all periods to incorporate the ancient Upanishads or writings into the orthodoxy of the moment, even the Mahomedans have worked some in and "adapted" them by interpolation, and so on. Later scholarship may succeed in restoring more of these wonderful scripts.

There is a show-case of curios in Library, one exhibit being the smallest book in the world, a little volume nearly an inch in length, and less in width, with handwriting in some ancient dialect on each page; another consists of three grains of rice, each with the figure of the Buddha carved on it.

Then we visited the roof, where students meet and discuss things in the cool of the evening. Here the toot-toot of a car came floating over in the direction of the entrance gates. "Must be the President; let us go and meet her," Mr. Leadbeater suggested; so we descended to the entrance hall, and as the car pulled up Mr. Grahame Pole stepped out with his pile of legal documents. Mr. Pole is a solicitor by profession, practising in Scotland, and is also General Secretary of the Scottish Section of the T.S. He volunteered to come out with the President and help her with the Appeal case. "They wonder where I have disappeared to," he told me later; "I get a cable every week asking me to come back by first boat. I don't know what is becoming of my business," he remarked quite cheerfully. Just the same sort of spirit that animates so many of those who work for the T.S.

Then the President alighted—she looked very tired—fancy standing, concentrating, reasoning for seven ours (less one hour's break), for days together; but she welcomed me to Adyar with the utmost cordiality, and we all went up to her balcony while she had a cup of tea and told us the news of the day. Partaking of he rapidly disappearing "birthday cake," we listened to the story already partly told of the stony-hearted judges and their apparent melting. It appeared that at the close of the day they showed every evidence of being quite friendly; but, as I write, the sequel is still unknown, though I saw by the evening paper summary of the resumption of the case that when the

opposing counsel started out on his reply the Judges heckled him a good deal, and whatever bias they exhibited seemed to be in favour of the President's contention. So mote it be, but law is law, and curious in its ways, and only the verdict will settle things. I wonder if the brilliant rainbow which spread over the northern sky as we sat on the balcony looking across the river to the setting sun could be regarded as an omen of success? "You seem to be particularly active in all departments of your public work both in Australia and New Zealand," remarked the President, at some reference to Australia. I replied that in both countries we had by consensus of opinion got quite past the stage where discussion took place as to whether vigorous propaganda was or was not the thing, and that the Lodges which strove most to reach the public, and by any and every means to spread Theosophy, flourished best in every sense. She replied "Yes, it is the law of growth, isn't it?"

In the morning every trace of weariness had left the face of the President. Happily it was a public holiday, the Courts were closed, the day is sacred to the goddess of learning, and the Hindus in the compound were busily decorating with flowers their working implements, including the printing presses. Mrs. Besant walked round to the various centres of activity; it was charming to notice the affectionate and respectful regard shown her on every side. Later came the opportunity for a quiet talk.

Developments of great moment affecting the future of the T.S. are in progress. A new chapter, entirely new, is about to be written in the Society's history, though it is true that looking at things as they appear *down here*, there is still a lot of finishing up to be accomplished before the old one is closed. Not for the first time has it been made clear to the writer that our great leader is in the councils of Those still greater, who are directing the movement and making plans which will be worked out later in detail on this lower level.

From the wider standpoint even the "Case" is quickly becoming a thing that belongs to the past. The great bolt has been shot, and recoiled on its originators in its failure. The attack on the Theosophical Society which culminated in the "Case" was the crowning effort of the organised opposition of many years. The end in view in that attack was dual. The President and those prominently associated with her, particularly Mr. Leadbeater, were to be discredited before the world, made to look like common impostors and charlatans, and with their followers transformed into a sect of pariahs amid the recognised cults of the day. The other object was possibly merely incidental, but has been regarded by the President as of even more real importance than the first, the effort to wrest

from her care and training the two wards, one of whom she regards as of so much consequence to the world's welfare in the near future.

There seems little prospect of this end being attained even if the present Appeal Case at Madras fails, because in that event it will be carried to the Privy Council, and before it can be finally disposed of many things may happen. Perhaps, however, the Madras Appeal will succeed. As to the effort to injure the President and the Society, well, that has not only emphatically failed already at all points, but it has actually established the bona fides of both before the world and cleared up many misconceptions.

Look at the position the President herself occupies today. Throughout the Society the feeling is not merely one of loyalty, but of unbounded confidence in her leadership—a confidence engendered not by sentiment, but by the test of experience and the recognition of her true greatness as well as of the fact that she is the mouthpiece of the Great Lodge.

There is evidence, too, that the outside public are daily placing her higher in their estimation. This was shown at all the public lectures during the late brief stay in Europe.

And in India what do we find nay in Madras itself, the centre of the late storm. Why, the very paper, “The Hindu,” that was used as the organ for giving publicity to all the evil things that were charged against the Society, has become silent, and whatever the technique of “the Case” and its ramifications may involve, the legal mind of Madras has quite satisfied itself that the Society has come out clean and strong from the ordeal.

After one of the cross-examinations of late an opposing counsel sat himself down, and a neighbour was heard to remark, “You didn't get much out of that lot.” “There's nothing to be got, their Society is just as straight and clean as it can be, I know that; but I must try and make a show; did my best.”

But that is a trifle. Look at this lecture program. By the way, let me whisper this; the order has gone forth from high authority that a big crusade is to be started, having as its aim the social reconstruction of India, and a series of lectures has been promptly announced to inaugurate it; that is the response. I hold in my hand a copy of the local poster. Here it is, notice the subjects to be dealt with, they will indicate where reform is sought. [Included at the end of this article]

As will be noticed, the Chairmen are mostly Judges of the High Court, and the Chairman for 16th Novr., *to be announced*, is the Barrister who daily sits opposite to the President and fights the case against her, Mr.

Ramaswami Aiyar. These names would hardly be associated with a discredited lecturer or Society, and nothing thing could more clearly show that in the eyes of Madras the T.S. has been elevated to its true place, and stands for purity of ideal and self-denying service. In this connection it may be mentioned that the two Junior Counsel for the opposite side have lately joined the Society, with many other prominent people.

So, though for some time yet the echoes of the past year will continue to reverberate more or less noisily, especially perhaps in the more distant corners of the earth, the struggle really is over, and it only remains to reap the harvest of victory.

Above the door of the President's study is an oil painting—a head—the latest addition to the pictures of the Great Ones. It is that of the mighty Manu Himself, the Great Founder of races. Kindly is the expression of the face, with much power, majesty and strength allied. May we suppose, the portrait being there, that the very fact that the artist has been able to see *Him*, may be taken as an indication that even He is coming closer to the organisation that is destined to exercise such a potent influence on the present century. What powers of darkness, of ignorance, of evil can resist His will if *He* has spoken! I have referred to the opening of the forward movement for Social Reform in India. Side by side is to follow a similar effort in the West. The Servants of the Empire organization will no doubt be used for that end, but I gathered from the President that for the immediate present those interested in that activity are doing best in just marking time. The word “go” will be spoken in due time.

The President, in her private capacity, is now attending all sorts of gatherings held for various reform purposes. This “going out,” she told me, is premeditated, it offers opportunity for encouraging service that is offered by others. Perhaps some amongst us who can do similar work will note this form of activity as worthy of attention.

Necessarily it is personal rather than representative, since the T.S., as such, cannot ally itself with other movements, though there is ample provision in its Order of Service for cooperation. Probably we can hardly expect to receive quite so much encouragement as does our honoured President; it is a striking fact that just now she cannot walk into a hall or attend a public meeting without arousing unbounded enthusiasm.

Another walk round the grounds, this time guided by Mrs. Besant; a visit to Mr. Wadia (one feels “friends” at once with Mr. Wadia), who has charge of the publishing department; a happy holiday meal with everybody, and then it had to be “good-bye,” or at any rate “au revoir,” to Adyar.

Space does not permit of reference to many of the well-known workers whom one meets at Adyar, but it would not be seemly to omit mention of the late Vice-President, Sir S. Subramania Iyer. He was good enough to come over to meet me, an honor shown by a great and true man, with a proud record both outside and inside the T.S. I was sorry after I left that I omitted to tell Major Peacocke that his letter to the local papers championing the T.S. and Mr. Leadbeater, which reached us in Australia at a critical time, was greatly appreciated there, and very useful.

Let me close by saying that my travelling companion in the train southward proved to be Mr. K. C. Rangaswami, B.A., B.L., Superintendent of Post Offices, and a Hindu gentleman. Our few hours together provided a useful object lesson in many ways, and afforded some insight into the mind of a man of one's own race of education and culture, a subject too of the same Empire, who is by the existing customs of India (at any rate as expressed in the regulations of the railway), prohibited from certain privileges afforded to "white people," and who is legislated against by different divisions of his Empire, including Australia. But that is another story, which should be told on another occasion.

T. H. MARTYN

S O C I A L R E F O R M
A S E R I E S O F E I G H T L E C T U R E S

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M R S . A N N I E B E S A N T

(UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE MADRAS HINDU ASSOCIATION, THE
ARYA YOUNG MEN'S ASSOCIATION, THE BROTHERS OF SERVICE),

AT THE

V I C T O R I A H A L L , M A D R A S ,

ON OCTOBER 10th, 17th, 24th, 31st; NOVEMBER 7th, 9th, 14th,

AND 16th.

THE CHAIR WILL BE TAKEN AT 5.30 p.m. PRECISELY.

Oct. 10th. *Foreign Travel; Why Indians should go Abroad.*

Chairman ; Sir S. Subramania Iyer, K.I.C.E., late Acting Chief Justice, Madras High Court.

Oct. 17th. *Child Marriage and its results.*

Chairman ; The Hon. Mr. Justice T. Sadaiva Aiyar, Madras High Court.

Oct. 24th. *Our Duty to the Depressed Classes.*

Chairman; The Hon. Mr. Justice B. Tyabji, Madras High Court.

Oct. 31st. *Indian Industries as related to Self Government.*

Chairman ; Dewan Bahadur N. Adinarayana Iyah.

Nov. 7th. *The Passing of the Caste System.*

Chairman ; Dewan Bahadur L.A. Govindaraghava Aiyar.

Nov. 9th. *The Education of Indian Girls.*

Chairman ; The Hon. Mr. P. S. Sivaswami Iyer, C.I.E., C.S.I., Indian member of the Executive
Council.

Nov. 14th. *Mass Education.*

Chairman ; The Hon. Mr. Justice L. Miller, Madras High Court.

Nov. 16th. *The Colour Bar in England, the Colonies and India.*

Chairman ; Mr. C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar.