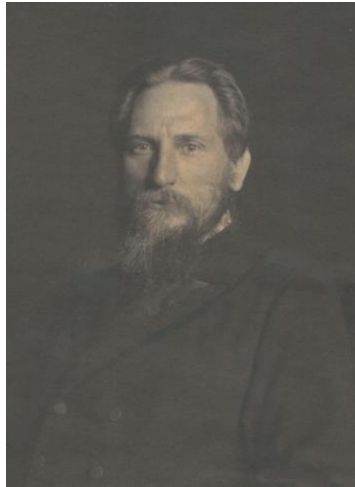


The Cipher Letter: Historical Background

Pedro Oliveira



C. W. Leadbeater in the USA, 1902

Evidence (*Oxford English Dictionary*): a thing or things helpful in forming a conclusion or judgment. In law: drawn from personal testimony, a document or a material object, used to establish facts in a legal investigation, or admissible as a testimony in a law court. Etymology: Middle English, from Old French, from Late Latin *evidentia*, from Latin *evidens*, 'obvious to the eye or mind', from e- (var. of ex-) 'out' + videre 'to see'.

After his return to England from Ceylon, at the end of 1889, C. W. Leadbeater became one of the popular speakers for the Theosophical Society, visiting many Lodges in that country. During the period from 1900 and 1905 he also lectured extensively in the United States. As a result of his talks many people joined the TS and came into contact with the teachings of Theosophy. In 1903, for a period of six months, he delivered a course of lectures in the US.

What seems to be little known is the fact that CWL, apart from his work as a speaker, was in private correspondence with Helen Dennis, the then Corresponding Secretary of the Esoteric School in the US, during his several tours of that country. They discussed a number of subjects, but also about her serious concern regarding the influence of a certain boy on her son Robyn (Robert Dennis). The tone of the following [letter](#) shows that Dennis had approached him regarding sensitive matters:

Seattle, Wash., Dec. 29, 1900.

Dear Mrs Dennis:

I have received the enclosed letter from Mrs. Davis, and as it is entirely upon the business of which you wrote to me I am sending it for you to see, but please destroy it carefully as soon as you have read it, as I should not like it to fall into any other hands. I have written consoling her, and pointing out that although certainly a mistake was made, and although much mischief might have resulted, yet, so far, nothing serious has occurred. Mr. Warrington writes to me promising absolute secrecy as far as he is concerned, and I am quite sure that he

will keep his word. I shall watch very carefully and I have no fear whatever as to success, so that I think that we may congratulate ourselves that very little harm has been done.

With all good wishes from both of us, I remain,

Ever yours most grateful

C. W. Leadbeater

In his letter to Helen Dennis, written from La Jolla, California, February 21st 1901, CWL writes: 'It is true that Robert's week with his friends at Los Angeles was lost time so far as we were concerned but he seems to have enjoyed it. The week at Coronado was also practically wasted, as he was never with us, but always ranging about the crowd. He I think we must do somewhat better because we shall be necessarily much more together. He has greatly enjoyed making a fire and cooking peas and making coffee for our evening meal – and he did it very well, too! But he is still inclined to resent any suggestion as to alteration of conduct as "always nagging at him", poor boy! Still I have great hopes as to the results of our quiet fortnight here, though possibly he will not think it so lively as the great hotel.'

In his next [letter](#) to Helen Dennis, still from La Jolla, California, March 6th 1901, CWL provides an inkling into the ferocious campaign waged by Katherine Tingley, leader of the organization 'Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society', against him and against Annie Besant:

I enclose herewith some newspapers cuttings which will amuse and possibly interest you. They show how considerably Mrs. Tingley controls the press here, and can get long notices of all her proceedings inserted almost daily. It is said however that she pays highly for this privilege. She is intensely disgusted at our prolonged stay in the neighbourhood, and our own people are proportionately strengthened and elated – which is one reason why I consented to stay! If anyone wishes to know why we are pausing so long at this point, it might be explained that because of the power and virulence of the opposition here, our own members need special encouragement and help.

He also writes about Robyn's [situation](#):

I seem to see for the first time a real opportunity of progress with our dear boy. Now that we are reduced to primitive conditions of life, and are necessarily much alone together, the strange resistance is breaking down and he is really trying to be what we all wish. Of course the attempts are clumsy as yet, and there are frequent failures but he is trying, and that is a most encouraging advance on his previous "don't care, and won't do anything" attitude. How long it will last I cannot tell, but I must give it every chance and every encouragement in my power. I had a serious talk with him the other night, when for the first time he spoke quite openly about himself and the influence of the dark powers upon him. He told me how something within "which could express itself very well – much better than he could", would constantly urge him to resist anything that Basil [Hodgson-Smith] or I suggested, telling him that to yield to our wishes would be a defeat for him, a loss of power, and so on. He said that once or twice he had struggled against it, but it never was any use, because it always won the

day. I told him how serious this matters was, and how I thought it ought to be met and circumvented, and since then I have often watched the effort been made. He is at least trying now to be on our side as against the mighty Kâmic elemental which they have fostered so sedulously, and that is half the battle, in spite of constant failures.

At the end of his American tour that year, CWL wrote, on the letterhead of the American Section of The Theosophical Society, which was located at 26 Van Buren Street, Room 426, New York, the following letter to Robert Dennis from New York, on June 22nd 1901:

My dear Robert,

My first letter in America was written to you, and now my last one shall be to you also. It must be a very hurried one, I fear, as we have to be on board our steamer by noon, and I have many things to do first. All the time I have been thinking how delightful it would have been if you were coming with us, as you would have been if things had gone differently on that Californian expedition. But I suppose it will be all right somehow. Meantime I do very much want you, dear boy, to make up your mind once and for all that you will not lose any more chances, but will work away really hard with your mother, so that when I return there will be an enormous improvement to chronicle. As you grow older, you will of course see more clearly what the work is, and what your own real interests are, so that you will be less likely to sacrifice the opportunity of a lifetime for a little temporary gratification. If you will make real efforts to become what your mother and Mrs. Davis wish you to be, there is still a noble future before you, though of course it will not be so easy this time as it would have been if you had come with me now. Never mind, it is no use our grieving over what is past; we must only make up our minds to do better in the future. Remember that I shall always love you and often be thinking of you, and if you can only learn to be entirely unselfish we may do well yet. I shall write to you now and then, and I hope you will sometimes write to me. Perhaps, too, affairs may shape themselves so that you could come over on a visit next spring, and then return to America when I come back in the following autumn. All heartiest good wishes and much love from us both to you and to Don [Donald Dennis, Robert's younger brother].

I am ever

Your loving friend

C. W. Leadbeater

During his 1903 tour of the US and Canada, CWL wrote to Helen Dennis from Victoria, British Columbia, on September 16th 1903, informing her of another boy whose parents had asked for him to join CWL's group in their travels:

It is curious to be going once more to San Francisco, where last time Robert was with us. And, stranger still, for part of the same journey I shall have with me another Theosophical boy, a member of our Lotus Lodge, Douglas William Lawrence Pettit, of whom I think I showed you a photograph. His parents also are anxious that he should have the opportunity of hearing many Theosophical lectures, and learning to be useful along our lines. At present moment he is type-writing vigorously opposite to me, helping to get off a number of cards

before our steamer starts. So far he has been very gentle and really wishful to do everything he can; but of course one only gradually comes to know how far they will persevere in well-doing! He is a very nice fellow, yet it somehow makes me rather sad to be taking in charge some one else than our first American boy. This, however, was in no way of my seeking, but was all arranged for me, so I suppose it is all for the best. I have just received the forty-eight missing pages of the proof from Regan, and shall look them over on the steamer. With all kindest regards to you and Mr. Dennis, and much love to Robert and Don.

On October 12th 1903, writing from San Francisco, California, CWL gave additional information to Helen Dennis about the boy Douglas Pettit:

I enclose a very good portrait of Douglas Pettit, who is at present typewriting vigorously at some copying work. It seems a curious freak of destiny which brought us together in California, the scene of the other experiment. It is early yet to speak, but I have considerable hopes, since so far he is not only willing but very eager to do as much work as possible, and seems to think of almost nothing else. I incline to believe that the enthusiasm will last, because he has already made himself one of us in precisely the way which Robert never would do, although I was always trying to bring about that Condition of affairs. The parents are very kind and friendly about it, and apparently willing to lend him to us almost indefinitely. From what the father told me, he appears to have a very good record in school-work, being at the age of thirteen in a class where most of the others are seventeen and eighteen. He holds already apparently a certificate which qualifies him as a junior teacher, whatever that may amount to.

1904 saw CWL traveling through the US again, and on October 25th he wrote a letter to Fritz Kunz from Cleveland, Ohio, with whose family CWL was associated since 1902. The letter alludes to the difficulties, of a personal nature, that were besetting another boy, named George Nevers:

I enclose two more [letters] from Douglas, and one really private one from George. At first I did not feel sure that even you ought to see this, yet I wanted you to know about it, because it shows George in a better light than we generally see him. Do not let any one else see it, and destroy it as soon as you have read it, for I feel it as a sort of confidence from him, and I should not show it to anyone but you. I am so glad you remembered something of one of our astral experiences; go ahead and remember many more, and tell me all about them, so that I may verify or correct them for you. At least one of those boys you really ought to recollect clearly, for he loves you very much.

Towards the end of February 1906, Annie Besant, the resident in Benares, India, received a letter from Helen I. Dennis, dated 25 January 1906. The letter was co-signed by the following persons: Alexander Fullerton, General Secretary of the American Section of the TS; Frank F. Knothe, Assistant General Secretary; Elizabeth M. Chidester, Assistant Corresponding Secretary, E.S., and E. W. Dennis, Mrs Dennis' husband.

The letter presented the following charges against C. W. Leadbeater and demanded an inquiry about them: 1) "That he is teaching young boys into his care, habits of self-abuse

[masturbation] and demoralizing personal practices.” 2) “That he does this with deliberate intent and under the guise of occult training or with the promise of the increase of physical manhood.” 3) “That he has demanded, at least in one case, promises of the utmost secrecy.” The letter also enclosed testimonies of the mothers of two boys and branded Leadbeater’s conduct as ‘criminal’. Although Helen Dennis’ letter to Annie Besant did not mention the names of the boys or their parents, and presents the (unsigned) boys’ testimonies through their parents, later it became known that the boys in question were Robert Dennis, Helen Dennis’ son, Douglas Pettit, George Nevers and Howard Maguire, who was the recipient of the Cipher Letter. Although Dennis and her co-signatories ‘pledged each other to the utmost secrecy and circumspection so that no hint of it shall escape them’, it soon became known that the charges had been widely circulated among Lodges and members in the American Section, reaching newspapers in early June 1906.

In a letter to John Coats, dated June 18, 1966, Fritz Kunz recollects what transpired at Benares when Helen Dennis’ letter arrived in the mail:

Basil [Hodgson-Smith], CWL and I were AB’s [Annie Besant] guests in Benares when the first letters came from USA in 1906. I remember it as if it were yesterday. We were all working in our top coats, for Benares in winter can be cold! The moment he read the first one, CWL swept all the mail together and marched into AB’s study and was there a long time, while they read the letters. She came over to see Basil, who was coming down with a temperature. He tried to get her to understand the unspeakable crudity and pettiness of some of the people accusing CWL, but the very nobility of her character made it difficult to communicate. At that time she had been only very briefly in USA. For what reason I don’t know, but she would not come to England to face George Mead and Co. Later she made handsome amends to CWL. This is all too complex for letters.

On 27 February 1906, CWL wrote a frank letter to Alexander Fullerton, in which he said:

The business of discovering and training specially hopeful younger members and preparing them for Theosophical work has been put into my charge. Possibly the fact that I have been associated with the training of young men and boys all my life (originally of course on Christian lines) is one reason for this, because of the experience which it has given me. As a result of that experience, I know that the whole question of sex feeling is the principal difficulty in the path for both boys and girls, and that very much harm is done by the prevalent habit of ignoring the subject and fearing to speak of it to young people. The first information about it should come from parents or friends, not from servants or bad companions. Therefore I always speak of it quite frankly and naturally to those whom I am trying to help, when they become sufficiently familiar with me to make it possible. The methods of dealing with the difficulty are two. A certain type of boy can be carried through his youth absolutely virgin, and can pass through the stages of puberty without being troubled at all by sensual emotions; but such boys are few. The majority pass through a stage when their minds are much filled with such matters, and consequently surround themselves with huge masses of most undesirable thought-forms which perpetually react upon them and keep them in a condition of emotional ferment. These thought-forms are the vehicles of appalling mischief since through them disembodied entities can and constantly do act upon the child.

The conventional idea that such thoughts do not much matter so long as they do not issue in overt acts is not only untrue; it is absolutely the reverse of the truth. I have seen literally hundreds of cases of this horrible condition, and have traced the effects which it produces in after-life. In this country of India, the much abused custom of early marriage prevents all difficulty on this score. Much of this trouble is due to the perfectly natural pressure of certain physical accumulations, and as the boy grows older this increasing pressure drives him into associations with loose women or sometimes into unnatural crimes. Now all this may be avoided by periodically relieving that pressure, and experience has shown that if the boy provokes at stated intervals a discharge which produces that relief, he can comparatively easily rid his mind of such thoughts in the interim, and in that way escape all the more serious consequences. I know this is not the conventional view, but it is quite true for all that, and there is no comparison between the harm done in the two cases even at that time – quite apart from the fact that the latter plan avoids the danger of entanglement with women or bad boys later on. You may remember how St. Paul remarked that while it was best of all to remain celibate in the rare cases where that was possible, for the rest it was distinctly better to marry than to burn with lust. Brought down to the level of the boy, this is precisely what I mean; and although I know that many people do not agree with the view, I am at a loss to understand how anyone can consider it criminal – especially when it is remembered that it is based upon the clearly visible results of the two lines of action. A doctor might advise against it, principally on the ground that the habit of occasional relief might degenerate into unrestrained self-abuse; but this danger can be readily avoided by full explanation, and it must be remembered that the average doctor cannot see the horrible astral effects of perpetual desire.

In her reply to Helen Dennis, Annie Besant stated that she did not agree with CWL's advice to boys on sexual matters but defended his good faith and pure intent. Her view, however, would change dramatically, due to a statement to the effect that he had advised to the boys concerned a daily use of the practice [masturbation], which CWL emphatically denied. She considered that CWL had fallen on the path of Occultism. It was only after the visit by the two Mahatmas to Col. Olcott's deathbed at Adyar, in January 1907, that her view would change. During that visit Olcott asked one of the Masters: 'Is it then true that Mrs. Besant and Mr. Leadbeater did work together on the Higher Planes, under your guidance and instruction?' To which Mahatma M. replied: 'Most emphatically yes!' This visit was witnessed by Marie Russak, an American member residing at Adyar, and Rina, Col. Olcott's nurse, and was recorded in his Diaries. CWL's opponents considered the 'Adyar manifestations' a psychically-engendered illusion, and one of them blamed him for them, although he was in Italy at that time. For more information see the [Bio](#) page on this website.

It is interesting to note that the Cipher Letter, allegedly written by CWL to one of the boys, was not part of the correspondence sent to Besant in January 1906 by Helen Dennis and others in the American Section. It was sent to them, upon request, sometime in May 1906, by the mother of the boy to whom the Cipher Letter was written. It is also well known that the President-Founder of the TS, Col. Olcott, had called for an Advisory Board meeting in London on 16 May 1906 to consider the charges against CWL, to be held at the Grosvenor Hotel, which included Mr Burnett as a representative of the American Section. At that meeting, and after an intense debate, when a number of those present wanted CWL expelled

from the TS, Col. Olcott decided to accept his resignation from the Society with immediate effect.

In her letter of May 1906 to the Investigating Committee of the American Section, the mother of the boy to whom the Cipher Letter had been written mentions that 'our only desire is that a full, fair setting forth of all points in the matter be made. We have the deepest appreciation of Mr L's kindness to the boy and ourselves in many ways, and whatever may come from us, we wish to avoid any semblance of pre-judging. What conclusions I have arrived at are based on the facts at hand.' She also protested saying that 'Mr L ... either considered the parents unfit counselors or else he feared their disapproval. In either case it was an assumption of privilege. For no matter which view he held, the parents are Karmically responsible for the child, and such teaching so contrary to their sense of right would have been possibly permissible only after having consulted them and receiving their consent.' Then she added an interesting piece of information:

Our son left the slip of paper on the floor, from which the enclosed cipher note is copied. I also found another on the floor some time after finding the above mentioned cipher. That note was written in Mr L's hand and asked our son to keep a record of days when "experiments" were made, but this is now mislaid. It was not of so dangerous a nature as the enclosed: for in this as you will observe, Mr L expresses himself as "glad sensation is pleasant" showing that he approves of the sensuous part of the practice.

The other note, referred to above, although mislaid in 1906, mysteriously reappeared in 1908, during the aggressive campaign to prevent CWL from rejoining the TS. The text of the Cipher Letter is reproduced below.

PRIVATE

My own darling boy, there is no need for you to write anything in cipher, for no one but I ever sees your letters. But it is better for me to write in cipher about some of the most important matters; can you always read it easily? Can you describe any of the forms in rose-colour which you have seen entering your room? Are they human beings or nature spirits? The throwing of water is unusual in such a case, though I have had it done to me at a spiritualistic seance. Were you actually wet when you awoke, or was it only in sleep that you felt the water? Either is possible, but they would represent different types of phenomena. All these preliminary experiences are interesting, and I wish we were nearer together to talk about them.

Turning to other matters, I am glad to hear of the rapid growth, and the strength of the results. Twice a week is permissible, but you will soon discover what brings the best effect. *The meaning of the sign [Circle with dot in center] is osauisu. Spontaneous manifestations are undesirable, and should be discouraged. Eg ou dinat xeuiou iamq, ia oaaet socceoh nisa iguao. Cou oiui uii iguao, is ia xemm oiui dina xamm. Eiat uiuu iuqqao xiao zio usa utmaa; tell me fully. Hmue taotueio et ti qmautuou. Uiiotuoo lettat eusmeoh. (The following is the boy's translation of the paragraph written in cipher - beginning with the *) The meaning of the sign [Circle with dot in center] is urethra. Spontaneous manifestations are undesirable and should be discouraged. If it comes without help, he needs rubbing

more often, but not too often or he will not come well. Does that happen when you are asleep? Tell me fully. Glad sensation is so pleasant. Thousand kisses darling.

(Key to the cipher: To translate; move those that will be vowels in the word when translated one vowel forward in the continuous circle of vowels, a, e, i, o, u, a, e, i, o, u, a, etc, and those that will be consonants in the word when translated, one letter backward in the continued circle of the alphabet, without regard to whether it strikes a vowel or consonant.)

In a letter to Fritz Kunz from Adyar, February 6th 1913, CWL shares his view regarding the Cipher Letter. The President mentioned below is Annie Besant, who was elected as the second President of the TS in 1907 after the passing of Col. Olcott in February of that year:

As to the horrible cipher letter, I think that have already told you all that I know of the matter. I certainly did not write the thing in the form in which it at present appears, and I equally certainly never used the phrases attributed to me in the sense which is there put upon them. I have never seen the original, but I did see a written copy made by Monsieur Charles Blech from one that was shown to him by (I think) Mrs. Russak. So far as I remember the document it was divided into two parts, the first part referring to some psychic experiences, and the second to sexual difficulties. The first part corresponds with a sort of half-recollection that I have of a story of psychic experiences told to me by Howard Maguire; and my impression is that I did write to him very much what the first part of the 'cipher letter' contains. The second half contains such advice as I think I might have given, though I do not definitely remember giving it; but the closing phrases are not in the least my style, and, as I have already said, I am quite sure that I did not use them in the sense now attributed to them, though I may, for anything that I know, have employed the phrase about 'sensation' with regard to some psychic experience; though of that also I have no actual recollection. I have always been given to understand that the letter was supposed to be addressed to Howard; but perhaps I assumed that because I knew that it was to him that I had written in connection with the psychic experience. I think, however, that I remember hearing at the time something about the attitude taken in regard to it by his father and mother; and altogether I have very little doubt that he was the recipient. If so, that finally disposes of the idea that Fullerton could have written it, for I do not think that he knew the boy. Nor can I conceive of any reason why he should have written it even if he had known him, and the advice on psychical matters is not such as he would be likely to give. I am not casting any doubt on the value of the psychic impressions either of your sister or of Mrs. Tuttle; but from what I know about such things I should think it not impossible that the eager use which Fullerton made of the document might be quite sufficient to guide their intuitions towards him and make them regard him as its author. I cannot believe that he had anything to do with it; but if you find evidence suggesting that, I think the simplest plan would be to ask him directly, for I believe that now he would tell us the truth on such a matter. The President told me long ago that the alleged original document had been shown to her; that it was typewritten, without address, date or signature; but that one short word, which had apparently been omitted in typing, was inserted in handwriting that looked like mine. I also heard at the time that Chidester, when it was shown to him, identified the paper as some which (I think) he had given to me, and expressed the opinion that the typing was like that of my Blickensderfer. I have really never troubled to form much of a theory for myself; but I know that two possibilities occurred to me at the

time: (1) that the document might be an absolute forgery, inserted phenomenally in one of my letters as it passed through the post (this hypothesis, of course, requires the presence of people of the black magician type); (2) that a document really written by me might have been found as stated, and skillfully copied with a transposition of some sentences (and possibly the insertion of others) so as to give to them an entirely different meaning from that which they really bore. The President also told me that she had seen an answer, written by the boy to me (but never posted) in which he asked the meaning of that remarkable phrase about ‘sensation’. All this, I think, makes it almost absolutely certain that the letter was received by Howard, and that he took it as a genuine document; though if it was, as alleged, picked up on the floor of his bedroom, and afterwards shown to him, I presume that he could not be certain that it had not in the meantime been recopied or changed in some way.

Below is Annie Besant’s statement in her ‘Letter to the Members of the Theosophical Society’, in November 1908, regarding the Cipher Letter:

Much has been made of a “cipher letter.” The use of cipher arose from an old story in the Theosophist, repeated by Mr. Leadbeater to a few lads; they, as boys will, took up the cipher with enthusiasm, and it was subsequently sometimes used in correspondence with the boys who had been present when the story was told. In a typewritten note on a fragment of paper, undated and unsigned, relating to an astral experience, a few words in cipher occur on the incriminated advice. Then follows a sentence, unconnected with the context, on which a foul construction has been placed. That the boy did not so read it is proved by a letter of his to Mr. Leadbeater – not sent, but shown to me by his mother – in which he expresses his puzzlement as to what it meant, as he well might. There is something very suspicious about the use of this letter. It was carefully kept away from Mr. Leadbeater, though widely circulated against the wish of the father and the mother, and when a copy was lately sent to him by a friend, he did not recognize it in its present form, and stated emphatically that he had never used the phrase with regard to any sexual act. It may go with the Coulomb and Pigott letters.

(Emma and Alexis Coulomb were workers at the headquarters of the TS at Adyar who participated in a conspiracy with Christian missionaries in Madras against Madame Blavatsky in 1884. Richard Pigott was a journalist for *The Times* in London in the 1880s, well known for the ‘Pigott forgeries’ against Charles Stewart Parnell.)

The attitude of Helen Dennis to Annie Besant in this crisis is worth mentioning as it reveals not only a pattern of animosity but also a sense of deep bitterness and personal attack that seemed to have continued to the end of her life. In a letter to Fritz Kunz, dated August 27th 1906, from Harrogate, England, CWL writes:

Mrs. Howard of Chicago writes me that Mrs. Dennis “called her to her house and argued like a lawyer, taking up point after point to convince her that Mrs. Besant was unfit longer to remain Outer Head”! The points were – 1. Mrs. Besant had grown proud, arrogant and dictatorial. 2. Had shown her utter unfitness by defending her colleague. 3. Is not a pupil of the Masters (!!)

4. Had fallen and has steadily fallen for the past five years. 5. Is drunk with power. 6. Is in the hands of black magicians. 7. Is trying to lead us all into Catholicism. Now this represents most abominable treachery, and shows to what depths these misguided people

are descending. I don't care what they say about me, but if they begin this kind of thing they will get into trouble. I never heard before of a school which proposed to elect its headmaster!

The University of Chicago Library holds a Helen I. Dennis Collection, which includes her handwritten reminiscences of the 1906 events. In a note written in May 1940, what Helen Dennis writes corroborates her views expressed in CWL's letter above mentioned:

What a terrible mess she [Annie Besant] made of the T.S., providing slogan after slogan which ignorant fools repeated ad nauseam after her. As a crowning insult to the Society, she left to their votes the decision as to whether or not she was fit to be the President of the TS and what is worse, whether or not C W Leadbeater as a self-pronounced sex pervert who defended his theory was worthy of membership in the T.S., and infinitely worse to be put on the pedestal of a spiritual teacher and leader. She vacated her honour and duty of the defense of true Theosophy, and left it to the votes and ignorance of blind devotees, and left the Adyar T.S. forever tainted with upholding one of the worst forms of Black Occultism known – a purely Tantrika practice to develop psychic vision.

However, the constitutional and democratic institution of a vote by the members world wide to elect the President of the Theosophical Society, conducted in May 1907 and presided over by A. P. Sinnett as Acting President, following the death of Col. Olcott in February 1907, the figures of which are shown below (from Josephine Ransom's *A Short History of the Theosophical Society*), exposes the unreasonableness of Mrs Dennis' view:

On 28 June [1907], Mr. Sinnett advised Mrs. Besant that the returns showed an overwhelming vote in her favour. America 1319 for, 679 against; Britain 1181 for, 258 against; the rest of the world 7072 for, 152 against; total voting strength at the end of 1906, 12,984. The vote recorded in the United States was taken by the officials as a vote of censure upon themselves, and they resigned.

It is said that the Cipher Letter is not among Helen Dennis's Collection at the University Chicago Library, and that it may have been destroyed. One certainly wonders why such a central accusatory piece against CWL would not have been preserved. In a number of biographical references about C. W. Leadbeater, including Wikipedia, the Cipher Letter is still presented as having been written by him in spite of the clear evidence to the contrary.

The many testimonies in his favour have been persistently ignored by his accusers, both contemporary and from early times, some of which were and are staunch students of Madame Blavatsky's teachings. His name remains controversial but his influence on the contemporary world is both real and lasting, in many fields, including art (see the [Influence](#) page on this website).

Yet it was Madame Blavatsky herself that ended up providing an enduring testimony about the man who left everything behind in England and travelled with her to India in 1884. 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
London, 1891.

As C. Jinarajadasa remarked 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”.’ Her dedication to him was not written in cipher, but in plain English, as an evidence for all to see.

* * *

Facsimiles of some letters included in the book *CWL Speaks – C. W. Leadbeater’s Correspondence concerning the 1906 Crisis in the Theosophical Society*

A number of letters from C. W. Leadbeater (CWL) to Annie Besant and others are included in the book. As stated in its Introduction, on page ix, they were obtained from the archives of the Theosophical Society, both at Adyar and in Wheaton. On the same page it is stated that “as time permits, copies of relevant documents which are included in this book will be uploaded onto the CWL World website: www.cwlworld.info”.

Below are links to a number of letters which were included in the book, either partially or in full, in Chapter 1, ‘Early Correspondence with Helen I. Dennis’:

Letter from CWL to Helen Dennis, 28 December 1900

[CWL to Helen Dennis Dec 1900 copy](#)

Letter from CWL to Helen Dennis, 6 March 1901 (two parts)

[CWL to Dennis March 1901 copy](#)

[CWL to Dennis March 1901 II copy 2](#)

Letter from CWL do Robert Dennis (Mrs Dennis’ son), 22 June 1901

[CWL to Robyn PDF](#)

Letter from CWL to Helen Dennis, 16 September 1903

[CWL to Dennis Sep.1903](#)

Letter from CWL to Helen Dennis, 12 October 1903

[CWL to Dennis Oct1903 i](#)

[CWL to Dennis Oct1903 ii 2](#)

Letter from CWL to Helen Denis, 22 October 1903

[CWL to Dennis 22 Oct1903](#)