

## THE ORDER OF THE STAR IN THE EAST

WHEN the Order of the Star in the East was organised in Benares, an attack was made upon it by a number of Theosophists who claimed that, because of the prominence in Theosophical circles of the founding members of the Order, the whole Theosophical Society was being committed to an idea which was no part of the Society's work. They protested that all Theosophists were being forced to accept new teachings, whether they were willing to believe them or not. A little colouring was lent to this criticism by the unwise enthusiasm of a few, who did not make sufficient allowance for the natural scepticism of those who could not accept the idea of the coming of a World Teacher. India especially was deeply affected by this strife, though it was only a small minority among the Indian members who believed that the Society was in jeopardy, because of the activities of the Order of the Star in the East.

But just as any fears which Christian Theosophists might have had in the eighties that the Founders were committing the Society to Buddhism, were dissipated in the natural course of events, and just as the fears that Mrs. Besant was preaching Hinduism through the Society, or that Co-Masons were dominating it, were found to be without foundation, so too time has proved the same with regard to the activities of the Order of the Star in the East. While that organisation has grown, it has in no way interfered with the development of the T.S. The Society has such a universal philosophy and such a wide platform, that all kinds of organisations and creeds can work under

its ægis, without in any way limiting the illimitable ideals and basis of the Society.

Inseparable from this disturbance over the commencement of the Order of the Star in the East, is another which took place in India. This was an attack on Mrs. Besant by some Hindus representing Hindu orthodoxy, aided in their attack by those Theosophists who were violent in their antipathy to the Order. The Head of this Order was in 1909 a boy, and Mrs. Besant had been given by the father the care of training and educating J. Krishnamurti and his younger brother Nityananda. She had called Mr. C. W. Leadbeater to assist her in the task.



FIG. 178

J. KRISHNAMURTI IN 1911

This gave a target for the revival of the old attacks against Mr. Leadbeater. The father was well-meaning but weak, and especially sensitive to any criticism of his neighbours. As his son was now under unorthodox influences and had given up caste limitations, the enemies of Theosophy worked upon the father and stirred him up to resentment. No one could question that the boys were in every way better

looked after and trained, under Mrs. Besant's care, than they had been at home since their mother's death, while at school they were cruelly beaten in the usual brutal way, so that school was a terror to them; but all this weighed little with the father, when he felt the pressure of orthodox caste opinion. Finally in 1912, he brought a suit against Mrs. Besant, claiming that young Krishnamurti and his brother should be handed back to him. To this both the boys strenuously objected, and they stood affectionately and loyally by Mrs. Besant and Mr. Leadbeater. The old charges against Mr. Leadbeater were revived, with additional ones concocted in order to further the plans to thrust the two boys again into the evil conditions from which they had been rescued by Mrs. Besant. Both the boys had been to England with her in 1910, and had gained a glimpse not only of happier possibilities of life, but also, for the first time since the death of their mother, they knew what it was to be surrounded by loving friends and comrades. Mrs. Besant therefore refused the request of the father, that the boys should be returned to him.

It was on this point, and this point only, that the plaintiff won his case, the Court holding that a father could not divest himself of his right to the custody of his children. The Judge found against the plaintiff on the charges he made; the Judge characterised his evidence as "not to be relied on". He had stated that he heard of the occurrence in 1910, and if that were true, he left his sons in the company of a man whom he supposed had "just committed a disgusting crime upon one of them". His conduct showed that he thought "only a violation of caste rules" had occurred. He did not mention the charges made "when he raised the question of this separation" in 1912. "The plaintiff's evidence is not reliable"; "he has, in my opinion, attempted to strengthen his case with lies"; "the alleged acts were not committed". These perjuries, however, did not, in the opinion of the learned

Judge, render him unfit "to be the guardian" of the boys, so Mrs. Besant was ordered to hand them over to the father, but they were made wards of Court. On account of his false charges, the father was ordered to pay the costs of the suit. The Judge very improperly stated that he considered that Mr. Leadbeater's opinions rendered him unfit to be a tutor of boys. If he is still alive, he must be astonished to know that those opinions are now publicly discussed without any suggestion that they are "immoral". The Appeal Court confirmed the decision of the original Court, but threw all the costs on Mrs. Besant. Sure of the justice of her case, Mrs. Besant appealed to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, which considered the welfare of the sons as more important than the supposed rights of the father, and the case was won on her own brief.

Before the suit of the father could be begun, Mrs. Besant had sent the boys to England to continue their education. By the judgment of the Court, the two minor boys had been made wards of Court, and it decreed that Mrs. Besant should produce them. As the two boys refused to return to the father, Mrs. Besant was in the situation of being ordered by the Court to do what was utterly impossible. Finally, as just said, Mrs. Besant appealed to the Privy Council in London. When the case came before the Privy Council, the two boys were for the first time represented by their own advocate, and they made their representations direct, and gave reasons why they did not desire to return to their father. The judgment of the Privy Council laid down for the first time for India what is the law in England, that where minors are at an age of discretion, they must be represented in all matters vitally affecting them. The Privy Council decided that, having failed to do so on this most important point, the judgment of the lower Courts in India must be set aside. This brought the whole trouble to an end, but left the position as between Mrs. Besant and the father exactly as it was at the beginning. The appeal being in her

favour, she was given costs against the father. But as the father was a poor man, and as he had been supplied with funds for his suit by the enemies of the T. S., Mrs. Besant refrained from pressing the matter of the costs awarded to her, and did not even claim the return of the costs paid to the father by her on the award of the High Court in its original and appeal decisions.

During this troublous period, the enemies of Theosophy in Madras stirred up various attacks in the papers of an outrageous character against Mrs. Besant. Because she had refused to credit all the stories of immorality circulated about Mr. Leadbeater, her enemies who desired to humiliate her levelled a charge against her, that she herself advocated the particular solution of the sex problem, which had been suggested by Mr. Leadbeater in the events of 1906. In order to save the good name of the Theosophical Headquarters at Adyar from the scandalous rumours which were being circulated, Mrs. Besant brought cases for defamation in the Police Courts. But so hostile was Madras then to the Theosophical Society, that the magistrates allied themselves with the public opinion of the city, and refused to grant her relief. But these cases in the Courts drew a great deal of attention to the Theosophical Society, and those Indians who were sufficiently unorthodox as to caste matters, or had an enquiring turn of mind, gained for the first time a great deal of knowledge as to what the Theosophical Society stood for. The publicity which the Society gained, though it was based upon utterly untrue charges, yet brought to the Society in India a larger number of members at this time than at any time previous.