

To the Members of the Theosophical Society.

An appeal has been made to the General Council and to myself, by the British Section in Convention assembled, to take action to put an end to the painful condition of affairs which has arisen in consequence of certain "pernicious teaching" ascribed to Mr. C. W. Leadbeater. The General Council does not meet until December next, and will then take such action as it may deem right. The appeal to myself I answer, after such delay has been imposed on me by the fact that I was in the Antipodes, on the Society's business, when the appeal was made, and could not complete my reply until I had verified certain data by reference to documents not then within my reach.

My wish is to lift the present controversy out of the turmoil of passion in which all sense of proportion has been lost, and to submit the whole case to the judgment of the Theosophical Society, free from the exaggerations and misunderstandings which have surrounded it. I recognize fully that those who denounce Mr. Leadbeater are inspired, for the most part, by an intense desire to protect the purity of public morals and the good name of the Society and are therefore worthy of respect. I ask them to believe that others may have an equal love of purity and of the Society's good name, while not accepting their view of Mr. Leadbeater's advice, and while considering that they have been misled by exaggerated and distorted statements, as I was myself. I even ask them whether they seriously think that I, after nearly twenty years of unstinted labor for the Society, and of a life more ascetic than lax, am likely to be indifferent either to purity or to the Society's good name? I ask them to give credit to others for good intent, as they claim good intent for themselves.

From the occult standpoint, the duality of sex represents the fundamental duality of the universe, and in the individual human being the duality once existed, as it still exists in the universe and in some forms of vegetable and animal life. The separation of humanity into two sexes, in each of which one sex predominates and the other is rudimentary, is but a temporary device for the better development of complementary qualities, difficult of simultaneous evolution in the same person. The separation being thus necessary, but the presence of both sex elements being essential to reproduction, the sex instinct, drawing the separated halves together, became a necessary factor in the preservation of the race. To subvert this purpose is its natural function, and any other use of it is unnatural and harmful. In the animal kingdom it has never gone astray from its due utility. In the human, owing to the activity of mind, with vividness of memory and of anticipation, it has become abnormally developed, and its true function has become subsidiary. It should serve to draw one man and one woman together, for the creation of pure bodies fit for incoming souls, and thus aid in cementing an enduring union of two lives complementary to each other, a union also needed for the nurture and protection of the young ones

within a settled home during their years of helplessness. But by unbridled indulgence, both within and without marriage, it has developed into an overmastering passion, which seeks merely for gratification its one rightful use, its only natural and legitimate function, is forgotten, the great creative power is prostituted to be an agent of pleasure, and this has brought an inevitable nemesis. Society is honeycombed with diseases which, directly and indirectly, spring from the general abuse of the creative function, by an extraordinary reversal of facts, continence is regarded as unnatural instead of natural, and the demand of the sex instinct for constant gratification is looked on as normal instead of as an abnormality evolved by habitual excess. Doctors know the suffering and the misery wrought under marriage sanction by unbridled incontinence, faced by the sex passion in unmarried lads, they bid them resort to the women of the streets, and thus increase the evil heredity, statesmen vainly try by Contagious Disease Acts to minimize the ruin both of men and women; solitary vice is becoming more widespread, and is the deadly peril which teachers in schools are forced continually to face, against which they ineffectually strive.

Such is the condition of humanity at the present time, and for this condition—at the root of most of the misery and crime in civilized life—Occultism has but one remedy: the restoration of the sex function to its one proper use by the gradual raising of the standard of sex morality, the declaration that its only legitimate use is the creative, that its abuse for sensual pleasure is immoral and unnatural, and that humanity can only be raised out of its present sensuality by self-control. This view is not likely to be acceptable in a society hereditarily self-indulgent, but occult morality is higher and sterner than that of the world. Also it cares for realities, not conventions, and regards unbridled indulgence within marriage as degrading both to mind and body, although, because monogamous, somewhat less ruinous to both than outside the marriage union.

Hence, Occultism condemns “neo Malthusian practices,” as tending to strengthen sex passion,* it condemns the medical advice to young men to yield to their “natural passions” it condemns solitary vice as only less harmful than prostitution: all these things are degrading, unmanly, unwomanly. It exhorts man to remount by self-control the steep incline down which he has slipped by self-indulgence, until he becomes continent, not incontinent, by nature. On all this, Mr. Leadbeater and myself are at one.

I do not seek to impose this view on the Theosophical Society, for every member is free to form his own judgment on the sexual problem, as on any other, and mutual respect, not wild abuse, is the rightful attitude of members in face of this the most difficult problem which confronts humanity. I speak on this as Occultist: “He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.”

I turn now to the accusations against Mr. Leadbeater, reminding the Society against whom these accusations are leveled. Mr. Leadbeater was a clergyman of the Church of England who in 1883 entered the

Theosophical Society, and in 1884 threw up his career to devote his ripe manhood to its service. From that date until now he has served it with unwavering fidelity, through good and evil report, has traveled all over the world to spread its teaching, has contributed to its literature some of its most valued volumes, and thousands, both inside and outside the Society, owe to him the priceless knowledge of Theosophy. During the last two and a half years, under a hurricane of attack as unexampled as his services, he has remained silent, rather than that the Society should suffer his reproach. Because he loved the Society better than his own good name, I, at his wish, have also kept silence. But now that I am appealed to, I will speak, and the more gladly because I also wronged him, believing that he had admitted certain statements as true. I wrote in 1906: "On June 7th, I received an account of the acceptance by Mr. Leadbeater before the Committee of the facts alleged in the evidence", I thus accepted on what I believed to be his own word, that which, on the word of others, I had rejected as impossible, and that which I ought to have continued to reject even coming as from himself, both he and I have suffered by my blunder, for which I have apologized to him, to an extent which our unmerciful critics little imagine, but it is over, and never the shadow of a cloud can come between us again.

The so called trial of Mr. Leadbeater was a travesty of justice. He came before judges, one of whom had declared beforehand that 'he ought to be shot' another, before hearing him, had written passionate denunciations of him, a third and fourth had accepted, on purely psychic testimony, unsupported by any evidence, the view that he was grossly immoral and a danger to the Society, in the commonest justice, these persons ought not to have been allowed to sit in judgment. As to the 'evidence,' he stated at the time: 'I have only just now seen anything at all of the documents, except the first letter', on his hasty perusal of them, he stated that some of the points "are untrue, and others so distorted that they do not represent the facts", yet it was on these points, unsifted and unproven, declared by him to be untrue and distorted, that he was condemned, and has since been attacked.

It was also on these points that I condemned his teaching, on the central matter I had before expressed disagreement, but no condemnation.

The following statement is the one which has been so widely used against him, and contains the teaching that both he and I condemn. That condemnation I hold to, but the teaching thus condemned was never his, part of it was repudiated by him before the Advisory Council in 1906, and the rest of it had been denied in a private letter of February, 1906, since widely published. I wrote, on the false information then in my hands:

'The advice supposed to be given to rescue a boy, as a last resort, in the grip of sexual passions, became advice putting foul ideas into the minds of boys innocent of all sex impulses, and the long intervals, the rare relief, became twenty four hours in length, a daily habit. It was conceivable that the advice, as supposed to have been given, had been given with pure intent, and the presumption was so, in a teacher of Theo-

sophical morality; anything else seemed incredible. But such advice as was given, in fact, such dealing with boys before sex passion had awakened, could only be given with pure intent if the giver were, on this point, insane."

The two points on which stress is laid here, to which my condemnation applies were: (1) the fouling of "the minds of boys innocent of all sex impulses"; (2) the advice for daily self-indulgence. Neither of these is true, and with the falsity of these, my condemnation no longer applies to Mr. Leadbeater's advice.

(1) In the case on which most stress has been laid, the boy had already contracted an evil habit; Mr. Leadbeater found it impossible to cure the vice at once, but he induced the boy to give up his daily habit, and to lessen the frequency of the self-indulgence, gradually lengthening the intervals, that it might at last be entirely renounced. In a second case, the boy wrote to his father, expressing his intense gratitude to Mr. Leadbeater for helping him, and adding: "They were to be continued only for a very short time. Do not call them a habit, because they were never intended to be anything of the kind." Instead, then, of advising self-indulgence, Mr. Leadbeater sought to help boys in their difficulties, by leading gradually up to a perfect control of the sex functions, laying especial stress upon the avoidance of haunting lascivious thoughts. If a man is poisoned with arsenic, what is the treatment by a doctor? He does not cut off the poison at once, for that would kill; he prescribes lessening doses till the body regains its normal state. Is the doctor to be denounced as a poisoner because he takes the only means of saving his patient?

Mr. Leadbeater says positively that he has never given such advice except in cases where certain symptoms had already shown themselves either on the physical plane or in the aura, even though in one or two instances this may have taken place before what is commonly called puberty. Unhappily—as is known to every teacher of children—this vice is found at a very early age, an age much below that of any boy to whom Mr. Leadbeater spoke. This statement of his—sufficient to all of us who know him—is thoroughly borne out by the fact that most of the boys who were much in his company had never heard of any such advice being given. His usual habit was to speak to the boy of the danger of both solitary and associated vice, to advise non-stimulating diet, exercise, and the turning of thought away from subjects connected with sex—advice on the lines borne witness to by a lad who was much with him, in a brave letter to the Vahan. This was Mr. Leadbeater's ordinary advice, as it is the advice of all of us.

(2) This Mr. Leadbeater positively denied before the Advisory Committee, and there is not a shred of evidence to support the charge. He said: "The interlineation in writing giving a statement by the mother as to interval is untrue. The original interval was a week, and then it was lengthened to ten days, then a fortnight, and so on."

I ask the members of the Theosophical Society to consider whether this simple explanation is not more consonant with the character of the

great teacher who has lived among them for twenty-four years, than the lurid picture of the monster of sexual vice painted by the inflamed fancy of a few Americans and English? It must be remembered that every effort has been made to construct personal charges against him, without avail.

I have had in my possession for nearly two years a letter from one of Mr. Leadbeater's most prominent enemies, addressed to a boy whom Mr. Leadbeater was said to have corrupted, in which (with many caressing words, himself using an expression stronger than that which has been taken, in Mr. Leadbeater's case, to imply impropriety) the writer tried to coax the boy into confessing criminal relations with Mr. Leadbeater, begging him not to show the letter to his father, and to destroy it when read. The lad, utterly ignorant of what was suggested, took the letter to his father, and the father indignantly sent a copy to me. I have also seen the original.

It is not true that this advice was given as theosophical or occult. On the contrary, Mr. Leadbeater has stated throughout that it was a purely physical matter, from his standpoint, and was given as a doctor gives advice to a patient, as a temporary expedient to avoid a worse danger, while lifting the boy out of vice into purity. Mr. Leadbeater agrees with me that the advice is dangerous when scattered broadcast—as has been done by his assailants—and from the very first he volunteered the promise never to give it again; but in the few special cases in which he gave it, he thought he had safeguarded it from the obvious danger.

Much has been made of a "cipher letter." The use of the 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 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.

There is no doubt that the sex problem is in the air, and it may be, as Dr. Van Hook thinks, that that problem must be discussed in the Theosophical Society, as it is being discussed by sociologists, doctors and teachers outside. It can, however, only be decently and usefully discussed by mature men and women, possessed of physiological and pathological knowledge and of experience of the darker side of life. On the moral question we are all at one; it is the method of dealing with dan-

gerous physiological conditions which is under debate. Personally I think—basing the view on well-known physiological facts—that as every secretory gland is readily stimulated by thought, and without stimulation does not work to excess, the occupation of the mind along healthy lines will generally avoid dangerous excess, and will preserve in the body the vital elements necessary for the continuance of youth and strength. Dr. Van Hook's medical experience is, of course, enormously wider than my own, but many doctors hold the view expressed by me that nature may, in normal cases, be left to give any necessary relief. But this does not touch Mr. Leadbeater's effort to help boys through a difficult period by counsel often given by Catholic priests under similar circumstances, and given by himself when a priest of the English Church. Mr. Mead has lately stated, in the pages of the Theosophical Review, that the facts of sex should be explained to boys and girls, so as to avoid the dangers to which they are exposed by hearing the coarse talk of evil-minded servants or vicious comrades. I agree with him on this, but he will be a bold man who ventures to give such instruction, in the face of the hideous misconception with which Mr. Leadbeater has been met. The giving by an elder of a scientific and common sense explanation would be incredible to a society which can only regard sex through an atmosphere of prudery or vice. In all speech thereon a vicious purpose would be taken for granted.

With regard to the preamble of the resolution condemning Dr. Van Hook, I am bound to say that it is based on a misrepresentation. Dr. Van Hook does not say that any "corrupting practices . . . are the high doctrine of Theosophy and the 'precursor of its introduction into the thought of the outerworld'"; he says that certain habits, characterized a few lines lower as "this degrading practice," "could not be instantly interrupted by unspiritualized boys. What more natural *than that he should recommend that the practice be curbed?* And who knows how many boys, taking this advice from Mr. Leadbeater, *have not been gradually weaned away from their vice and brought to entire cleanness of life?*" (Italics are mine.) He then speaks of other boys who had not yet fallen into vice, but who were surrounded by dangerous thought-forms, as already mentioned above. Dr. Van Hook, after this, says that "the introduction of this question"—obviously the question of how to deal with boys addicted to vice or on the brink of it, alluded to on the preceding page as a "problem" known to "every woman school teacher dealing with children"—"into the thought of the Theosophical world is but the precursor of its introduction into the thought of the outer world." It is a proof of the danger of introducing an important resolution without notice, and of inflaming the listeners with a garbled account of a paper which they had not read, although they were called on to vote its condemnation, that such a misrepresentation should have been imposed on the Convention.

The further statement that Dr. Van Hook has said that his letter was "dictated verbatim by one of the Masters" suggests, though it does not say, that Dr. Van Hook had made this statement publicly. It would, per-

haps, have been fairer to point out that Dr. Van Hook had said this privately, with a request that it should not be published, and that it was promptly published by the person to whom he privately wrote it. On this, as President, I follow the decision laid down by the General Council on July 7th, 1894, in the case of Mr. W. Q. Judge. Mr. Judge was charged with certain offenses "with respect to the misuse of the Mahātmās' names and handwriting"; Mr. Judge contended that he, as Vice-President, could not be tried on such a matter; the Council, on the motion of Messrs. Keightley and Mead, decided that the point was well taken. The Judicial Committee, on July 10th, followed this decision, and apart from the question of his office, it further declared that they could not consider a charge which involved declaration on their part as to the existence or non-existence of Mahātmās, as "it would be a violation of the spirit of neutrality and the unsectarian nature and constitution of the Society." The President-Founder further declared: "The authoritative and dogmatic value of statements as to the existence of Mahātmās, their relation with and messages to private persons, or through them to third parties, the Society or the general public, is denied; all such statements, messages or teachings are to be taken at their intrinsic value and the recipients left to form and declare, if they choose, their own opinions with respect to the genuineness; the Society, as a body, maintaining its constitutional neutrality in the premises." Until those decisions of the General Council, the Judicial Committee of 1894, and the President-Founder are annulled, I am bound by them, and cannot officially, nor can the General Council, express any opinion on the origin of Dr. Van Hook's "Open Letter." By parity of reasoning, no Sectional Council should express any opinion on such a matter. Dr. Van Hook is perfectly free to assert publicly—though he has not done so—that the "Open Letter" was dictated verbatim by one of the Masters, and any other member is equally free to deny it.

This is apart from the undesirable nature of the precedent set by a Sectional Convention in its condemnation of the chief officer of another Section; every General Secretary is amenable to his own Section primarily, and this hasty setting aside of a dangerous precedent is another proof of the un wisdom of springing on an official body an important resolution without notice. While technically accepting this resolution as from "the British Section in Convention assembled," I cannot but know that it is only the individual opinion of thirty-eight persons, unshared in by another twenty-six. It is not the deliberate opinion of the Section.

As regards the main problem:

The Theosophical Society, as a whole, cannot be committed to any special solution of this problem, and its members must be left free. Dr. Van Hook, a medical man of high repute and for many years a university professor, has as much right to his view, without being charged with supporting solitary vice, as his assailants have a right to theirs, without being charged with favoring prostitution. Both accusations are equally foul and equally unjust, and people who fling them about are *ipso facto* disqualified from being judges. These difficult and delicate

questions of sex cannot be efficiently, or even decently, discussed in open conventions, in which young people are present. The conclusions arrived at under such conditions are inevitably those of passion, not of reason. We are all at one in condemning vicious practices, solitary or associated, and in desiring to rescue the young who have fallen into either form of vice. There is no approval of vice anywhere within the Theosophical Society; there is therefore no need for the Society to repudiate pernicious teaching on this matter any more than to repudiate assassination. Mr. Leadbeater and myself labor as earnestly to help others to pure and noble living as do Mr. Sinnett, Mr. Mead, and their co-signatories, and there should be room enough in the Society we all love for us as well as for them.

Mr. Leadbeater resigned two and a half years ago in the vain attempt to save the Society from this dissension; he does not ask to return. I am not at liberty to resign, being where I am by my Master's order, nor am I at liberty to ask him again to take his place within the Theosophical Society without a vote of the Theosophical Society. If the Theosophical Society wishes to undo the wrong done to him, it is for the Convention of each Section to ask me to invite his return, and I will rejoice to do so. Further, in every way that I can, outside official membership, I will welcome his co-operation, show him honor, and stand beside him. If the Theosophical Society disapprove of this, and if a two-thirds majority of members of the whole Theosophical Society demand my resignation because of this, I will ask my Master's permission to resign. If not, is it not time to cease from warring against chimeras, and to devote ourselves wholly to the work? The trouble is confined to a small number of American and a considerable number of British members: can they not feel that they have done their duty by two years and a half of protest, and not endeavor to coerce the remainder of the Society into a continual turmoil? The vast majority of you affirmed last year that you regarded me as the President chosen by the Masters to steer what They have called "our Theosophical ship." In Their name I call on all, who are loyal to Them and to Their choice, to work for Them, each in his own way, but in charity with all.

Your faithful servant,

ANNIE BESANT,

President of the Theosophical Society.

P. S.—Since the above was written, Dr. Van Hook has been re-elected as General Secretary, his Section's answer to the British attack on him. In answer to a letter from England, he has repudiated the misrepresentation of his paper, and has made a statement similar to that made by me above, on pages 9 and 10. No unprejudiced person can read his paper in any other sense.

I am glad to take this opportunity of rebutting a statement widely circulated, but utterly untrue, that Mr. Leadbeater "deceived" me in his statement of the case of Benares. Neither then, nor at any other time, has he said anything to me which has deviated from truth in any way. I have utter confidence in his candor.