

## MRS. BESANT AS PRESIDENT, T.S.

THE taking of the office of President by Mrs. Besant was under somewhat stormy conditions. The message which Colonel Olcott sent to the Sections, concerning the appearance to him of the two Masters, and Their appointing Mrs. Besant to succeed him, was accepted by most Theosophists with reverence, but a minority insisted that Colonel Olcott was deluded. In an unofficial communication to the Sections, regarding the appearance of the Masters, he stated that he "appointed" Mrs. Besant to succeed him. He had in reality under the Constitution only the right to "nominate," not to "appoint," and in his official communication to the Sections he used the right word. But his use of the word "appoint," in his unofficial letter to the General Secretaries, gave an opportunity to those who desired to oppose Mrs. Besant. The chief reason for the opposition was her assertion that she believed in the purity of Mr. Leadbeater's life, while she totally dissented from the advice which he had given. However, immediately on Colonel Olcott's death, Mr. A. P. Sinnett, the Vice-President of the T. S., assumed charge as temporary President, till the voting was over. On July 6, 1907, Mrs. Besant was duly declared elected President by an overwhelming majority.

A new era now began, because Mrs. Besant was different from the President-Founder in having a conscious link with her Master. She had promised H. P. B. never to hesitate to state openly that she was a disciple of the Master who was the Guru of H. P. B. "Keep the link unbroken," was H. P. B.'s charge to her. She utilised the opportunities which this inner link



FIG. 170  
MRS. ANNIE BESANT

gave her to develop the work of the Movement. While she was scrupulously careful in no way to infringe any article of the Constitution, yet since the Constitution in no way limited the individuality of any official of the Society, Mrs. Besant spoke openly of her occult relation to her Master, and how at all costs she would carry out whatever orders He gave. Naturally such a strong personality as that of the new President roused opposition in some, and this happened not only when she became President, but has continued throughout all the years that she has held that office. On the other hand, the vast majority of members were profoundly grateful to her for the lead which she gave them in making Theosophy practical. In the time of Colonel Olcott, the interests of members had largely been focussed in the development of religious and philosophical ideas, and very little work was done of a practical kind to apply those ideas to social problems. It is quite true that Colonel Olcott had from the commencement thrown himself with vigour into reviving the religious spirit of the Buddhists of Ceylon. He had also begun a most philanthropic work for the uplift of the "untouchables" of Madras in his "Olcott Panchama Free Schools". But except for these two lines of activities, he had not fostered any others among the members. Mrs. Besant, however, at once insisted upon making Theosophy practical, that is, in inspiring members to utilise their Theosophical knowledge in action for reform. She urged members to go out into various fields of activities—religious, social, philanthropic—to "theosophise" them. The many lines of activities which the members gradually took up under her leadership are now grouped under the Theosophical Order of Service.

The President of the T.S. is given the right under the Constitution to appoint the Vice-President, but the appointment is valid only after endorsement by the General Council. Mrs. Besant was about to reappoint Mr. Sinnett as Vice-President, when she decided that certain statements which he made, with regard to

the relation of H. P. B. to the Society, made such a divergence of views between President and Vice-President as would make co-operation between them impossible. She therefore appointed as Vice-President a distinguished Indian, Sir S. Subramania Aiyar, K.C.I.E., LL. D. (Fig. 171), late a Judge of the High Court of Madras, and a past Vice-Chancellor of the University of Madras.

In 1908, as the result of representations from many



FIG. 171

SIR S. SUBRAMANIA AIYAR  
Vice-President, 1907--1911

Sections, the members of the General Council were invited by the President to review the evidence in the Leadbeater case, and to consider whether on those facts there was any reason why Mr. Leadbeater should not re-enter the Society. The Council voted that Mr. Leadbeater be invited to resume his membership. He did so duly, and on the invitation of the President came next year to reside at Adyar, where he began continuous writing and lecturing. His contributions to Theosophy at this time are published in the works *Inner Life*, *Hidden*

*Side of Things*, and in collaboration with Mrs. Besant *Man: Whence, How and Whither*. In this year, Mr. Sinnett resigned from the Society, and organised a new body, the "Eleusinian Society". Mr. G. R. S. Mead also, who had very ably contributed to Theosophical literature, resigned, and with some friends organised the "Quest Society".

It was in the Convention Report of the previous year that, for the first time, there occurs the phrase "Subsidiary Activities". From 1881, the Buddhist T. S. in Ceylon, which did not proclaim Theosophy but only fostered Buddhist education, had reported each year to Convention. After the

founding of the Central Hindu College, similar reports of work were presented to Convention. From 1904 onwards, the official reports from the Sections of the T. S. were separated from the reports of "subsidiary activities". Steadily the number of such subsidiary activities has grown, till to-day there are few lines of philanthropic and reform activities in which the members of the Society do not engage, in order to "theosophise" them.

Several times since, the same problem has arisen, and a certain number have always objected that others should take up subsidiary activities which they could not themselves endorse. Always the cry of the minority has been that the Society's neutrality is being infringed, and that its broad platform is being narrowed by a group of enthusiasts. Such an occasion arose towards the end of 1910, for during this year the Order of the Star in the East was organised, with the object of proclaiming the near coming of a great World Teacher, and of organising adherents to this faith into a definite movement to prepare the world for His coming. This thought of the coming of a great Teacher had been mentioned in esoteric circles long before. But it was at the conclusion of a lecture in Madras on December 31, 1908, that Mrs. Besant first publicly announced the advent of a great World Teacher.