CHARLES WEBSTER LEADBETTER 1854-1934

A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY

by

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Volume I

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CHARLES WEBSTER LEADBEATER, 1854-1934

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Introduction

You don't know me; you never knew my heart. No one knows my history. I cannot tell it; I shall never undertake it. I don't blame anyone for not believing my history. If I had not experienced what I have, I could not have believed it myself.

So the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith's (1805-1844) words at a funeral oration in 1844 are quoted in his biography by Fawn M. Brodie. They might have been spoken by Charles Webster Leadbeater (1854-1934), for he also sought to keep his history closed to outside scrutiny, and proclaimed such a fantastic account of his life experiences that others might have been excused for not believing it.

Brodie comments:

Since that moment of candour at least three-score writers have taken up the gauntlet. Many have abused [Smith]; some have deified him; a few have tried their hands at clinical diagnosis. All have...
insisted, either directly or by implication, that they knew his story. But the results have been fantastically dissimilar. [2]

And she concludes:

The reason for these disparate opinions is by no means a lack of biographical data, for Joseph Smith dared to found a new religion in the age of printing. When he said "Thus saith the Lord!" the words were copied down by secretaries and congealed for ever in print. There are few men, however, who have written so much and told so little about themselves. [3]

The same can be said for Leadbeater, although he has lacked a biographer, except for the writers of brief journal articles, until the author's The Elder Brother in 1982. But he provoked startlingly contrary opinions, abuse, deification, and analysis. His words are recorded in many volumes, and his new religion was not so much founded in an age of printing, as dependent upon printing for its promulgation.
The standard portrait of Charles Webster Leadbeater shows an elderly gentleman with sparkling eyes, and a dignified face, the barest hint of a smile, and a patriarchal beard. He is sitting on what appears to be a throne, a large ring prominently displayed on his right hand, and a jewelled cross suspended on his chest. Upon closer examination one might notice the gnarled knuckles and distorted fingers characteristic of arthritis. His expression is placid, the forehead free from wrinkles. The same dignified gaze is to be found in almost every formal portrait of him; the face, it has been commented, seems like a mask, revealing nothing of the man behind it except his ability to remain untouched by the external world.

Leadbeater was a man who made the most startling claims for himself, and made them in a very matter-of-fact way. [4] He declared that he had penetrated the depths of the atom by his psychic powers, discovered the ultimate unit of matter whilst sitting in a park on the Finchley Road in London, and had psychically extracted individual atoms of various elements from the showcases in the Dresden Museum whilst he reclined several miles away. He also claimed to have sent sea spirits to dig out atoms of another element from the mines of Sabaranganuwa in Ceylon while he lay in his bed in Madras in India.[5] He claimed to have explored most of the planets in the Solar System, while his body
remained on earth, and described their climates and inhabitants in some detail. [6] He claimed to be in regular communication with the Powers which govern the earth from the Inner Planes, the Masters or Mahatmas, the Supermen who constitute the Occult Hierarchy of this planet. And, so he said, he conducted parties of pupils to the secret places in Tibet where these same Masters resided, while the bodies of both the pupils and their guide slept securely in their beds.[7]

From the lowliest member of the Inner Government of the World, with whose bureaucratic structure he was completely familiar, to the Highest he claimed a personal acquaintance. Indeed, as he told an incredulous judge in the Madras High Court, he had seen the Solar Logos, who is God as far as this planet is concerned, in human form, and had conversed with him.

Thus he claimed to have ranged from the microscopic depths of the atom and the molecule, to the macroscopic vastness of the solar system and beyond. The history of man and the earth held few secrets from him. He claimed to have followed human evolution with his clairvoyant gaze, tracing it from its origins on this planet, through man's emergence from animal form, even locating the precise moment at which human individualization
occurred. From the akashic record, the memory of the Logos, Leadbeater claimed to have been able to trace the rise and fall of civilizations on earth from the earliest day until the present time, and even into the distant future. [8]

Leadbeater claimed to be able to see thoughts, and described them in detail to an artist who painted them. He claimed to be able to observe the occult constitution of man, and was a noted authority on chakras, kundalini, auras, and all those aspects of anatomy and physiology unseen and unknown by orthodox science. [9]

Death held no mysteries for him: he claimed to regularly assist the so-called dead in their after life states, conveying messages to and from them with no effort at all, and thereby providing great consolation to the loved ones remaining on this side of the veil. He claimed to have been to heaven and hell and purgatory, and enrolled a band of "Invisible Helpers" who took over from the angels the duties of caring for those who had died unhappily, or who refused to recognize that they were dead. [10]

He was given to speaking quite casually of conversations not only with the so-called dead, but with angels and archangels, with nature spirits and devas (Sanskrit: "heavenly ones"). He observed the consciousness of
rocks, and discovered one large rock in a New South Wales national park that had fallen in love with a young boy and enjoyed having him sit upon it.[11] Leadbeater claimed to have gathered water spirits from Sydney Harbour whilst crossing it by ferry, scooping them out of the harbour with a psychic sieve and sending them to attach themselves to the auras of those he knew to be unhappy or depressed.[12]

Leadbeater claimed to have observed the occult, or inner, side of almost everything: he knew precisely how and why the ceremonies of the Christian Church operated, and the exact process whereby transubstantiation - the changing of the bread and wine of the Eucharist into the Body and Blood of Christ - took place. He claimed to have observed it all, and described it all.[13] And he claimed to be able to take any unresolved mysteries to Christ himself for clarification. Leadbeater's compilations of clairvoyant discoveries provided details of the occult effects of ceremonies and eating meat, of jazz and large cities, of the elementals that attach themselves to drunks and the psychedelic pink and green clouds that swirl about as a result of Wagner's music.[14]

From the highest Power in the Solar System, to the evolution of man, the nature of matter and energy, the cause of cancer [15], life on Mercury, the after-death state
of someone's beloved Tom cat, the aura of a ship-wreck, to the real authorship of Shakespeare's plays, the validity of Anglican Orders [16], and the future evolution of life on earth - on all these subjects, and on a thousand more, Leadbeater wrote in his usual semi-scientific, almost mundane, style, much as though he was describing the plants in his garden, or meeting friends for tea. However exalted the perception, he described it in a prosaic, unexcited fashion.

Given the remarkable claims he made, it can readily be understood that his disciples held him in the highest awe and reverence, regarding him as the world's greatest occultist, psychic and seer, and, as Mrs Annie Besant, declared, "a man on the threshold of divinity". In 1925 one of his disciples, Dr Mary Rocke, said of him:

Messenger of the Gods might he well be called, standing as he does on the very threshold of the Super-Man, transmitter of Their Word, instrument of Their Will, Dispenser of Their Benefits. [17]

He was the chosen messenger of the Masters, to whom he led his pupils. He was the highest source of information on occultism, religion, and the mysteries of life, and his
books were held to be the final authorities in such matters.

The range of his writing and the extent of material that flowed from his prolific pen was vast. He wrote thirty-nine books, many of them very substantial - for example:

The Inner Life (2 vols) - 800 pages
The Science of the Sacraments - 600 pages
The Hidden Side of Things - 600 pages
The Other Side of Death - 500 pages
The Hidden Side of Christian Festivals - 500 pages
Glimpses of Masonic History - 400 pages
The Hidden Side of Freemasonry - 300 pages
The Masters and the Path - 300 pages
Clairvoyance - 200 pages
Man Visible and Invisible - 150 pages.

He also wrote some forty-five pamphlets and, for much of his life, five or six journal articles a week, not to mention a number of sermons, lectures and talks, plus an extensive correspondence with people all over the world who wrote seeking information on occult matters. In addition to his
own writings, he collaborated on eleven books and several pamphlets. Most of his writings are still in print, selling very well—in bookshops throughout the world, and not only in bookshops specializing in the occult, but in many general bookshops. His two most popular works, *The Chakras* and *Man Visible and Invisible*, had been printed and reprinted in various editions: in 1981 Quest Books in the United States reported that in their editions of these works alone there were 110,000 and 56,000 copies respectively in print. [18]

Leadbeater's subject matter ranged from Buddhist catechetics, pedagogy and Masonic history, to the origins of Christianity, the causes of war and the nature of the soul; from life after death, reincarnation, heaven and hell, to the evolution of man, the unseen effects of sunlight and the value of vegetarianism, and the occult side of just about everything.

The modern occult movement owes more to Leadbeater than to anyone else. [19] In almost all modern works on occultism there are clear traces of his influences, often unacknowledged. [20] His concepts and ideas, his popularizing of Theosophical terms and principles, run throughout all modern works in the area. The idea of reincarnation, and of investigations into life before birth
as much as life after death, ideas of "reincarnational therapy" and examinations of the akashic records derive directly from Leadbeater's work. The concept of the aura, the bio-energetic field surrounding the human body, which is currently attracting some serious scientific attention, was first made popular by his writings, and first extensively described by his accounts of his clairvoyant investigations [21]

The modern notion of "vibrations", and the psychic atmosphere of places, first appeared in its popular form in his writings, as, for the West, did the idea of vegetarianism [22], a return to nature, long hair and bare feet in the spiritual life. The young "New Age" people in their brightly coloured, loose cotton clothes, with bare feet and long hair, following a vegetarian diet, meditating and using mantras, concerned with vibrations and their auras, eager to make contact with the Masters of the East, and find Initiation, follow a lifestyle of which he not only approved, but of which he was the first popular advocate and publicist. [23] His influence has extended even into modern rock culture; amongst those influenced by him was Elvis Presley, whose favourite reading included Leadbeater's The Inner Life, from which he often read aloud before going on stage to perform. [24]
The concept of the Occult Hierarchy, centred at the mythical city of Shamballa in the Gobi desert, with its Masters and progressive Initiations, appeared first in his writings, and was first publicized by him. Whether or not such concepts originated in the works of Helena Blavatsky, whom Leadbeater claimed as his occult teacher, matters little: her works remain obscure and largely unread outside a select circle. Leadbeater's books made the concepts popular and reached a wide reading public. They also reached other authors, who took the ideas up, amended them a little, and reproduced them as their own. [25] This is most clearly the case with the terms Leadbeater took from eastern religions: words like karma, chakra, chela, mahatma, atma, buddhi, manas, yoga, mantra, kundalini, and Maitreya, and concepts like the Wesak Festival, Shamballa and initiation, which he took from Buddhist or Hindu traditions, and misinterpreted or reinterpreted to suit his own needs. These have generally continued to be used in modern occult writings in the sense in which he used them, regardless of their original meanings.

Leadbeater's authority as the world's greatest occultist, psychic and seer was unquestioned by his disciples, including Mrs Annie Besant, during his lifetime or since. He was described as "one of the world's foremost scientists in spiritual research" and "a great physicist of
the spiritual worlds" [26]. He was hailed as "a giant among
men, a great teacher and light-bringer to mankind" [27], "a
great occultist, a seer, a sage, and a selfless servant of
the human race" [28]. He was acclaimed as the

Great Seer whose books have robbed death of its
terrors; Master-Scientist of Occultism, who
unveiled to the world the hidden side of life;
Lover of Humanity and Spiritual Teacher of tens of
thousands. [29]

He was "probably the greatest clairvoyant that ever lived"
[30] and "a man on the threshold of divinity" [31].

Yet for every enthusiastic disciple who hailed
him, there was a critic who denounced him. Even within the
Theosophical movement there were those who held, and still
hold, that he had perverted and corrupted Theosophy from its
original doctrines to his own misinterpretation of them, and
had, by various means, imposed that interpretation upon the
Theosophical Society and, indeed, the world, since his works
were well publicized and other presentations of Theosophy
largely ignored. At least two journals came into existence
solely to denounce him, and did so consistently for several
years, and several others made criticism of him a major part
of their work. The Canadian Theosophist, in whose columns he was frequently pilloried, described him thus:

This rollicking romancer has, by his own account, explored every world, plane, department, nook and cranny of the visible and invisible Universe, ancient, modern and future...He has frolicked with the fairies, fraternized with "invisible helpers" and other "astral entities" and hobnobbed with the Mahatmas...He is also a crony of the Logoi and the Manus; his recorded vision of the Seven Logoi sitting on the world 'lotus, and of the Manu "surrounded by His council of highly developed adepts" reminds me of the washerwoman who had a vision of the Holy Ghost and was thrilled with admiration as "the beautiful way his shirt-front was done up". [32]

And, in the same journal, the author of Leadbeater's obituary stated:

I saw the Theosophical Society laid in ruins by him - and one may almost say, by him alone. [33]

Not only was he condemned for perverting Theosophy and true occultism, but also for corrupting young
boys, being a sexual pervert, a tool of the Black Powers, if not a Black Magician himself. In Australia a Theosophical journal denounced him:

His psychopathic tendencies get him into trouble, but the dear devoted souls rally round him again and again, fighting heroically for a bad cause...He has a Rasputin-like influence over boys and old women who, when his vileness is exposed, shout "Judge not...be tolerant". [34]

And outside the Theosophical movement he was attacked by such occultists as Dion Fortune (i.e. Violet Firth, 1891–1946) who declared that he was a Black Magician employing sexual perversity for depraved occult ends [35], and Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) who, ironically, attacked him as a "senile sex pervert" and hinted that he was a Black Magician. [36] More recently, the controversial Indian teacher, Bhagwan Rajneesh (i.e. Rajneesh Chandra Mohan, 1931– ), has denounced Leadbeater both for his occultism and for his sexuality. [37]

Newspapers in Australia initiated campaigns against Leadbeater, alleging all manner of sexual perversions with his boy pupils, and encouraging the police to investigate, and prosecute, him, and the Minister for
Immigration to deport him. In London, John Bull said that he should be horse-whipped, and the New Statesman declared that no modern adventurer had built up such a police dossier. [38]

Yet Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930), creator of Sherlock Holmes and eminent spiritualist, who met Leadbeater in Sydney, was quite impressed, describing him as "venerable and picturesque", and the philosopher Count Hermann Keyserling (1880-1947), who met him in India in 1911, wrote:

I find his writings, of all publications of this kind, the most instructive, despite their often childish character. He is the only one who observes more or less scientifically, the only one who describes in simply straightforward language. Furthermore he is in his ordinary intellect not sufficiently gifted to invent what he claims to see, nor like Rudolph Steiner to elaborate it intellectually in such a way that it would be difficult to distinguish actual experience from accretions. Nevertheless I find again and again statements in his writings which are either probable in themselves or which answer to philosophical truths. What he perceives in his own
way (often without understanding it) is full of meaning. Therefore he must have observed actual phenomena. [39]

Some twenty years later Keyserling commented:

Leadbeater had genuine occult powers – infinitely more than Annie Besant – and it was quite true that he suddenly "saw" occult colour images of your character, a country or an event. But it was just like having a fine voice, or eyes of a particular colour. He was stupid, yet I liked him for his quaint mixture of occult gifts and an incredible naivety. His occultism was as genuine as his pomposity. [40]

Leadbeater’s relationship with Mrs Annie Besant was almost as widely discussed as his relationships with his bosom pupils. One of her biographers described him as "her astral Svengali" [41], and The Canadian Theosophist in its obituary of her declared:

She had been Svengalized, and for the most part was unaware of the wreck she was contributing to. [42]
It was suggested by various critics that Leadbeater kept Mrs Besant hypnotized, or under some bizarre form of astral "spell", and there is no question that he dominated her life virtually from the time he first met her. Mahatama Gandhi (1869-1948) declared:

I do not think that Mrs Besant is a hypocrite; she is credulous and she is duped by Leadbeater. When an Englishman suggested to me to read Leadbeater's *The Life After Death*, I flatly refused to do so as I had grown suspicious of him after reading his other writings. As to his humbug, I came to know of it later. [43]

George William Russell (1867-1935), better known as the poet "AE", who was influenced by Theosophy and magic in the tradition of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, had little regard for either Mrs Besant or Leadbeater. Of the former, he said she was "silly mystically if eloquent and golden-tongued otherwise", and that "having no spiritual insight of her own she had come under the evil influence of Leadbeater, who had hypnotized her till she saw whatever he wished". Russell's son recalled the poet saying: "Leadbeater is a bad man." [44]

One of Leadbeater's most vigorous Theosophical critics,
William Loftus Hare, declared that "for more than twenty years [Mrs Besant] was no more than an eloquent mouthpiece for her ineloquent colleague", and that "Without him Mrs Besant would never have made the errors from which she suffered so much disillusionment". [45]

Who was Charles Webster Leadbeater, this man acclaimed on the one hand as being "on the threshold of divinity", and denounced on the other as an evil sex pervert and Black Magician? What sort of man was he, and how he did he come to such an extraordinary position? Was there, as Mrs Besant declared, a conspiracy of malicious intrigue conducted against him under the influence of the Black Powers, or were the accusations against him simply true? And why has no biography of him appeared within the movements influenced by him where thousands of eager disciples would read it enthusiastically?

2. A Biography of Charles Webster Leadbeater

There are many mysteries in the life of Charles Websther Leadbeater, and the lack of biography is one of them. There were, during his lifetime and after his death, many calls for one to be written. George Arundale (1873-1945), one of his disciples, considering the occult relationship that existed between Leadbeater and Mrs Besant,
commented:

...when [Leadbeater's] biography comes to be written, and it should be written soon, it will be seen how deeply he penetrated into and permeated into her life, and was influenced by it, as she herself deeply penetrated into his and was influenced by it. [46]

This was written in 1939 when Arundale was President of the Theosophical Society, and had charge of its archives, including all Leadbeater's papers. Yet no biography appeared. Various Theosophical journals suggested that a "well balanced appraisal of C.W. Leadbeater's life and work" should be undertaken, and one suggested that this should be written "thoroughly and faimindedly from within the Theosophical Society". [47]

Others, more critical, called for a study of

the influence of the dominating personality of Leadbeater - a psychological problem which could be adequately treated only by a complete analysis of the voluminous material available. [48]

Some of his disciples, however, noted that
When appraising the life of an occultist, it is necessary to remember that much of that life must inevitably be hidden from public view, because it is private and personal; also that this concealment is deliberate, for there is a self-imposed discipline of silence. [49]

Yet the question of why no biography has appeared from those who have access to all the material a biographer could need remains a mystery - or remains a mystery until one comes to write such a biography.

This thesis is intended to provide a detailed critical biographical study of Charles Webster Leadbeater. It has been written on the basis of documentary sources, both published and unpublished, and of oral history. Given the amount of research required to provide a biographical study, and to solve the major "mysteries" of Leadbeater's life, the thesis does not attempt to provide a detailed analysis of the background to those movements within which Leadbeater was involved, or of the influence he exerted during or after his life. The former are generally adequately documented in published works; the latter are beyond the scope of this present work, and would extend its coverage to an unmanageable extent.
Uncovering material for the biography has posed major problems, not the least of them the fact that most of the documentary sources, and most of the individuals from whom oral history could be obtained, remain within movements committed to an idealized view of Leadbeater, to steadfastly perpetuating a traditional version of his life, and to protecting his reputation against what they consider to be unjustified attacks. To some extent, it was possible to gain access to what might be called "inside sources", and the sources used for this work will be discussed later in this chapter.

It can be assumed that most readers of this work will have no previous knowledge of Leadbeater, or most of the movements and people associated with him. Therefore, the biography is unfolded as clearly as possible, with the least possible intrusion of extraneous material. Extensive footnotes provide not only documentation of sources, but also additional material providing analysis and expansion on the text. The text itself is intended to present a detailed, comprehensive biography of Leadbeater, based on original research using, wherever possible, primary sources.

The final chapter gives special consideration to two aspects of Leadbeater's life. First, to the influence he
exerted on a diverse range of organizations and individuals, and second, to the major "mysteries" of his biography. In some cases the "mysteries" are, it is argued, "solved". In other cases, evidence is presented which suggests a solution, although it has not been possible to present a final resolution.

It would not be possible to provide more than a superficial and cursory summary of Leadbeater's teachings in anything less than a work of comparable size to this present one, and therefore no attempt had been made to do so. No serious analysis of Leadbeater's philosophy, theology or cosmology exists.

One of the most obvious questions arising from a study of Charles Webster Leadbeater is: why bother? what is the significance of this eccentric figure? how can a substantial study of him be justified? Leaving aside the obvious justification, which is the insight which such a study provides into charismatic religious leaders generally, there are four reasons why Leadbeater is significant:

1. his influence on Mrs Besant
2. his influence on Krishnamurti
3. his influence on Theosophy
4. his influence on later occultism.

His influence on Mrs Besant, as will be shown later in this work, was extraordinary. He was the dominating force in her life more or less from the time he first developed a friendship with her. Her work, occult and secular, came to be shaped by his influence. Of Mrs Besant's significance, little needs to be said. Her career was remarkable no less for the range of interests she pursued then for the intensity with which she pursued each in its turn. She has been the subject of popular and scholarly, critical and uncritical studies, of which the most detailed, and least popular amongst her followers, is Dr Nethercot's two volume study. [50] Dr Nethercot begins his work with the statement:

In 1885, before she was forty, Mrs Annie Besant was known all over the English-speaking world, and by many people on the Continent, as one of the most remarkable women of her day. [51]

If anything, her fame increased with the passing of the years. Some thirty years after her death, Nethercot commented:

It is now pertinent to ask what would have been
the difference to the world if Annie Besant had never lived. For one thing, the acceptance of women in English colleges would have been established somewhat later. For another, the acceptance of birth control as a respectable practice would also have been delayed. The campaign for granting women equal rights with men would have lost a valuable supporter. Her absence from the London School Board would have delayed the achievement of free public education for children of both sexes, and the principle of furnishing free meals at public expense to children whose parents could not afford them would have been postponed. The early Fabian Society would have impressed itself much more slowly on the public mind if the lustre of her name and fame as an orator in its cause had been lacking. As a female strike-leader and social reformer her services would have been greatly missed. Without her spectacular conversion from atheism and materialism to mysticism the anti-rationalistic movement toward the end of the nineteenth century would have lost a powerful force.[52]

And of her work in India Nethercot says:
But if India had followed the advice of her and her party in 1929 the country would probably have obtained Dominion Status seventeen or so years earlier than it did, it would probably have retained Pakistan, and there would have been no Kashmir problem. [53]

If her influence was extensive and powerful, the influence of Leadbeater upon her was equally so. But to her biographers, including Dr Nethercot, Leadbeater remained an incompletely explained factor in her life. [54] Leadbeater was, as it were, the missing piece in the jigsaw of Annie Besant's career after she joined the Theosophical Society. It may be too harsh to claim he was the puppet-master for whom she performed, but there can be no doubt that his influence determined the direction of her life and work.

The influence of Jiddhu Krishnamurti, even at the height of his career as teacher, has been much less than his "Amma", Mrs Besant. But he has been influential, and remains so, attracting considerable scholarly attention. The two volumes of bibliography of works by and about Krishnamurti are ample evidence of the interest in him. [55] A detailed study of his philosophy, incorporating most of a doctoral thesis on the subject submitted to the Department of Philosophy at Banaras Hindu University, was written in 1977
by R.K. Shringy. [56] But the influence and role of Leadbeater in the education and preparation of Krishnamurti has never been adequately considered, and, indeed, is avoided by Krishnamurti's modern day disciples.

Leadbeater's influence on the shape and development of the Theosophical Society cannot be underestimated, and much of this work will be devoted to describing the effects he had, directly or indirectly, on the Society. From the time of its foundation in 1875, the Society grew not only in its geographic spread and numbers of members, but, more significantly, in influence. It is not an exaggeration to say that from 1875 until 1906 the Society was remarkably - for its size - influential in art and literature, religion and philosophy, no less than in occultism and mysticism. As Campbell, in his study of the Theosophical Movement, noted:

The Theosophical movement spread around the world in its first century. In the process, it affected several hundred thousand people directly through their being members of various Theosophical groups. It also had a wider influence. At least several dozen spiritual groups and movements are offshoots of one of the three major groups or are dependent on the ideas of Theosophy or on the
milieu it helped to create. In addition, Theosophy has had a significant impact on cultural and political events in societies as diverse as India and Ireland, and on institutions as different as Ceylonese Buddhism and Western abstract art. [57]

Theosophy was influential in bringing eastern philosophy to the West, and in popularizing oriental ideas. It attracted many eminent thinkers, including the American inventor Thomas Edison (1847-1931), the French astronomer Camille Flammarion (1842-1925), the biologist Alfred Wallace (1823-1913) and the British scientist William Crookes (1832-1919). In the field of literature it included amongst its members William Yeats (1865-1939) and George Russell ("A.E.")(1867-1935), and in the arts Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) and Piet Mondrian (1872-1944). Theosophy has been attributed with a major influence in the Irish literary movement of the turn of the century. [58]

In the east, the Theosophical Society promoted a revival of oriental religion in the face of western missionaries. It was a primary influence in the revival of an almost extinct Buddhism in Ceylon [59], and promoted a renewed interest in Hinduism in India. In both places it established schools in which young people could receive a modern English education without the imposition of
missionary Christianity. Indians who had turned to the west in many cases found their interest in their traditional culture and religion awakened by contact with Theosophy: Mahatma Gandhi was but one of these. [60]

But, under Leadbeater's influence, the whole direction of the Theosophical Society, with its headquarters at Adyar, changed. The notable and learned figures departed, controversy and conflict came to dominate, and, although membership expanded, the Society moved from being a small esoteric movement of the intellectuals, to a movement of popular occultism which tended to actually repel intellectuals. [61]

Two of the most notable leaders of religious movements who broke from the Theosophical Society as a result of Leadbeater's influence were Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), founder of the Anthroposophical Society, and Alice Bailey (1880-1949), a prolific author on occult subjects, whose influence has been increasing since her death, especially in movements of young people concerned with ecology, peace and a new world order. [62]

The final area in which Leadbeater's influence and importance justify a study of him is the modern occult "revival". As will be suggested later in this work,
Leadbeater's influence on popularizing concepts and words has left an indelible mark on almost all contemporary occult literature, ideas and movements. In what was called the "occult revival" of the sixties and seventies, themes, words and concepts popularized by Leadbeater achieved a widespread circulation. Leadbeater's most popular works remain in print, and are available in many general and specialist bookshops throughout the world. [63]

For the study of unorthodox religious movement in Australia generally, and Sydney in particular, Leadbeater and the organizations associated with him are also of great interest. In the twenties Leadbeater was a figure of considerable public and media, not to mention police and clergy, interest. He was described in newspapers, denounced from pulpits, and watched by crowds who gathered outside his Sydney home in Mosman, or his cathedral in Redfern, to satisfy their curiosity about this eccentric and controversial figure. [64]

3. Sources

This thesis has its origins in the author's The Elder Brother. A Biography of C.W. Leadbeater, commissioned by Routledge and Kegan Paul in London in 1978, and published by them in May, 1982. Since the writing of that biography in
the first quarter of 1980, the author undertook detailed research extending that undertaken for the book, and made use of new primary sources, and collections which had not previously been consulted.

The research for this thesis continued on from where the work on the biography had ended, following up the many "mysteries" which had been unresolved, and pursuing the numerous research trails which had been uncovered. The publication of the book produced comments and reactions from a wide range of people throughout the world, and led to an extensive correspondence. This, in turn, led on to further research areas and new primary sources and material. The contacts developed as a result of the book were invaluable in undertaking research for the thesis.

The thesis is a substantially different work to the book although, since like the book it follows the outline of Leadbeater's life, it follows the same chronological structure, and necessarily includes the same material. It is, however, a much more detailed study, less impressionistic and more phenomenological. The published biography may be considered as the core of Leadbeater's biography, with the thesis as an extensive and detailed expansion and analysis of it.
Some background to the writing of the present work will be useful for the reader. The author's first contact with the Theosophical Society and the Liberal Catholic Church, both organizations profoundly influenced by, and presently deeply committed to the work of, Leadbeater, was in 1968 in Perth, Western Australia. He read through all the works of Leadbeater, and began collecting biographical material. This was continued in Sydney, 1975-6, when sources in the State Archives and the Mitchell Library were consulted. At this time, the author was also involved in research being undertaken within the Liberal Catholic Church for both audio-visual programmes on Leadbeater and his work, and on the editing of his writings, and those of his fellow Liberal Catholic Bishop, James Ingall Wedgwood, and therefore had access to some "inside sources".

In 1977, as part of work for a graduate Diploma in Library Studies at the Western Australian Institute of Technology, the author undertook a major research project on tracing sources on Leadbeater and the Liberal Catholic Church.

In 1978, while living in London, he prepared an outline for a biographical study of Leadbeater, on the basis of which Routledge and Kegan Paul commissioned The Elder Brother. During 1978-1979 he undertook detailed research in
London, and elsewhere in England and Europe, and, at the end of 1979, in India, before returning to Australia. The manuscript for The Elder Brother was written in Sydney between January and April, 1980, and was, once written, submitted to two authorities in the area for checking. One of these was Mary Lutyens, author of three volumes which provide vital background material for Leadbeater, and an authority on the history of the Theosophical movement in the first quarter of this century (for much of which she was actively involved in it) and on Jiddu Krishnamurti, who had been "discovered" by Leadbeater. [65] The other authority was John Cooper, a specialist on Theosophy and the history of the Theosophical Society in Australia, on which subject he is currently completing his MA thesis in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Sydney. Both Miss Lutyens and Mr Cooper provided extensive comments, annotations and additions to the manuscript. The final words manuscript of around 80,000 was finally published in May, 1982.

The Elder Brother received extensive reviews. The Times Literary Supplement devoted a page to the work with a detailed review by Arthur Calder-Marshall. [66] The eminent psychiatrist, Anthony Storr, commented in the (London) Sunday Times:
Gregory Tillett's scrupulously documented account should be read by all who are fascinated by the further reaches of human credulity. [67]

The English Roman Catholic historian, Fr F.H. Amphlett Micklewright, in the (London) Catholic Herald, said:

...a well-researched biography. Garnished with quotations from Leadbeater's own writings, it provides a remarkable insight into the movement in which Leadbeater was to become an international figure. [68] [7]

The Australian Roman Catholic historian, Fr Edmund Campion, said in The Bulletin:

This is a patient biography of a difficult subject who invites ridicule. A lesser writer would have given in to the temptation to mock. Instead, Tillett has written a good book about a notable Sydney eccentric. [69]

The American library magazine, Choice, noted:

This fascinating biography on Leadbeater's
"journey from obscurity in the Church of England to international acclaim and notoriety" reveals a thorough research corroborated by substantial documentation ... [Tillett's] clear, narrative style and sensitive, dispassionate tone indicate a sophisticated biographer. [70]

Those few reviews which appeared in journals published by movements with which Leadbeater had been associated agreed. Will Ross, an eminent lecturer for the Theosophical Society, in a review that was published both in the (London) *Theosophical Journal* and *Theosophy in Australia*:

Gregory Tillett has produced a biography, carefully researched and very readable....Tillett gives a fascinating picture of his subject, warts and all. [71]

Even the avalanche of hostile letters from members of movements with which Leadbeater had been associated failed to detect any significant errors in the work. The equally substantial quantity of letters offering favourable comments provided invaluable suggestions as to further areas for exploration and research, and indicated sources of additional material, all of which were followed up in subsequent research.
In January, 1980, the author enrolled in the Master of Arts (Honours) program in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Sydney, and began additional research into the life and work of Charles Leadbeater for a Master's thesis. At the end of 1980, at the recommendation of the Head of the Department of Religious Studies, Professor E.J. Sharpe, his candidature was transferred to a Doctorate of Philosophy, and was he awarded a Commonwealth Postgraduate Research Award.

Between 1981 and 1983 the author was enrolled as a full-time Doctoral candidate, and undertook additional detailed research. This included work in the Mitchell Library and the State Libraries of New South Wales and Victoria, in addition to the Australian National Library. Detailed work was also undertaken on a collection of material, especially relating to the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society, in the collection of John Cooper, whose collection of Theosophical journals was also used for a completed search of relevant publications. Research into the philosophical and religious thought of the period was undertaken in the library of the University of Sydney.

In 1982 the author made two overseas trips on which he undertook additional research in several previously
consulted collections, as well as new research in important collections in the United States of America. These included the Special Collection of Columbia University and the New York Public Library in New York, the library of the Theosophical Society International at Pasadena, and the archives of Point Loma Publications at San Diego. Additional research was undertaken in the British Library, the India Office Library and Archives, and other collections in England. The author also spent a week working with a major informant, Rex Henry, in Mijas, Spain.

In 1985 limited access was given to the archives of the Theosophical Society in Australia at North Sydney, from which the detailed statistics on membership of the Society (included as Appendix 4) were extracted. The sources used for this thesis include documentary and oral sources, published and unpublished sources, and "inside" and "outside" sources.

1. Published documentary sources

Published sources were consulted in a number of collections, including:

**Australia**

State Reference Library, Western Australia
State Reference Library, New South Wales
Library of the University of Sydney
Library of the University of New South Wales
Library of the University of Western Australia
Library of the University of Melbourne
Mitchell Library, Sydney
Library of the Theosophical Society, Perth
Library of the Theosophical Society, Sydney
Library of the Theosophical Society, Adelaide
Library of the Theosophical Society, Melbourne
Library of the Liberal Catholic Church, Sydney
Library of Grand Lodge of Freemasonry, Sydney
Archives of the Theosophical Society, Sydney

England

Central Reference Library, London
The British Library (Reference Division)
The British Library (Manuscript Division)
The British Library (Newspaper Division)
Library of the University of London
Library of the Warburg Institute, University of London
Library of the Theosophical Society, London
Library of the United Lodge of Theosophists, London
Library and Archives of Lambeth Palace, London
Library and Archives of the India Office, London
Library and Archives of the Catholic Apostolic Church, London
Library of the Order of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masonry for Men and Women, London
Stockport Public Library
Bramshott Public Library

France
Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

America
New York Public Library, New York
Library of Columbia University, New York
Library of the Theosophical Society
Library and Archives, Point Loma Publications, San Diego
Library of the University of California at San Diego

India
Archives of the Theosophical Society, Adyar
Adyar Library and Research Centre, Adyar
Library of the United Lodge of Theosophists,
Bombay

Published works fall into several major categories:

a. By Leadbeater

All published works of Leadbeater have been examined, including books, pamphlets and journal articles. Initially a detailed bibliographic search was undertaken to trace all monographs, and then to trace as many journal articles as possible. This involved searches of the publications of all the organizations with which Leadbeater was associated, including the Theosophical Society, its Esoteric Section, the Liberal Catholic Church, Co-Masonry, the Order of the Star in the East, the Order of the Round Table, and a number of smaller organizations. All major Theosophical journals in the English language were searched for the years from the time Leadbeater joined the Society until the present.

The author obtained copies of all Leadbeater's books (in many cases in different editions) and consulted most editions of all of them, noting differences between editions where these occurred. He also obtained copies of all the works for which Leadbeater was joint author, and
almost all of Leadbeater's pamphlets. All the monographs, and the major journal articles, are included in the bibliography.

The major collections in which Leadbeater's published works have been found are the libraries of the Theosophical Society at Adyar in India, London in England, and Perth and Sydney in Australia, together with the British Library in London. The Mitchell Library in Sydney, and the Library and Archives of the India Office in London include some rare works.

b. About Leadbeater

Although no full biography of Leadbeater had been published until The Elder Brother, there was a number of brief biographical outlines, mainly journal articles or entries in Theosophical directories. The most important of these are discussed in chapter 2, and include articles by Mrs Besant.

In 1980, the St Alban Press, official publisher for the Liberal Catholic Church, published Charles Webster Leadbeater. A Biography by Hugh Shearmarke, a Liberal Catholic priest and eminent Theosophical writer, who is well-known within the Theosophical Society as an apologist for
Leadbeater's interpretation of Theosophy. [72] This small booklet – of 39 pages – appears to have been produced in anticipation of The Elder Brother, and presented (without acknowledgement) some of the material discovered in research for that work which had been made available to the President of the Theosophical Society in 1979.

It is necessary to consider the ways in which Shearman has dealt with the problems inherent in the "orthodox" biography of Leadbeater perpetuated within the Theosophical movement, revealing as it does the means whereby the inheritors of a "myth" endeavour to reconcile the myth, or "sacred biography", with the seemingly incontrovertible facts of history. Bishop James Burton, formerly Regionary Bishop of the Liberal Catholic Church in Great Britain, noted in his foreword to Shearman's booklet:

Today some would-be biographers...go out of their way to over-emphasize (to the partial exclusion of the positive achievements of their subjects) any eccentricities, presumably to engage the attention of the casual reader. [73]

He declared Shearman's work to be "an example of the way in which an outline biography should be presented. It is objective, informative, balanced."
Shearman begins by dealing with some of the inconsistencies in the traditional biography of his subject. For example, Leadbeater declared that he had been born on February 17, 1847, but his birth certificate shows February 16, 1854. Shearman comments:

Circumstances sometimes make errors of this nature more easy to accept than to correct, but this one caused various accounts of his career to convey the impression that at each stage of his life he was seven years older than he actually was. [74]

It is difficult to imagine what the "Circumstances" might have been which could lead to a seven year error in birthdate. But Shearman goes on to imply that this false information was given (a) only occasionally and infrequently, (b) by people other than Leadbeater himself, and (c) by an "impression". These suggestions are patently false. As will be seen in chapter 2, Leadbeater himself repeatedly gave, and failed to correct others when they gave, a wholly false account of his early life. Similarly, Shearman avoids the difficulty of Leadbeater's story of a brother (for whom there is no evidence) by saying, in passing, "He seems to have been an only child". [75]. This is the same method he uses to deal with claims of an Oxford
or Cambridge education.

When dealing with the better documented period of Leadbeater's life—after he joined the Theosophical Society—Shearman tends to reinterpret history, glossing over controversial periods (for example, the 1906 "troubles" considered in chapter 10), or simply misrepresenting the facts. Two examples will suffice to show his method. The discovery of Krishnamurti and his presentation to the world as the future Vehicle for the World Teacher, or the Christ, are presented in the following way:

She [Mrs Besant] said that, if he proved fit for it, Krishnamurti would be the "vehicle" through which the "World Teacher", the Master of the new revelation of spiritual truth, would speak to the world. [76]

But Mrs Besant and Leadbeater both declared—privately and publicly—that Krishnamurti was to be the Vehicle for the Coming, and indeed was the Vehicle on several important occasions. Shearman seeks to move the responsibility from Mrs Besant to Leadbeater, when, in fact, Mrs Besant tended merely to echo Leadbeater's statements in such matters.

A second instance of Shearman's dishonest method
is found in his reference to Helena Blavatsky as Leadbeater's "teacher". [77] His passing reference to this "fact" implies that it is simply a fact. But there has been a heated debate in Theosophical circles over many years as to Leadbeater's relationship with Blavatsky, and the evidence is strongly against Leadbeater's claim to have had Blavatsky as his teacher.

Shearman's brief biography was also included at the beginning of a previously unpublished work by Leadbeater, published under the title, *The Christian Gnosis*, by the St Alban Press, Sydney, in 1983. [78]

The President of the Theosophical Society in America, Mrs Dora Kunz, who had been a pupil of Leadbeater when she was a girl, told the author at Adyar in December, 1979, that the Society's publishing house in America had received a manuscript biography of Leadbeater from an American Theosophist, but had "put it on ice" when they heard that *The Elder Brother* was to be published.

c. *By or about Leadbeater's Associates*

The author has examined all the published works of Leadbeater's major associates - Helena Blavatsky, Annie Besant, George Arundale, Jinarajadasa, Krishnamurti, James
Wedgwood, Ernest Wood — and most of those of lesser associates. He has gathered all the available biographical material on all the leading figures in the Theosophical movement, from both published and unpublished sources. The major sources of this material has been libraries of the Theosophical Society in Adyar, London, Sydney and Perth, together with the British Library and the Library and Archives of the India Office in London, the libraries of the United Lodge of Theosophists in London, Bombay and Los Angeles, and the libraries and archives of the Theosophical Society International at Pasadena, and of Point Loma Publications at San Diego. Additionally, important material was located in the private collections of Mary Lutyens and John Cooper, and from interviews with people in England, India, Australia and America.

The major studies of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky provide valuable background to Theosophy and the Theosophical Society. The most important works from outside the movement are Meade (1980), Williams (1946) and Symonds (1959), and from within it Ryan (1975) and Butt (1925). The series, H.P.Blavatsky. Collected Writings, edited (up until his death in 1983) by Boris de Zirkhoff, provide, in addition to the texts of almost all Blavatsky's works, invaluable notes and commentary on her life and work, and that of colleagues and associates.
Mrs Annie Besant was the major colleague, friend, and associate of Leadbeater throughout his Theosophical career. Almost all her published works from the time of her conversion to Theosophy – monographs, pamphlets and journal articles – have been examined. The major biographical studies from outside the movement are Nethercot (1961 and 1963), Williams (1953) and West (1929), and from inside Besterman (1934) and Mrs Besant's autobiography annotated by Arundale (1939).

Jiddu Krishnamurti became a major figure in Leadbeater's life from the time of his "discovery" at Adyar. The most important works for material on his life, and the Theosophical movement at the time, are Emily Lutyens (1957), Elizabeth Lutyens (1972) and Mary Lutyens (1959, 1975 and 1983). Weeraperuma (1974 and 1982) provides invaluable guides to sources not only on Krishnamurti, but on the period generally. The texts of all Krishnamurti's talks and writings up until Leadbeater's death, as well as much of his material after that time, have been considered.

d. On Theosophy and Associated Movements

A wide range of published material on the background to Theosophy (including the rise of occultism an
spiritualism), the history and influence of the Theosophical Society, and movements associated with it has been considered. The best general sources on the occult background are Webb (1971 and 1981), and Kerr and Crow (1983). Important and more detailed background material on Spiritualism is found in Brandon (1983). The most important published sources on Theosophy and the Theosophical Society from within the movement are Kuhn (1930), The Theosophical Movement 1875-1925 (1925), and Ransom (1938 and 1950), and from outside Guénon (1965). Although supposedly a scholarly study of Theosophy, Campbell (1980) is flawed by major errors of fact.

Essential material on the Indian background to the Theosophical movement is found in Farquhar (1967). Important material on English free-thought and other "heretical" movements which so influenced Mrs Besant is found in Warren Smith (1967). The background to the episcopi vagantes, or "wandering bishops", out of which the Liberal Catholic Church emerged is provided by Anson (1964) and additional material on the Church from an uncritical insider's position is given in Hooker (1981).

A vast range of publications of the Theosophical Society was consulted during research in the libraries of the Theosophical Society in Adyar, London, Sydney,
Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth, in addition to the libraries of the United Lodge of Theosophists in Bombay, London and Los Angeles, of the Theosophical Society International at Pasadena, and Point Loma Publications at San Diego. Extensive collections of such publications are also found in the British Library, the Library and Archives of the India Office, London, the New York Public Library, the State Reference Libraries of Western Australia and New South Wales, and the Mitchell Library, Sydney, and the libraries of the University of California at San Diego, and Columbia University in New York.

The major Theosophical journals, including *The Theosophist*, and regional journals for Australia, England, the USA and India, were searched from the time of Leadbeater's first contact with the Society until the present day.

Most of the (supposedly secret) publications of the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society have been searched, including almost complete sets its journals. All the publications of the Liberal Catholic Church, including the international [Liberal Catholic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_Catholicism) and its journals in England, Australia and the USA, have been searched from the beginnings until the present time. Most of the publications associated with Co-Masonry have also been examined, as have
those of the Order of the Star in the East, the Order of the Round Table, and smaller organizations deriving from the Theosophical movement. Much of this material has been consulted in private collections, including that of John Cooper, or has been made available from private collections.

e. On Religious and Philosophical Issues of the Time

To establish the biography in historical context it was necessary to undertake research into the philosophical and religious issues of the time — that is, from around the middle of the nineteenth century into the first quarter of the twentieth century. Valuable background to the religious questions of the time is found in Vidler (1971), Reardon (1966), and Chadwick (1971 and 1972). The background to traditions of unorthodox and heretical thought is provided in Christie-Murray (1976), and Warren Smith (1967).

The links between the religious issues, unorthodox thinking and the occult is considered in Webb (1971 and 1981). The Indian religious and philosophical background is provided by Farquhar (1967), Sarma (1944) and Naravane (1964). The rise of occultism in the West generally
is considered in Webb (1971 and 1981), McIntosh (1972), Colquhoun (1975), and King (1970 and 1971), and these works provide a context within which Leadbeater's work in the Theosophical movement can be understood. The background to Spiritualism, out of which Theosophy emerged, is best considered in Brandon (1983), Pearsall (1973) and McHargue (1972).

The religious themes of the time included the beginnings of a conflict between religion and science, the rise of spiritualism and the occult, the development of Christian mysticism, the revival of monasticism in the Church of England, and conflict in that same Church over theological and ceremonial developments.

f. Biographies

A wide range of biographies of religious figures from the period has been considered. These have included studies of a number of "prophets" who, on the basis of claims to extraordinary sources of knowledge, established religious movements. Amongst these was Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910) (the best objective biographies of whom are Ernest Bates and John Dittemore, Mary Baker Eddy: The Truth and the Tradition, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 1932, and Edwin Dakin, Mrs Eddy: The Biography of a Virginal Mind, Charles
Scriber's Sons, New York, 1929). Joseph Smith (1805-1844), the prophet of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, better known as the "Mormone", was also considered; the best objective biography of Smith is Fawn M Brodie's *No Man Knows My History* (Alfred A Knopf, New York, 1967; second revised edition, 1983).

Henry James Prince (1811-1899) and the Reverend John Hugh Smyth-Pigott (1852-1927), founders of the group known as the Agapemonites, were considered because of the presence of a secret sexual component in their teachings. The best sources of material on the Agapemonites are Donald McCormick's *Temple of Love* (Jarrolds, London, 1962), John Montgomery's *Abodes of Love* (Putnam, London, 1962) and Aubrey Menon's fictional account, *The Abode of Love* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973). Partly for the same reason, the life and work of Jan Maria Michal Kowalski (1871-1942), leader of the Mariavite Old Catholic Church of Poland, better known as the "Mariavites" was also studied. Some of Kowalski's teachings - including the concept of the coming of a new "race" - had parallels in Leadbeater's ideas. The only detailed study in English of the "Mariavites" is Jerzy Peterkiewicz's *The Third Adam* (Oxford University Press, London, 1975).

One of the most interesting features of these
biographies, and that which has most relevance to a study of Leadbeater, is the existence of a "myth" (that is, a popularly believed and officially promoted "sacred biography") which is challenged by the facts of history. In many cases, it is apparent that the individuals concerned, either deliberately or unconsciously, produced and promoted the "myth", preferring it to the more conventional biography.

Amongst those more or less contemporaneous figures with whom Leadbeater may be compared in this, and who have been "exposed" once scholarly biographies have been written of them, are the founder of the Theosophical Society, Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891), the best-selling Victorian novelist, Marie Corelli (1855-1924), and the "ghost-hunter", Harry Price (1881-1948).

Blavatsky's "myth" is outlined in works like Murphet (1975) and Butt (1925): it is vigorously de-bunked in Meade (1980), whose work has the subtitle, "The Woman Behind the Myth". Marie Corelli's "myth" is presented in the biography, Marie Corelli. The Writer and the Woman, by Thomas Coates and R.S. Bell (Hutchinson, London, 1903), and is investigated and exposed in Now Barabbas was a Rotter by Brian Masters (Hamilton, London, 1978). Harry Price established his own myth in his autobiography, Search for Truth: My Life
for Psychical Research (Collins, London, 1942) and in his Confessions of a Ghost-hunter (Putnam, London, 1936), and it was taken up by Dr Paul Tabori in his Harry Price: The Biography of a Ghost-Hunter (Athenaeum Press, London, 1950). This myth was carefully investigated, and exposed by Trevor H. Hall, in Search for Harry Price (Gerald Duckworth, London, 1978).

In each of these cases, the subject created an aura of mystery around his or her life, and effectively suppressed (at least amongst disciples) the facts of biography, creating a new past for themselves which was so convincing that others took it up as biography and perpetuated it. By the time the myth had been established not simply as a story about a person but, effectively, as an article of faith for the "true believers" who were his or her disciples, it had assumed, for the disciples, a reality with which the mere facts of history could not compete.

This produced what might be called "hagiographic dissonance", a sub-species of cognitive dissonance, the theory of which has been developed by Leon Festinger. [79] It would require a substantial work to develop such a concept further. It is sufficient in this context merely to note that the contradictions in Leadbeater's life-story and his re-creation of his own past are not uncommon amongst
modern prophetic figures (whether in the religious sphere or elsewhere), or, presumably, in religious leaders of the past.

2. Unpublished Documentary Sources

Unpublished material consulted covered a wide range, and can most easily be divided according to category:

a. Public Archives

The State Archives of New South Wales hold the police files for investigations into Leadbeater; these were consulted and copied in 1975-6 and 1982. The Special Collections Department of Columbia University in New York contains a collection of archival material deposited there by one of Leadbeater's most vigorous American critics, Mrs Helen Dennis: this was consulted in 1982. The India Office Library and Archives in London contain a considerable collection of material relevant to Theosophy in India, especially insofar as it was involved with political matters: this was consulted in 1978-9 and 1982.

The Library of Lambeth Palace, London, includes substantial collection of material relevant to the
background to and the founding of the Liberal Catholic Church: this was consulted in 1978–9. The Public Records Office in London was used to obtain relevant birth, marriage and death certificates, and the Archives of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge were consulted regarding Leadbeater's claims to have been a student there. The Warburg Institute of the University of London contains archival material on a range of occult movements, most of it deposited there by Mr Gerald Yorke, with whose permission it was made accessible to the author.

The National Library of Australia includes some material directly relevant to Theosophy in Australia, notably papers relating to Alfred Deakin and a collection (including Esoteric Section papers) deposited by a former member of the Theosophical Society: these were consulted in 1982.

b. Private Archives

The private archives of a number of organizations were made accessible to the author. The Archives of the Theosophical Society at Adyar in India was opened to the author in December, 1979, at the direction of the then President of the Society, John Coats, and all files relevant to Leadbeater, his associates and movements in which he was
involved were consulted. It should be noted that access was not given to the archives of the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society, in which it can be assumed a large amount of valuable material repose.

Very limited access was given to the archives of the Liberal Catholic Church at its international headquarters in London. Undoubtedly the most extensive collection of material in the world on small, episcopal churches — those usually described as based on episcopi vagantes or "wandering bishops" — is in the archives of the Catholic Apostolic Church (Orthodox Church of the British Isles) in London; these were made accessible and copies of large numbers of valuable documents given to the author.

Several Theosophical organizations unconnected with var have archives which contain valuable material. The Theosophical Society International at Pasadena, California, made its collection of material on the history of the Theosophical movement available, and gave limited access to its archives. Point Loma Publications, at San Diego, California, which is a derivative of the Theosophical Society International, made its extensive archives freely available. These include a valuable collection of material specifically on Leadwater, including a large number of letters to and from eminent Theosophical figures, like
R.L. Gardner (for whom see chapter 23) and the editor of Blavatsky's works, Boris de Zirkhoff.

The United Grand Lodge of England made material on Leadbeater and Co-Masonry available from its archives. The archives of the Order of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masonry for Men and Women, a derivative of Co-Masonry were made available, and contained a considerable amount of valuable material on Co-Masonry.

c. Private Collections

A number of individuals made their private collections available for purposes of research. These included Mary Lutyens, in London, who possesses a substantial amount of rare material, including many letters to and from Leadbeater, inherited from her mother, together with a large amount of documentation gathered for her own books.

Susunaga Weeraperuma, in Adelaide, made his extensive collection of material on Krishnamurti and his background available. John Cooper, in Sydney, gave access to his unparalleled collection of material on the history of Theosophy in Australia, together with the results of his own research in the archives of the Theosophical Society in
Sydney. Laurence Langley, in Sydney, made available his collection of material on the history of the Liberal Catholic Church, and the sources of its liturgy.

Richard Robb, of Wizard's Bookshelf in San Diego, gave access to his substantial collection of material on Helena Blavatsky and her influence. Mrs Brigit Köllerström, in London, gave limited access to her late husband's collection of diaries and papers concerning Leadbeater. Michael Godby, of Melbourne, gave access to a substantial collection of material gathered during research into the life of James Wedgwood and the origins of the Liberal Catholic Church.

3. Oral History

A considerable number of people who either knew Leadbeater and/or his associates, or who have special knowledge of movements with which he was associated were interviewed. These included (in alphabetical order) the following people; where titles are given they are those held at the time of the interview:

Rukmini Devi Arundale – widow of George Arundale, and one of the central figures in the Theosophical Society in the 1920's – Interviewed at Adyar, 1979

Elaine Baly - a pupil of Bishop James (a friend of James Wedgwood) and the daughter of Vyvyan Deacon (for whom see chapter 23) - interviewed in London, 1979 and 1982

Radha Burnier - Outer Head of the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society - interviewed at Adyar, 1979 (now also President of the Society)


John Clarke - assistant editor of The Theosophist and a priest of the Liberal Catholic Church - interviewed at Adyar, 1979

John Coats - President of the Theosophical Society - interviewed at Adyar, 1979 (Mr Coats died in December, 1979)

John Cooper - an authority on the history of the Theosophical Society, interviewed at Sydney, frequently
1980-1985

Marjorie Debenham - President Grand Master of the Order of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masonry for Men and Women, who had been involved in Co-Masonry and Theosophy in the 1920's - interviewed in London, 1978 and 1979

Mar Georgius (Newman) - Metropolitan of the Catholic Apostolic Church (Orthodox Church of the British Isles), a leading authority on *episcopi vagante*, and the movement out of which the Liberal Catholic Church developed - interviewed in London, 1978

Rex Henry - secretary to James Wedgwood, and public relations officer for Mrs Besant in Europe in the 1920's - interviewed at Adyar, 1979, and at Mijas, Spain, in 1982

Ian Hooker - priest of the Liberal Catholic Church, Assistant Corresponding Secretary of the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society in Australia, who completed his Master of Arts degree in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Sydney in 1981 with a thesis entitled "The Founding of the Liberal Catholic Church" - interviewed in Sydney, 1980
Grace Knoche - Leader of the Theosophical Society International, Pasadena and a resident of the Point Loma Theosophical Community in the 1920's - interviewed at Pasadena, 1982

Brigit Köllerström - widow of Oscar Köllerström, one of Leadbeater's closest pupils - interviewed in London, 1978 and 1979

Dora Kunz - National President of the Theosophical Society in America, and Leadbeater's first girl pupil - interviewed at Adyar, 1979

Mary Lutyens - biographer of Krishnamurti, daughter of Lady Emily Lutyens, and member of the Theosophical Society during the 1920's - interviewed in London, 1978 and 1979

Paula Mango - former wife of Dick Balfour Clarke, and one of Leadbeater's last group of pupils, the "Seven Virgins of Java" - interviewed at Adyar, 1979

Joy Mills - Vice-President of the Theosophical Society - interviewed at Adyar, 1979

Jack Patterson - Head of The Manor - interviewed
at Sydney, 1980

James Perkins - Head of The Manor - interviewed at Sydney, 1976

Jean Raymond - Recording Secretary of the Theosophical Society - interviewed at Adyar, 1979

T. William Shepherd - Grand Secretary of Co-Masonry in Great Britain - interviewed at London, 1979

Mar Seraphim (Newman-Norton) - Metropolitan of the Catholic Apostolic Church (Orthodox Church of the British Isles), authority on episcopi vagantes, and the history of the movement out of which the Liberal Catholic Church developed - interviewed at London, 1978 and 1979

Lilian Storey - Librarian of the Theosophical Society, London - interviewed 1978 and 1979

Sten von Krusenstierna - Regionary Bishop of the Liberal Catholic Church in Australia - interviewed at Sydney, 1975 and 1976

Susunaga Weeraperuma - bibliographer of Krishnamurti - interviewed at Sydney, 1980.
In addition to these major figures, a number of men and women who were associated with or knew Leadbeater or his associates were interviewed in England, India and Australia. Additionally, the author has corresponded with a number of people (other than those mentioned above) who have provided written information on Leadbeater or related matters. These have included:

Ted Davy - Editor of The Canadian Theosophist

Ellic Howe - authority on "fringe" Masonic groups and late nineteenth century occult movements

Arthur Nethercot - author of a two-volume biography of Mrs Annie Besant (see Nethercot 1961 and 1963)

Dr Hugh Shearman - Liberal Catholic priest and Theosophical author (including Charles Webster Leadbeater, A Biography, see Shearman, 1982)

Boris de Zirkoff - editor of H.P.Blavatsky, Collected Writings.
3. Methodology

Given the scope of this work, and the amount of material involved in just presenting a detailed biography of Leadbeater, the aim of this work is to be phenomenological, rather than analytical or critical. In places, analysis or critical commentary is necessary, and will be given. This is especially the case when the traditional biography and the facts of history conflict. Extensive references will be given for all sources, but it can generally be assumed that the basic facts have been published in *The Elder Brother*, and that this thesis is a substantial expansion on that work, providing considerable additional material derived from primary sources.

The narrative is presented with the intention of giving the reader a clear picture of Charles Webster Leadbeater, and of drawing attention to the principal "mysteries" of his life without attempting to resolve them until the narration of his life story is concluded. In the final chapter, the threads of the narrative will be drawn together, and solutions to at least most of the mysteries offered.

The influence of charismatic figures, whether as founders, leaders or exemplars, is evident in all religious traditions. Generally, the lives of such people are invested
with supernatural significance, and acquire the quality of myth, rather than historical biography. Both the myth and the history behind it are of great importance for the study not only of the religious tradition within which the individual exists, but for an understanding of the ways in which religious traditions develop. Reynolds and Capps note that

In short, the study of the sacred biographies of founders and saviors within the history of religions has raised fundamental issues concerning the genesis and formative development of the religious symbols and images which have been the basic constitutive elements of many of the great world religions, and of many lesser traditions as well. [80]

The two most important issues which arise in this study are the way in which the myth develops out of the history, and the relationship between the myth and the history.

Although there is a limited amount of theoretical material on the study of biography in history, anthropology or psychology, there is very little on biography in the context of religious studies. [81] As Reynolds and Capps, editors of one of the few comparative studies in this field,
comment:

Unfortunately no major figure within the discipline has yet spelled out in any detail the procedures and implications of this specifically religio-historical style of biographical scholarship. However, some indications can be gleaned from the various biographical studies which historians of religions have published over the years. [82]

For this thesis, basic principles of procedures and methodology have been gleaned from consideration of biographical studies of figures such as Blavatsky, Mary Baker Eddy and Joseph Smith; the contrast between myth and reality appears in their biographies as it does in the case of Leadbeater.

It is not easy to reveal the history, if there is an historical basis, behind the myth, and less easy to explain the development of the myth in the context of history. In some instances in which history and myth conflict it is possible to show what, insofar as they can be known, the historical facts were. And theories can be developed as to how and why those historical facts came to be revised, or developed, denied or added to. But, however
extensive the speculation, there are severe restrictions on the scholars ability to enter the unwritten past, let alone the minds of people long dead.

Leadbeater created a myth, and laid the foundations for his own sacred biography, or even hagiography. He was less concerned with the trivia of the history of one man than with a vast, cosmic drama in which he believed he was a central figure.

The sacred biographer is not primarily concerned to provide a narrative portrait or "likeness" of the subject. Establishing the mythical image, of what might better be called the biographic image, takes precedence over a simply chronicling of biographical facts. Very often this biographic image is established by directing attention to a few key events in the life of the subject including, in most cases, his birth, his religious quest and its dénouement, and his death....Stories of an apocryphal nature may be supplied to fill gaps left by a relatively inaccessible or uneventful childhood. [83]

As will be seen, Leadbeater follows these principles of the religious biographer in providing material for his religious
autobiography.

This thesis looks at the sacred biography, and, by "a simple chronicling of biographical facts", compares the myth with the history, seeking not only to compare the two, but to consider how and why the one developed out of the other.

4. The Personality of the Man

Charles Webster Leadbeater, like all around whom a myth develops making them seem larger and better than human beings in real life can possibly be, was an amalgam of diverse, often contradictory qualities. He was almost unbearably pompous in some matters, yet possessed a rather loud sense of humour in others. He spoke in hushed and reverent terms about his colleagues in public conversation, yet was scathingly sarcastic about the same people in private conversation. He was dogmatic and condescending to those whom he regarded as his inferiors, and yet friendly and encouraging in his conversations with children, treating them as equals and confiding in them as friends.

For most of his life Leadbeater treated women with contempt. Yet his relationship with Mrs Besant was closer than any other relationship in his life. And he treated women with titles and status with respect. He was,
as one of his students mused, a "crusty old Tory", believing in King and Empire and loyalty and the status quo, believing that the Powers which govern the world had ordered all things according to the best and most equitable scheme, and that it was not the right of mere human beings to criticize, let alone radically change that system.

He disapproved of social reforms, political changes and democracy. He firmly believed that people should be governed by their betters, and should cheerfully accept their positions in the hierarchy which evolution had established. Between the savage at the bottom, and the Master at the top, were the peasant, the unskilled labourer, the skilled artisan, the middle-classes, the upper-classes, the nobility and the Theosophists. This was the natural order of things, and change should only occur through the evolutionary movement upwards. [84]

He believed intensely in loyalty, firstly to those who have been appointed to high office, like the Monarchy, and secondly to the ideals of institutions. When confronted with an instance of a close colleague making a statement he regarded as simply false, he refused the suggestion that he should correct it lest the organization to which they were both committed should suffer. He declared to his closest disciples that loyalty was more important
than truth, and believed that there were, effectively, two moralities. First, that of the ordinary man who was bound to tell the truth all the time, and, second, that of the occultist who worked on a higher level, and might not tell the truth (he avoided the word "lie") when it was clear that those who did not understand the working of the higher life would misinterpret or misunderstand the truth.

Leadbeater loathed argument, criticism or questioning of any sort. Once the facts of the matter had been stated (usually by him) he thought that any discussion, let alone argument, completely unnecessary and positively disruptive. He described it both as a waste of time and "a dissipation of energy". As a result, he was a very bad politician, lacked tact or tolerance, and was unable to be subtle in any influence he wished to exert. This meant that he was also inclined to excessive irritability if he did not have his own way immediately. As Ernest Wood, who worked very closely with him for many years, recalled:

One "streak", however, that did trouble me was his liability to irritability, which would sometimes become quite explosive and verging on the cruel – a quality common enough, however, and accepted rather as a matter of course among old English gentlemen of the Victorian school. [85]
And Leadbeater remained, throughout his life and well into the twentieth century, a Victorian. If the world changed, then the world was wrong, and he saw no reason to repeat its folly. Though, oddly enough, he was a Jacobite, believing that the House of Stuart was legitimately entitled to the British throne. This did not detract from the intense loyalty he felt, and tried to inculcate into his pupils, for the British throne, whoever happened to be occupying it.

He led a somewhat secluded life, occupied principally with the "inner planes" and therefore more or less blissfully unaware of the major changes that were re-shaping the external world.

Physically, he was a strong and robust man. Although his height seems to vary from one account to another, he was around five feet nine inches tall barefooted. His dignified bearing led people to believe he was well over six feet tall. His body was muscular, his chest massive, and his arms long. For most of his life he was extremely active physically, swimming, playing tennis, and bicycling, well into his seventies, and giving up only when heart disease and diabetes, together with rheumatism, eventually limited his physical activities.
His whole appearance gave an impression of dynamic energy, complete self-confidence and assurance. He attracted attention wherever he went, his whole manner dignified and superior, especially with his long white hair, patriarchal beard and inevitably flamboyant dress. His whole manner inspired confidence. There seemed no reason to believe he did not know exactly what he was talking about, did not see exactly what he described. Even those who believed he was a worthy successor to Svengali or Rasputin only ever equated him with the more extravagant characters of mystery and romance. His photograph even appeared in an evangelical magazine as a portrait of the Anti-Christ. [86]

But there were those who found his physical presence repulsive. The writer on occult and mystical subjects, Arthur Edward Waite (1857-1942), is said to be one of these, and the Australian Leida singer, Dorothy Helmrich (1889- ), who in her early days was a member of the Theosophical Society, was another. She found him so repulsive that she could not approach him. The reason given by his followers was that his vibrations were so high that they had a repelling effect on those less evolved. [87]

But to those who were neither repelled nor attracted, Leadbeater remains a mystery. As Mary Lutyens, in her biography of Krishnamurti, commented:
As for the integrity of C.W. Leadbeater, the person she [Mrs Besant] trusted most in all occult matters, I have not been able to make up my mind, although in 1925 I spent nine months in his community in Sydney in daily contact with him. I then believed implicitly in his clairvoyance; I do not disbelieve in it today. An extraordinary man, a man of charm and magnetism and with an apparent sincerity it was hard to doubt, to me he remains an enigma. [88]

As for Krishnamurti, the Indian philosopher whom Leadbeater "discovered" on the beach at Madras in 1909, and trained intensely for many years to play the role of Vehicle for the Coming Christ, and who rejected the role as defined by Leadbeater, he rejects him completely. In December, 1976, at a gathering of friends in India, including Dick Balfour-Clarke, Krishnamurti was asked to accept the sincerity of all those who worked closely with him in preparation for the Coming — Annie Besant, Leadbeater, Arundale, Jinarajadasa and Wedgwood. He replied sternly: "The only sincere one was Mrs Besant." [89] To Mary Lutyens, when told about The Elder Brother, and asked for his comments, he said simply: "Leadbeater was evil", and refused to discuss the matter further, beyond the comment that he
found even thinking about Leadbeater, or hearing his name, distasteful. [90]

Throughout his life Leadbeater had pupils, some very close, others less so. Of the closest pupils, only one remained close to him, and continued in work for the Theosophical movement. That was Jinarajadasa. Several of the others specifically rejected his occult claims, and others simply drifted away from contact with him.

Few contemporary members of the organizations with which he was so closely associated know anything of his life, however much they know of his work. The man is overshadowed by the myth, almost occupied by an archetypal being in whose existence his followers want to believe because it fills an essential role in their occult scheme of things. And many of his critics invest him with an almost archetypal evil, just as his disciples invest him with an almost archetypal good.

Leadbeater's journey from obscurity to fame and notoriety, from insignificance to archetypal power, is the subject of this study.
Chapter 2: The Early Years

In 1930, A.J. Hamerster (1883-1951), a respected member of the Theosophical Society, was asked to deliver a lecture on the life of Charles Webster Leadbeater, and to prepare his lecture for publication in the annual of the Order of the Round Table, a small chivalric association for young people. Hamerster met Leadbeater in Australia in 1926, and had corresponded with him. Anxious that his biographical material should be as accurate as possible, Hamerster submitted the draft of his lecture to Leadbeater, who "enriched the original manuscript with notes, corrections and suggestions", and wrote to Hamerster on April 15, 1931, approving the text as an accurate biography. [1] The lecture was subsequently published in the Round Table Annual for 1932, and then all but disappeared.

But Hamerster, a careful historian whose work from the archives of the Theosophical Society's headquarters at Adyar, in Madras, India, had revealed all manner of interesting information, had all his writings collated and bound, some of them with additional handwritten notes, and deposited in the Adyar library. [2] His account of Leadbeater's life was not unusual: it simply presented the facts previously published by other Theosophical authorities, and subsequently repeated up to the present
day.[3] Its uniqueness lay in the fact that it had been declared by Leadbeater himself to be an accurate account of his life.

The Leadbeater family derived, so the article ran, from old Norman stock, and came to England at the time of William the Conqueror in the 11th century. The name was adapted from the French le Batre (the builder). [4] Charles Webster Leadbeater was born in February 17, 1847, and at the age of twelve went with his father, his mother and his younger brother, Gerald, to South America, where his father was the director of a railway company. The years in Brazil were full of adventures, including a train chase in which Charles drove a locomotive at great speed to capture a cashier defaulting from his father's company. The younger brother was "atrocessly butchered" by Red Indians [sic] and "renegade insurgents". When the family returned to London, the father contracted tuberculosis and died. "The life in South America", concluded Hamerster, "had made of the boy Charles a man."

The years between returning to London and being ordained into the Church of England in 1878 are left blank by Hamerster, and his article concludes with an account of Leadbeater's developing interest in spiritualism and theosophy. Mention is made of the fact that the "atrocessly
butchered" brother, Gerald, reincarnated fifteen years after his untimely death into C. Jinarajadasa, a boy born in Ceylon in 1875. Leadbeater's occult interests were said to have been stimulated when, as a child, he saw the famous Bulwer Lytton (Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 1st Baron Lytton, 1803-1873) perform a psychic demonstration at the Leadbeater home in London to convince Leadbeater's father of the reality of such things. [5]

This, in general, is the account of his life which accompanied Charles Webster Leadbeater throughout his Theosophical career. It was elaborated upon with additional details by other writers. Mrs Annie Besant, then President of the Theosophical Society, noted in an article in The Theosophist in 1911 that he had entered Oxford University but was obliged to give up his studies when the family fortune was lost in the "crash" of J. E. Gurney and Company's bank on the "historic 'Black Monday'" of 1866. [6]

In the same year a story by Leadbeater, entitled "Saved By A Ghost", appeared in The Theosophist: it had the subtitle, "A True Record of An Adventure in Brazil, Near Bahia, 1861-2". The story was offprinted, and also published, with some changes, in a volume of Leadbeater's short stories; [7] It detailed the adventures in Brazil, and included a detailed account of the death of brother Gerald.
According to the story, Leadbeater's father was "the leading director of a certain railway then in the course of construction. [8] On one of his trips to the interior of Brazil he was accompanied by Charles, junior, and Gerald. They were attacked by Indians, and although they survived, the danger was sufficient to inspire their father to make a long speech about the meaning of life, concluding "...remember, we are in God's hands, and nothing can happen to us without His knowledge, and whatever is His will for us, somehow or other that is best for us, and if we die bravely, as Englishmen should, you may be sure we are serving Him in doing it." However, they escaped the Indians but were captured by "rebels". The leader of the rebel army, General Martinez, demanded that they join his army or be executed. [9] Leadbeater's father "indignantly refused, asserting over and over again that as an Englishman he declined to take part in such affairs."

Martinez was unimpressed with typically Leadbeaterian display of patriotism, and prepared to administer an oath of allegiance to his unwilling recruits. Part of the oath (for reasons never explained) involved trampling on a crucifix.

I need hardly say that we had not the slightest
intention of doing anything of the kind. We were members of the Church of England, and not of that of Rome, but nevertheless my mother was a devoted follower of Dr Pusey [10] with whom she was intimately acquainted, and I myself habitually wore a tiny ebony and silver crucifix around my neck underneath my clothes, which the Red Indians [sic] had left me, because, I suppose, they recognized it as a magical symbol of the Christians and may have feared its power. [11]

Leadbeater's father, having managed to free himself from the ropes with which he had been tied, made a sudden dash into the jungle and disappeared, much to the annoyance of the rebels, and much to the amusement, oddly enough, of his two sons. Martinez ordered Gerald to trample on the crucifix, but Charles exhorted him not to do so.

"Don't do it, Gerald," I shouted back to him as I was dragged off, "remember St Agnes." [12]

And Gerald, doubtless recalling the courageous thirteen year old Roman maiden, refused to obey and told Martinez he was "a wicked man", whereupon the rebel leader killed the child with his sword. Charles was dragged into the jungle, tied in
an ingenious manner between two trees by way of a rack, and then pelted with broken bottles and struck with sticks. Eventually the Indians lit a fire beneath his feet, "which were soon most horribly burnt."

Fainting from pain, he recovered to find himself tied to yet another tree, in great pain and full of depressing thoughts and the desire for death. Suddenly he saw his dead brother Gerald standing in front of him —

...my brother Gerald, whom I had seen only a few hours before cut down by the sword of Martinez. Indeed, the mark of that cruel blow still lay across his skull — a great ghastly wound cleaving the skull asunder. [13]

Gerald, however, looked peaceful and happy, and his presence totally transformed his brother's despair and desire for death into a peaceful certainty that he would be rescued. And, as he anticipated, in the middle of the night his father returned, assisted by a faithful Negro servant, and carried Charles, junior, off into the jungle.

A lengthy chase followed, involving the rebel soldiers, blood-hounds and hiding in tree-tops. Eventually the Leadbeaters and their servant arrived at a friendly
hacienda, and set out on their return to the city (never named) where they were reunited with Mrs Leadbeater. [14] A band of volunteers set out to fight the rebels, and Leadbeater's father immediately joined - "principally, I think because he was an Englishman" - and, doubtless for the same reason was given command of the company. Charles, junior, having recovered from the worst effects of his torture, was given permission to ride with the men. He hoped that this would give him the opportunity to gain his revenge for the death of his brother, and looked forward to a chance to kill Martinez.

Eventually, the company engaged in action against the rebels, and Leadbeater found himself attacking Martinez with a sword: he recalled that Martinez was the best swordsman in South America, but was undeterred. A fierce fight ensued, Martinez stumbled and lost his sword; Leadbeater leapt on top of him and held the point of his sword at the General's throat, putting his foot on the man's breast. Martinez begged for mercy.

"Mercy" I said jerkily perhaps, for I was panting from the terrible exertion of the fight; "what mercy did you show my brother " [15]

At the height of this dramatic confrontation, the silver and
ebony crucifix around Leadbeater's neck fell out from his shirt, and the rebel leader, seeing it, cried again for mercy "for the sake of the Christ whose image you wear." Unimpressed, Leadbeater was about to plunge the sword into his victim's neck when he felt his arm being held back and, turning, saw his brother Gerald. Martinez saw him too, and was terrified. Unable now to carry out his long anticipated revenge, Leadbeater left Martinez lying on the ground and walked away. The rebel leader leapt up, attacked Leadbeater with a dagger, and was shot by a government soldier, while Leadbeater was shot in the right arm by a rebel soldier. But he was able to fire back, killing the soldier, before falling to the ground.

Carried back home by his father, he was nursed to health, and shared with his father in the praise and decorations of a grateful government. A month later he watched the execution of Martinez by a firing squad, but felt no antagonism, "for I had looked into my brother's eyes, and I knew he lived and loved me still." The story, as told by Leadbeater, ended with an enigmatic foreshadowing of events to come, when Leadbeater and his brother were to be reunited, the brother in a different incarnation:

And so I was content, though I knew nothing of the beautiful fate which would bring my brother
back to life fifteen years later in a country far away, which would bring him in that new body into my life again, which would enable us both to recognize one another, and to realize that death can never part those souls that truly love. [16]

The story of the Brazilian adventure is significant more for what it reveals about the personality of the man who wrote it than for its biographical value. His vivid imagination in presenting historical events, his ability to give a convincing account of happenings which would otherwise appear inherently improbable, and his skill in interweaving the supernatural with the historical were all qualities which characterized all his writings. Leadbeater was known for the ability he possessed and the pleasure he gained in telling fantastic stories to his young disciples. He merged the sort of rugged adventure characteristic of popular books for boys (for example, the "Boy's Own" series) with elements typical of the Gothic novel or the classical horror story into an exciting tale in which natural and supernatural fused to create a thrilling atmosphere.

Additional material on the adventures in Brazil was given to his pupils. Clara Codd, who lived in
Leadbeater's community in Sydney for two years, recalled that he told exciting stories of his travels in South America, and claimed to have been shown the lost treasures of the Incas by Indian boys while in Peru. He was also shown the secret rituals of the Incas' contemporary descendants (whoever they were), and, in later years recognized the signs and symbols he had been shown as similar to those used in Freemasonry. [17]

Jinarajadasa, who published a considerable amount of biographical material on his brother of a former life, left a Memo for a Biography of C.W.L. in the archives of the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society at Adyar. [18] Jinarajadasa noted that Leadbeater had been born in Lea Green Hall, at Stockport, in Cheshire, on February 17, 1847, but the family moved to London when Charles was quite young. In 1858 they travelled to Brazil, where his father was the chairman of a railway company owning concessions on the Bahia and San Francisco railway, and also in south Brazil. The family returned to London in 1861, and Leadbeater, senior, died in 1862. According to Jinarajadasa, Charles Leadbeater, junior, entered Queen's College, Oxford, in 1865 or 1866, but was obliged to leave after the family fortune was lost in the collapse of Overend, Gurney and Company. Leadbeater worked for a time at a shipbroker's, then at a railway contractor's, then in Williams, Deacon and Company's
bank as a clerk. [19] This was followed by ordination in the Church of England, for which Jinarajadasa gives the date 1876.

Jinarajadasa also referred to a meeting with "General Morgan" [presumably Major General Henry Rhodes Morgan (1822-1910), an eminent early Theosophist] in 1866, when Leadbeater told the General of meeting a werewolf in Scotland. The werewolf story is told in detail by Clara Codd. [20] She says that at the time Leadbeater was a pupil at St John's College, Cambridge, and had travelled to the Orkneys or Shetlands with some other students; whilst staying in a hotel they set out on a walk. Leadbeater was separated from his companions, became lost and was given shelter by an old woman and her daughter. In the middle of the night he awoke to find a large grey wolf attacking him. He seized a knife and stabbed it; the wolf left the house and Leadbeater barricaded the door. The following morning he saw that the old woman's daughter had blood stains on her dress. Returning to his hotel he was again attacked by the wolf, lost consciousness and was finally found by his companions of the previous day. He was weak with fever for some weeks, and on recovering took his companions back to the cottage, but found it empty. This story, like that of the adventure in South America, mixes the "Boy's Own" and horror genres, and is typical both of the sort of story
Leadbeater used to tell his pupils, and of werewolf tales of the time.

Leadbeater also claimed to have a family motto: *Toujours prêt*, "always ready".[21]

Biographical accounts of Leadbeater appeared in various Theosophical publications throughout his lifetime; the same stories were repeated in articles by Theosophists who worked and lived with him, and a "definitive" article was published after his death by J.L. Davidge, who entitled it "Authentic Biographical Details on Bishop Leadbeater". [22] This repeated the stories of Brazil and the abruptly terminated career at Oxford, as did the obituary in the official journal of the Theosophical Society in England. [23] In two editions of *Who's Who in Australia* (1927-8 and 1933-4) the standard biographical details are included in entries for Leadbeater, presumably supplied by him, or at his direction. [24] More recently, the Theosophical Society in America repeated the popular account in its study course on the history of Theosophy [25], as did the Presiding Bishop of the Liberal Catholic Church in his notes on the history of the Church for its clergy training course. [26] Both these courses, especially the Liberal Catholic Church Institute of Studies program, were intended to be basically scholarly approaches to their subjects.
Given this impressive weight of material, and the fact that Leadbeater never contradicted or corrected any of the stories published in his lifetime, one might assume the standard account of Leadbeater's "mysterious beginnings" to be undoubtedly true. It is not. Whilst it is difficult to locate evidence about his early years, it is comparatively easy to dispose of the main claims of the popular version.

From the General Register Office in London some of the facts can be ascertained from records of births, deaths and marriages. Charles Webster Leadbeater was born on February 16, 1854, in Thompson Street, Stockport. His father was Charles Leadbeater, who gave his occupation as bookkeeper, and his mother was Emma Leadbeater, formerly Morgan. His parents had been married in St Jude's Church in the parish of West Derby in Lancaster on May 26, 1853. Charles, senior, was 28 at the time of his marriage, and gave his profession as bookkeeper or clerk, and his address as Stockport. Emma Morgan, spinster, was born in 1822, and was therefore 31 at the time of her marriage; her address was given as Edge Hill. Her father, Webster Morgan, was an accountant, and Charles Leadbeater's father was a builder. [27]

Thompson Street, Stockport, where Leadbeater was
born, was a relatively new area of the town. It did not exist in 1851 when a census revealed the town's population to be 53,835, but appears to have been built as part of a development to provide additional housing. Of Lea Green Hall no trace appears in records relating to Thompson Street. Stockport was one of the largest towns in the County of Chester, lying on the River Mersey, and by the middle of the nineteenth century it had established itself as a considerable industrial town, with cotton mills, hat-making and engineering works. It was also an important market centre, and possessed five Anglican churches, six almshouses and three weekly newspapers. It lay five and a half miles from the major industrial centre of Manchester, and 192 miles north-west of London. Its population began to decline in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, dropping from 30,746 in 1861 to 29,923 in 1871. [28]

The Leadbeater family seems to have been fairly mobile, for they do not appear in the census records for Stockport in 1851 or 1861. Charles Leadbeater died in 1862 in Rutland Cottage, John Street, Hampstead in London, but the census of April, 1861, does not show them at that address. At the time of his death, Charles, senior, was 36, and his son only 8. The occupation given on the death certificate is bookkeeper to a railway company. The cause of death was pythisis pulmonalis, in lay terms tuberculosis,
from which he had suffered for three years. [29]

Of brother Gerald, the registers of births and
deaths contain no record from 1850 to 1870. Nor do the
records of deaths of British subjects overseas.

What is the true story of Charles Webster
Leadbeater's early life? And why did he persist in
concealing it? Where was he and what was he doing from the
time of his birth in 1854 until he appears as an ordinand in
the Church of England in 1878? And how was he educated
after his father's death?

It seems unlikely that, given the actual date of
his birth, Leadbeater was driving locomotives or engaging in
sword fights with rebel generals in Brazil in 1860 (when he
was 6) even if the family did go to South America equally
improbable is the brother Gerald of whom no official record
seems to exist. C. Jinarajadasa did not know he was Gerald
reincarnated until some time after he had been "discovered"
in Ceylon and taken from his homeland to London; it was a
story told in later years by Leadbeater, although he claimed
he had been sent to Ceylon by his spiritual Master for the
purpose of finding Gerald reborn.[30]

The claim that Leadbeater attended Queen's
College, Oxford, is refuted both by the College and by
published records of those who matriculated to attend that University. [31] The University has no record of Charles Webster Leadbeater as a student in any of its colleges at any time, nor of him matriculating to become a student. [32] Cambridge likewise has no record of him. [33] That he did not attend any university is further indicated by the records of the Diocese of Winchester, within which he was ordained: he is entered in the list of ordinands as a "Literate", that is, someone who is not a graduate but was admitted on special examination. [34]

The story of Bulwer Lytton seems unlikely, given the family circumstances. Even less likely is the story Leadbeater told in his book *The Masters and the Path* of seeing "Master M" in London in 1851 - three years before he was born. [35]

The bank of Overend, Gurney and Company did indeed "crash" (although it was on a "Black Friday" and not on a "Black Monday") on May 11, 1866. What was "for forty years the greatest discounting house in the world", suspended payment with liabilities in excess of eleven million pounds Sterling. [36] Since Leadbeater was only 12 at the time, it seems unlikely that it terminated his studies at University. The family fortune may have been lost, although from what records there are, it seems
unlikely that such a fortune existed.

According to Jinarajadasa, Leadbeater's early working years were occupied in various clerical positions, and included eighteen months in the Parish of Bramshott as a lay reader prior to his ordination. Although there is no record of this in the parish archives records, it is not improbable. Jinarajadasa also suggested that Leadbeater was involved in the Church of All Saints, Margaret Street, London, a centre of Anglo-Catholic activity. [37] Leadbeater himself said that his mother was a follower of Dr Edward Pusey (1800-1882), the English theologian and leader of the Oxford Movement, and that it was her influence that led him to find a vocation in the Anglican ministry. [38]

But the "mysterious beginnings" remain. Why did he lie about the date of his birth and his early years? Why did he allow false accounts of his life up to the age of twenty-four (when he was ordained) to be repeated regularly in publications with which he was associated?

The answers derive from the complex personality of Charles Leadbeater and must be seen in the context of the highly romanticized "life of manifold adventures", as he called it, which he revealed to his friends and disciples. Leadbeater's ability as a story-teller, and his enthusiasm
for romantic, fantasy and horror fiction provides some explanation. In the final chapter of this work in which the "mysteries" and the myths associated with him will be examined some additional explanations will be considered. The answers are less "mysterious" than some suggested by contemporary disciples of his, one of whom claimed that Leadbeater has occultly altered records to prevent an outsider writing his biography. Another suggested simply that there were two Charles Webster Leadbeaters, born in different years but with parents of the same names; for the "real" Charles Webster Leadbeater (that is, the subject of this study) there were no records.

Throughout his life Leadbeater was not averse to re-writing history to suit his own requirements, be it the evolutionary past of man on this planet, the past lives of friends and enemies, or the humbler history of his own family. Whether he did this deliberately and consciously with intent to deceive and defraud, or whether it was unconscious compensation for personal inadequacies and the subconscious creation of a fiction which translated into fact, and was sincerely believed to be true, remains a matter of opinion.

In reaching any conclusion about the man, the claims he made for himself, and the claims that were made
about him, one must consider the extraordinary career which carried Leadbeater from obscurity in the Church of England to international acclaim and notoriety. As an eminent investigator of criminal mysteries has said of human actions:

...not one of them happens by pure chance unconnected with other happenings, none is incapable of explanation; they are the fruits which must of necessity develop under the influence of nature and individual culture, fruits whose formation is explained by the organism producing them. They are attached to the individual as surely as fruit emanates from the tree. We do not look to gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles. [39]
Chapter 3: The Anglican Ministry

Leadbeater said he was led to enter the ministry of the Church of England by the influence of his mother, a disciple and friend—so he said—of the eminent Tractarian, Dr Edward Pusey. But, if the inspiration came from such a High Church source, one is led to wonder why it found its fulfilment in a Diocese and in a Parish neither of which was High Church, let alone Anglo-Catholic. The explanation lies in the sources of influence available to establish Leadbeater, lacking a University degree or even a good education, in the Church.

Leadbeater's father's sister, Mary, had married William Wolfe Capes, an eminent churchman in the Diocese of Winchester. Capes represented almost everything the Established Church represented in the nineteenth century. [1] Born in 1834, he was educated at St Paul's School, London, and Queen's College, Oxford, of which he became a Fellow and Tutor, and subsequently Reader in Ancient History. Ordained in 1868, he was appointed Rector of the Parish of Bramshott in the Diocese of Winchester in 1869, remaining there until 1901. He spent a minimum amount of time in his parish, being heavily involved in the life of Queen's College, and later of Herford College, of which he was also a Fellow and Tutor. In addition to his
ecclesiastical and academic duties, Capes was also a noted author, producing learned works on the early Roman Empire, Stoicism, university life in ancient Athens, and on the works of Livy. Capes was an extremely wealthy man, and the older residents of Bramshott still refer to large areas of their town as "Canon Capes' land".

The Parish of which Capes was Rector was under the patronage of Queen's College, Oxford, and all the Rectors and Curates — with the exception of Leadbeater — were graduates of that College. Bramshott lies nine miles from Petersfield in Hampshire, and in 1878 had a population of 1,411. The Church, dedicated to St Mary, was built in 1872 at a cost of two thousand two hundred pounds, and then seated three hundred people. Until 1900 women sat in the north aisle, men in the south, and families and children in the nave. The Rector received an annual income of eight hundred and twenty pounds, plus the Rectory. A school had been built in 1833, and was nationalized in 1871; by 1880 it had sixty pupils. Canon Capes had also built four houses for his curates. His influence on the parish was such that the history of Bramshott describes his time there as "the age of Canon Capes".[2]

One can assume that Leadbeater and his mother went to live in Bramshott at Capes' invitation some time
before he was to be ordained; Jinarajadasa in a biographical
note in the archives of the Esoteric Section of the
Theosophical Society at Adyar says Leadbeater was in
Bramshott for eighteen months as a lay reader whilst
completing preparations for his ordination. [3] There was a
certain amount of reading to be done. In the Diocese of
Winchester at that time candidates for ordination were
required to be graduates of the Universities of Oxford,
Cambridge, Durham or Dublin, or to be "Literates". Literates
were candidates for ordination who lacked a University
degree and were admitted on special application. They were
required to pass a preliminary examination, and to satisfy
the Bishop and his chaplains of their suitability. The
examinations were held twice yearly, at Easter and in
October; presumably Leadbeater sat for his examination in
October, 1878, since he was ordained to the Diaconate in the
Parish Church of St Andrew, at Farnham, on St Thomas' Day,
December 21, of that year, by the Right Reverend Edward
Harold Browne, D.D., Lord Bishop of Winchester.

The preliminary examination consisted of six
sections covering the Old and New Testaments (the latter in
Greek), the Creeds and the Thirty-nine Articles of the
Church of England, the Prayer Book, "selected portions" of
ecclesiastical history; and a chosen work from an
eclesiastical writer in Latin. In 1878, the examination
covered the Book of Psalms, the Gospel according to Mathew, and Corinthians I, together with the history of the Church to the time of the Council of Nicaea, and the history of the English Church 1625–1662, and the Commonitorium of Vincentii Lerinensis. [4]

Having been ordained Deacon, and after paying a fee of thirteen shillings and seven pence, Leadbeater was licenced as Assistant Stipendary Curate in the Parish of Bramshott, charged by the Bishop with "preaching the Word of God, and in reading the Common Prayers and performing all other Ecclesiastical duties" belonging to his office. His annual stipend was to be one hundred and twenty pounds, paid quarterly, and he was directed to reside in the parish. Stipendary assistant curates were traditionally placed in charge of a Parish when the Rector was responsible for a number of parishes, but by 1878 assistant curates were almost entirely appointed to large parishes to assist the incumbent, who paid their stipends, assisted by grants from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and associations like the Society for Promoting the Employment of Additional Curates. By 1873 the average stipend for an assistant curate was one hundred and twenty-nine pounds five shillings and eight pence. Leadbeater's income was somewhat less than he might have expected to receive, especially considering the wealthy parish into which he had been appointed. He lived with his
mother in a cottage, "Hartford", about a quarter of a mile from the small village of Liphook, just outside Bramshott. The house had been built by Capes in 1861 as a residence for a curate. [5]

On St Thomas' Day, 1879, after serving a year as Deacon, Leadbeater was ordained to the Priesthood in St Andrew's Church, Farnham, by Bishop Browne. Thirteen other Priests and sixteen Deacons were ordained that day, amongst them John Wallace Kidston, B.A., M.A., B.C.L., a graduate of Queen's College, Oxford, who was also appointed Curate of Bramshott. Initially Kidston lived in a house in the same road as "Hartford".

As a Curate, Leadbeater was responsible for many of the routine duties involved in parish life: marriages, baptisms, funerals, conducting Morning and Evening Prayer, preaching, visiting the sick and conducting the Sunday School, as well as providing religious instruction for children preparing for confirmation. It cannot have been a busy life, especially after the arrival of Mr Kidston, even with the long absences of Canon Capes. But Leadbeater became increasingly involved with activities for children in the parish; he taught singing, organized clubs and groups for them, ran the Sunday School, and was also responsible for the Church school. And he gathered about him a small group,
of boys with whom he developed especially close relationships, and this established a pattern which was to continue throughout his life.

During his years at Bramshott, Leadbeater also developed another interest which was to continue: the investigation of the supernatural.

Occasionally there would appear in some newspaper an account of the appearance of a ghost, or a curious happening in a haunted house; and whenever anything of that sort came to my notice, I promptly travelled down to the scene of action, interrogated any witnesses that I could find, and spent a good deal of time and trouble in endeavouring personally to encounter the spectral visitant. Of course, in a large number of instances, I drew a blank; either there was no evidence worth mentioning, or the ghost declined to appear when he was wanted.[6]

Undeterred by such difficulties, and becoming more and more involved in such research, Leadbeater was personally convinced of the existence of psychical phenomena.

...among the wearisome monotony of many failures,
there came sometimes a bright oasis of definite success, and I personally collected an amount of direct evidence which would have absolutely convinced me, if I had needed convincing.[70]

In addition to his interest in "spectral visitants", Leadbeater also undertook investigations into cases of "second sight", and travelled extensively in the Scottish Highlands examining instances and taking evidence. [8] He said that this interest in the supernatural began when preparing young people for confirmation and found that orthodox theology could not provide the answers to their questions. He had been led to wonder where the answers lay, and to explore many unorthodox theories.

But he had not heard of spiritualism, despite its vogue in Victorian England, until he read an article in the Daily Telegraph by the Reverend Maurice Davies describing seances held by D.D.Home for the Emperor Napoleon III of France. [9] This drew his attention to the techniques of table-rapping and moving. Amazed by the claims in the article, Leadbeater read it aloud to his mother and expressed his doubts at what was alleged to have happened. The article had concluded with a challenge to its readers: Davies suggested that his claims could be verified by a gathering of a few friends in a darkened room at which hands
were laid on a table, or on the brim of a silk hat resting on a table. Davies claimed that either the table or the hat would begin to move, thus demonstrating the existence of "a force not under the control of anyone present". Leadbeater and his mother decided to experiment that evening.

Accordingly, I took a small round table with a central leg, the normal vocation of which was to support a flower-pot containing a great arum lily. I brought my own silk hat from the stand in the hall, and placed it on the table, and we put our hands on the brim as described. The only person present, besides my mother and myself was a small boy of about twelve, who, as we afterwards discovered, was a powerful physical medium; but I knew nothing about mediums then. I do not think that any of us expected any result whatever, and I know I was immensely surprised when the hat gave a gentle but decided half turn on the polished surface of the table. Each of us thought the other must have moved it consciously, but it soon settled the question for us, for it twirled and gyrated so vigorously that it was difficult for us to keep our hands upon it. [10]

But more was to come: the hat began to rise in the air as
they lifted their hands, and eventually the table went up with it.

Here was my own familiar silk hat, which I never before suspected of any occult qualities, suspending itself mysteriously in the air from the tips of our fingers, and, not content with that defiance of the laws of gravity on its own account, attaching a table to its crown and lifting that also. I looked down to the feet of the table; they were about six inches from the carpet, and no human foot was touching them or near them. I passed my own foot underneath, but there was certainly nothing there — nothing physically perceptible, at any rate. [11]

The table and the hat continued their performance, rocking vigorously, until eventually the hat was thrown off the table to indicate that the experiment was to be concluded. Unlike the average spiritualist of his day, Leadbeater did not attribute these activities to visitations from beyond the grave, but only to some "new force":

I was not myself thinking of the phenomenon in the least as a manifestation from the dead, but only as a discovery of a new force. [12]
Leadbeater was thus led into spiritualism, and in the direction of a philosophy which would account for "strange new forces" without recourse to supernatural visits from the deceased. But, for the time being, and stimulated by his own experiment, Leadbeater began to explore the growing literature of spiritualism, and to investigate mediums. He attended innumerable seances, and while certain that there was "a certain amount of fraud and still more stupidity", he was convinced that at least some of the manifestations were supernatural, and some of them "due to the action of those whom we call dead."

Leadbeater was also engaging in spiritualist experiments with some of the boys in his parish. In his volume of stories, The Perfume of Egypt, he recounts an adventure called "The Forsaken Temple" in which there is clear reference to his own work. [13] The hero is living in a village and assisting the Rector with the choir and the Sunday school, and becomes particularly involved with two brothers, Lionel and Edgar St Aubyn, who share his developing interests in spiritualism. They are employed by him as "good physical mediums" in seances at his home. There seems little doubt that Lionel and Edgar St-Aubyn were Leadbeater's two closest boys in Bramshott, James and Frank Matley. The Matley brothers were taught, as were the boys in
the story, music and singing by Leadbeater, and participated in seances with him. James Matley left the only known account of Leadbeater's work in his parish.

When I first seem to know C.W.L. was one Saturday; I was with two others boys, I suppose between nine and ten years old; we had a dog and were going, with the aid of the dog, to catch a rabbit (I think the rabbit was fairly safe). We met C.W.L. on the way, or rather he was with my brother on a small hill, and appeared to have been firing with a saloon pistol at some target; he pointed the pistol at us and fired, and for fun I dropped down; he having seen the real thing was I fancy not greatly alarmed. The two came down to us and C.W.L. wanted to know what we were doing. We explained and then C.W.L. told Frank that he thought it was time that I was taken in hand, and that he would find for me a nicer amusement than the one I had contemplated. So there and then I was taken on, and from that time on we three were always together and became three brothers. Only studies and such like interfered with our meetings, which were at "Hartford".[14]
their spare time with Leadbeater in the evenings they learned songs or played euchre, on Saturdays they went for long walks or visited other towns, even journeying to London on one occasion to attend the theatre, and occasionally boating on the River Wey. Leadbeater also organized activities for other children in the parish, and established a branch of the "Union Jack Field Club".

I think it was a club in which you promised not to be cruel to any creature, and to report anything of interest that happened amongst the creatures about you. Anyhow we at times with a crowd of boys would take walks into the Forest and across the Commons, collecting all sorts of specimens of natural history. C.W.L. was of course a favourite with the boys, it was to these that he seemed to go and to have most to do with. [15]

Leadbeater also established a branch of the Church Society, in which the members had to promise not to tell lies and to be "pure and good". Meetings of the Church Society were held every fortnight, and the boys sang songs, told stories or listened to readings, and then consumed refreshments provided by Leadbeater, usually fruit, nuts, and cake. Matley suggested that it was the refreshments as much as anything else which encouraged all the parish boys to try to get into
the Society, and led to some jealousy with the children of the "fairly strong crowd of dissenters" who lived within the Parish.

In addition to the Field Club and the Church Society, Leadbeater established a juvenile branch of the Church of England Temperance Society, which began in March, 1880, with James Matley as number one on the membership roll. Leadbeater also had an interest in astronomy, and owned a twelve inch reflector telescope through which he used to gaze at the moon and stars, often spending the long summer evenings observing the heavens. Occasionally he took some of his boys away on holidays, and on one trip took them to France; he also taught them to swim, and organized various sports. He was quite good at cricket and tennis.

And, as Jim Matley recalled, Leadbeater also involved some of his boys in his developing interest in spiritualism.

...C.W.L. used to go to a good few spiritualistic seances and one Easter we spent going to a number in London, to Mr Husk, where the famous Irresistable was, also to Eglinton. He had Husk down to "Hartford" one night for a seance; I think
that a Mr Crowther came as well as we three. We had quite a good evening and lots of phenomena.

[16]

Leadbeater’s interest in spiritualism increased after the death of his mother on May 24, 1882. She was described in her death certificate as "Widow of Charles Leadbeater, cashier to railway contractors", and died from a chronic ulcer of the stomach which led to a haemorrhage into the stomach and bowels. Leadbeater himself was present at her death, but for some reason he did not register it until June 28. Like so many others who have been drawn into spiritualism, Leadbeater was encouraged to a deeper involvement after the death of a relative, and as a result of a feeling of meaninglessness and uncertainty in his life.

Spiritualism, as Ronald Pearsall commented:

..was tailor made for the nineteenth century. Beneath the rationalism and the optimism of Victorian England, there was a wide feeling of unease. God had been dismissed from His universe, and had left a yawning chasm... Spiritualism was a haven for the repressed, the unsatisfied and the bereaved, and was held together only by commitment.
Spiritualism had established itself in the latter half of the nineteenth century, stimulated by fascination with the phenomena produced by the Fox family of Rochester, New York, who from 1848 onwards produced a series of "inexplicable" rappings and other marvels. It caught the interest of the age, and of Leadbeater. Also in 1848 Catherine Crowe published a book that remained one of Leadbeater's favourites: The Night Side of Nature was a mixture of myth, the supernatural and psychic phenomena.[18] By 1852 the first medium had travelled to England from America, and began an enthusiastic interest in table rappings, ghostly knocks and seances.

Essentially the appeal of spiritualism lay in its claim to provide practical proof of the immortality of the soul: it could demonstrate that the "dead" did not die by making them available for consultation with the living. It also promised answers to all manner of questions, since the dead were assumed to have transcended the normal limitations of human knowledge. Accordingly, they could know all that the living knew, and everything else besides. Such was the success of the phenomenon that by 1855 the first wholly spiritualist newspaper, the Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph, had been established in England.
The earliest phenomena of spiritualism were table turning and rapping, a simple manifestation in which the sitters joined hands on the top of a table and were rewarded by inexplicable movements of the table, or mysterious rappings from beneath it. This comparatively primitive technique gradually developed into the more sophisticated seance, a gathering of people centred on a medium, who would fall into a trance and be taken over by a spirit. Seances produced all manner of phenomena: messages via the medium, messages in which the spirit controlling the medium used the medium's vocal cords, direct voice messages (in which the spirit's voice was heard to come from another part of the room, or via a trumpet provided for that purpose), appearances of spirit forms, materializations and even the manifestations of a spiritual "substance" known as "ectoplasm". Apports - material objects miraculously brought into the room - also occasionally appeared. Various types of phenomena passed through phases of popularity: one year, spirit photography, with shadowy forms materializing themselves onto sealed photographic plates; another year, slate writing with messages appearing mysteriously on sealed slates. Even levitation and conversations in the language of the Martians were not unknown. [19]

In the same year as his mother's death and in the
midst of his spiritualist explorations, Leadbeater joined the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, an Anglo-Catholic movement which had been founded in 1862 and dedicated itself to increasing devotion to the Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. The Confraternity was actively opposed by the mainly Protestant hierarchy of the Church of England, and operated in virtual secrecy. It proclaimed a number of doctrines which, whilst not unknown in the Church of England today, were regarded as radical, even heretical, in 1882: these included prayers for the dead, the use of Eucharistic vestments, the doctrine of the Sacrifice of the Mass, fasting Communion, and the Real Presence of Christ in Holy Communion. [20] It remains a mystery as to why Leadbeater should have joined the Confraternity; not only was he a Curate in a distinctly Low Church Parish, but he was also in the midst of explorations into spiritualism. There was no branch of the Confraternity in the Diocese of Winchester, and so Leadbeater, who had become Priest Associate number 1331, was attached to the South Kensington Chapter. [21]

The question of Leadbeater's theological knowledge and attitude is one which became important in later years, especially when he began his explorations of Christian origins and doctrine, and began work within what became the Liberal Catholic Church. His preparation for
ordination in the Church of England involved very little theological study as such, and his published works suggest a very limited understanding of either Christian doctrine in the general sense or of the teachings of the Church of England in particular. He wrote two books concerned specifically with Christian theology — The Christian Creed, originally published in 1899 [22], and a work, never published in full, which in manuscript was called An Enquiry Into the Failure of Christianity.[23] Neither indicates any deep understanding of Christian theology, and the latter, devoted to an attack on what he supposed to be traditional Christian doctrine, in fact considers only what theology might be found in extremely elementary forms of Protestantism. What knowledge of more traditional theology he had, especially regarding the Greek phrasing of some doctrine in the Creeds, Leadbeater derived from a small nineteenth century study of Christology, Salvator Mundi, by Samuel Cox, to which he made frequent reference. [24]

If Christian theology was not his special interest, then spiritualism, its phenomena and philosophy, was quickly to become and to remain a virtual obsession with him, although under other names.