

*Madame Blavatsky
on Plato's Timaeus*



Blavatsky on Timaeus and the Master of Balliol College who found Timaeus obscure and repulsive

First come I. My name is J-W-TT.
There's no knowledge but I know it.
I am Master of this College,
What I don't know isn't knowledge.¹

From *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (INTRODUCTORY) XIV pp. 1-16.²
Possibly an Introduction to a third volume of *The Secret Doctrine*.
Frontispiece: [Plato's olive grove dedicated to Athena] by Joanne Osband.

POWER BELONGS TO HIM WHO KNOWS; this is a very old axiom. Knowledge — the first step to which is the power of comprehending the truth, of discerning the real from the false — is for those only who, having freed themselves from every prejudice and conquered their human conceit and selfishness, are ready to accept every and any truth, once it is demonstrated to them. Of such there are very few. The majority judge of a work according to the respective prejudices of its critics, who are guided in their turn by the popularity or unpopularity of the author, rather than by its own faults or merits. Outside the Theosophical circle, therefore, the present volume is certain to receive at the hands of the general public a still colder welcome than its two predecessors have met with.³ In our day no statement can hope for a fair trial, or even hearing, unless its arguments run on the line of legitimate and accepted enquiry, remaining strictly within the boundaries of official Science or orthodox Theology.

Our age is a paradoxical anomaly. It is pre-eminently materialistic and as pre-eminently pietistic. Our literature, our modern thought and progress, so called, both run on these two parallel lines, so incongruously dissimilar and yet both so popular and so very orthodox, each in its own way. He who presumes to draw a third line, as a hyphen of reconciliation between the two, has to be fully prepared for the worst. He will have his work mangled by reviewers, mocked by the sycophants of Science and

¹ Balliol Rhymes, "The Masque of B-LL-L," 1875; [when pronounced, "Jowett" rhymes with "know it."]

² [It is impossible to ascertain whether the division of the text into Sections and the titles of the individual Sections are H.P. Blavatsky's, or whether they have been added by the Editor. We have preserved them intact. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

³ [It is possible that H.P. Blavatsky had in mind an additional volume of *The Secret Doctrine* which was never actually found among her papers. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

Church, misquoted by his opponents, and rejected even by the pious lending libraries. The absurd misconceptions, in so-called cultured circles of society, of the ancient Wisdom-Religion (Bodhism)¹ after the admirably clear and scientifically-presented explanations in *Esoteric Buddhism*, are a good proof in point. They might have served as a caution even to those Theosophists who, hardened in an almost life-long struggle in the service of their Cause, are neither timid with their pen, nor in the least appalled by dogmatic assumption and scientific authority. Yet, do what Theosophical writers may, neither materialism nor doctrinal pietism will ever give their Philosophy a fair hearing. Their doctrines will be systematically rejected, and their theories denied a place even in the ranks of those scientific ephemera, the ever-shifting “working hypotheses” of our day. To the advocate of the “animalistic” theory, our cosmogenetical and anthropogenetical teachings are “fairy tales” at best. For to those who would shirk any moral responsibility, it seems certainly more convenient to accept descent from a common simian ancestor and see a brother in a dumb, tailless baboon, than to acknowledge the fatherhood of Pitris, the “Sons of God,” and to have to recognise as a brother a starveling from the slums.

“Hold back!” shout in their turn the pietists. “You will never make of respectable church-going Christians Esoteric Buddhists!”

Nor are we, in truth, in any way anxious to attempt the metamorphosis.² But this cannot, nor shall it, prevent Theosophists from saying what they have to say, especially to those who, in opposing to our doctrine Modern Science, do so not for her own fair sake, but only to ensure the success of their private hobbies and personal glorification. If we cannot prove many of our points, no more can they; yet we may show how, instead of giving historical and scientific facts — for the edification of those who, knowing less than they, look to Scientists to do their thinking and form their opinions — the efforts of most of our scholars seem solely directed to killing ancient facts, or distorting them into props to support their own special views. This will be done in no spirit of malice or even criticism, as the writer readily admits that most of those she finds fault with stand immeasurably higher in learning than herself. But great scholarship does not preclude bias and prejudice, nor is it a safeguard against self-conceit, but rather the reverse. Moreover, it is but in the legitimate defence of our own statements, *i.e.*, the vindication of Ancient Wisdom and its great truths, that we mean to take our “great authorities” to task.

Indeed, unless the precaution of answering beforehand certain objections to the fundamental propositions in the present work be adopted — objections which are certain to be made on the authority of this, that, or another scholar concerning the Esoteric character of all the archaic and ancient works on Philosophy — our statements will be once more contradicted and even discredited. One of the main points in

¹ Cf. “When one speaks of esoteric Buddhism (with one *d*) to the European public — so ignorant of oriental matters — it is mistaken for Buddhism, the religion of Gautama the Buddha. “Buddha” is a title of the sages and means the “illuminated one”; Buddhism comes from the word “Budha” (wisdom, intelligence) personified in the *Purānas*.” *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (MISCONCEPTIONS – G) VIII p. 75

² [The above paragraphs may be found in *Lucifer*, Vol. VIII, pp. 97-98, and in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, Vol. XIII, pp. 148-51]

this Volume¹ is to indicate in the works of the old Aryan, Greek, and other Philosophers of note, as well as in all the world-scriptures, the presence of a strong Esoteric allegory and symbolism. Another of the objects is to prove that the key of interpretation, as furnished by the Eastern Hindu-Buddhistic canon of Occultism-fitting as well the Christian Gospels as it does archaic Egyptian, Greek, Chaldaean, Persian, and even Hebrew-Mosaic Books — must have been one common to all the nations, however divergent may have been their respective methods and exoteric “blinds.” These claims are vehemently denied by some of the foremost scholars of our day. In his Edinburgh Lectures, Prof. Max Müller discarded this fundamental statement of the Theosophists by pointing to the Hindu Śāstras and Pandits, who know nothing of such Esotericism.² The learned Sanskrit scholar stated in so many words that there was no hidden meaning, no Esoteric element or “blinds,” either in the *Purānas* or the *Upanishads*. Considering that the word “Upanishad” means, when translated, the “Secret Doctrine,” the assertion is, to say the least, extraordinary. Sir M. Monier-Williams again holds the same view with regard to Buddhism. To hear him is to regard Gautama, the Buddha, as an enemy of every pretence to Esoteric teachings. He himself never taught them! All such “pretences” to Occult learning and “magic powers” are due to the later Arhats, the subsequent followers of the “Light of Asia”! Prof. B. Jowett, again, as contemptuously passes the sponge over the “absurd” interpretations of Plato’s *Timaeus* and the Mosaic Books by the Neo-Platonists. There is not a breath of the Oriental (Gnostic) spirit of Mysticism in Plato’s *Dialogues*, the Regius Professor of Greek tells us, nor any approach to Science, either. Finally, to cap the climax, Prof. Sayce, the Assyriologist, although he does not deny the actual presence, in the Assyrian tablets and cuneiform literature, of a hidden meaning:

Many of the sacred texts were so written as to be intelligible only to the initiated.³

Yet insists that the “keys and glosses” thereof are now in the hands of the Assyriologists. The modern scholars, he affirms, have in their possession clues to the interpretation of the Esoteric Records.

Which even the initiated priests [of Chaldaeae] did not possess.

Thus, in the scholarly appreciation of our modern Orientalists and Professors, Science was in its infancy in the days of the Egyptian and Chaldaean Astronomers. Pānini, the greatest Grammarian in the world, was unacquainted with the art of writing. So was the Lord Buddha, and everyone else in India until 300 B.C. The grossest ignorance reigned in the days of the Indian Rishis, and even in those of Thales, Pythagoras, and Plato. Theosophists must indeed be superstitious ignoramuses to speak as they do, in the face of such learned evidence to the contrary!

¹ [If these are actually H.P. Blavatsky’s own words, and not those of the Editor, she had in mind an additional volume of *The Secret Doctrine* which she speaks of in Volumes I and II. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

² The majority of the Pandits know nothing of the Esoteric Philosophy now, because they have lost the key to it; yet not one of these, if honest, would deny that the *Upanishads*, and especially the *Purānas*, are allegorical and symbolical; nor that there still remain in India a few great scholars who could, if they would, give them the key to such interpretations. Nor do they reject the actual existence of Mahātmas — initiated Yogis and Adepts — even in this age of Kali-Yuga.

³ [See the *Hibbert Lectures* for 1887, pp. 14-17, or *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, Vol. XIII, p. 91 & fn.]

Truly it looks as if, since the world's creation, there has been but one age of real knowledge on earth — the present age. In the misty twilight, in the grey dawn of history, stand the pale shadows of the old Sages of world renown. They were hopelessly groping for the correct meaning of their own Mysteries, the spirit whereof has departed without revealing itself to the Hierophants, and has remained latent in space until the advent of the initiates of Modern Science and Research. The noontide brightness of knowledge has only now arrived at the "Know-All," who, basking in the dazzling sun of induction, busies himself with his Penelopeian task of "working hypotheses," and loudly asserts his rights to universal knowledge. Can anyone wonder, then, that according to present views the learning of the ancient Philosopher, and even sometimes that of his direct successors in the past centuries, has ever been useless to the world and valueless to himself? For, as explained repeatedly in so many words, while the Rishis and the Sages of old have walked far over the arid fields of myth and superstition, the mediaeval Scholar, and even the average eighteenth century Scientist, have always been more or less cramped by their "supernatural" religion and beliefs. True, it is generally conceded that some ancient and also mediaeval Scholars, such as Pythagoras, Plato, Paracelsus and Roger Bacon, followed by a host of glorious names, had indeed left not a few landmarks over precious mines of Philosophy and unexplored lodes of Physical Science. But then the actual excavation of these, the smelting of the gold and silver, and the cutting of the precious jewels they contain, are all due to the patient labours of the modern man of Science. And is it not to the unparalleled genius of the latter that the ignorant and hitherto deluded world owes a correct knowledge of the real nature of the Kosmos, of the true origin of the universe and man, as revealed in the automatic and mechanical theories of the Physicists, in accordance with strictly scientific Philosophy? Before our cultured era, Science was but a name, Philosophy a delusion and a snare. According to the modest claims of contemporary authority on genuine Science and Philosophy, the Tree of Knowledge has only now sprung from the dead weeds of superstition, as a beautiful butterfly emerges from an ugly grub. We have, therefore, nothing for which to thank our forefathers. The Ancients have at best prepared and fertilized the soil; it is the Moderns who have planted the seeds of knowledge and reared the lovely plants called blank negation and sterile agnosticism.

Such, however, is not the view taken by Theosophists. They repeat what was stated twenty years ago. It is not sufficient to speak of the "untenable conceptions of an uncultured past" (Tyndall); of the "*parler enfantin*" of the Vaidic poets (Max Müller); of the "absurdities" of the Neo-Platonists (Jowett); and of the ignorance of the Chaldaeo-Assyrian initiated Priests with regard to their own symbols, when compared with the knowledge thereon of the British Orientalist (Sayce). Such assumptions have to be proven by something more solid than the mere word of these scholars. For no amount of boastful arrogance can hide the intellectual quarries out of which the representations of so many modern Philosophers and Scholars have been carved. How many of the most distinguished European Scientists have derived honour and credit for the mere dressing-up of the ideas of these old Philosophers, whom they are ever ready to disparage, is left to an impartial posterity to say. Thus it does seem not alto-

gether untrue, as stated in *Isis Unveiled*,¹ to say of certain Orientalists and Scholars of dead languages, that they will allow their boundless conceit and self-opinionatedness to run away with their logic and reasoning powers, rather than concede to the ancient Philosophers the knowledge of anything the modern do not know.

As part of this work treats of the Initiates and the secret knowledge imparted during the Mysteries, the statements of those who, in spite of the fact that Plato was an Initiate, maintain that no hidden Mysticism is to be discovered in his works, have to be first examined. Too many of the present scholars, Greek and Sanskrit, are but too apt to forego facts in favour of their own preconceived theories based on personal prejudice. They conveniently forget, at every opportunity, not only the numerous changes in language, but also that the allegorical style in the writings of old Philosophers and the secretiveness of the Mystics had their *raison d'être*; that both the pre-Christian and the post-Christian classical writers — the great majority at all events — were under the sacred obligation never to divulge the solemn secrets communicated to them in the sanctuaries; and that this alone is sufficient to sadly mislead their translators and profane critics. But these critics will admit nothing of the kind, as will presently be seen.

For over twenty-two centuries everyone who has read Plato has been aware that, like most of the other Greek Philosophers of note, he had been initiated; that therefore, being tied down by the Sodalian Oath, he could speak of certain things only in veiled allegories. His reverence for the Mysteries is unbounded; he openly confesses that he writes “enigmatically,” and we see him take the greatest precautions to conceal the true meaning of his words. Every time the subject touches the greater secrets of Oriental Wisdom — the cosmogony of the universe, or the ideal pre-existing world — Plato shrouds his Philosophy in the profoundest darkness. His *Timaeus* is so confused that no one but an Initiate can understand the hidden meaning. As already said in *Isis Unveiled*:

The speculations of Plato in the *Banquet*, on the creation [or rather the evolution] of primordial men, and the essay on Cosmogony in the *Timaeus*, must be taken allegorically, if we accept them at all. It is this hidden Pythagorean meaning in *Timaeus*, *Cratylus*, and *Parmenides*, and a few other trilogies and dialogues, that the Neo-Platonists ventured to expound, as far as the theurgical vow of secrecy would allow them. The Pythagorean doctrine that *God is the Universal Mind diffused through all things*, and the dogma of the soul's immortality, are the leading features in these apparently incongruous teachings. His piety and the great veneration Plato felt for the MYSTERIES, are sufficient warrant that he would not allow his indiscretion to get the better of that deep sense of responsibility which is felt by every adept. “Constantly perfecting himself in perfect MYSTERIES, a man in them alone becomes truly perfect,” says he in the *Phaedrus*.²

He took no pains to conceal his displeasure that the Mysteries had become less secret than formerly. Instead of profaning them by putting them within the

¹ [II p.103]

² [249c]

reach of the multitude, he would have guarded them with jealous care against all but the most earnest and worthy of his disciples.¹ While mentioning the gods, on every page, his monotheism is unquestionable, for the whole thread of his discourse indicates that by the term *gods* he means a class of beings far lower in the scale than deities, and but one grade higher than men. Even Josephus perceived and acknowledged this fact, despite the natural prejudice of his race. In his famous onslaught upon Apion, this historian says:²

“Those, however, among the Greeks who philosophized *in accordance with truth*, were not ignorant of anything, . . . nor did they fail to perceive the chilling superficialities of the mythical allegories, on which account they justly despised them. . . . By which thing Plato, being moved, says it is not necessary to admit any one of the other poets into ‘the Commonwealth,’ and *he dismisses Homer* blandly, after having crowned him and pouring unguent upon him, in order that indeed he should not destroy, by *his myths*, the *orthodox belief respecting one God*.”³

And this is the “God” of every Philosopher, God infinite and impersonal. All this and much more, which there is no room here to quote, leads one to the undeniable certitude that, (a) as all the Sciences and Philosophies were in the hands of the temple Hierophants, Plato, as initiated by them, must have known them; and (b) that logical inference alone is amply sufficient to justify anyone in regarding Plato’s writings as allegories and “dark sayings,” veiling truths which he had no right to divulge.

This established, how comes it that one of the best Greek scholars in England, Prof. Jowett, the modern translator of Plato’s works, seeks to demonstrate that none of the *Dialogues* — including even the *Timaeus* — have any element of Oriental Mysticism about them? Those who can discern the true spirit of Plato’s Philosophy will hardly be convinced by the arguments which the Master of Balliol College lays before his readers. “Obscure and repulsive” to him, the *Timaeus* may certainly be; but it is as certain that this obscurity does not arise, as the Professor tells his public, “in the infancy of physical science,” but rather in its days of secrecy; not “out of the confusion of theological, mathematical, and physiological notions,” or “out of the desire to conceive the whole of nature without any adequate knowledge of the parts.”⁴ For Mathematics and Geometry were the backbone of Occult cosmogony, hence of “Theology,” and the physiological notions of the ancient Sages are being daily verified by Science in our age; at least, to those who know how to read and understand ancient Esoteric works. The “knowledge of the parts” avails us little, if this knowledge only leads us the more to ignorance of the Whole, or the “nature and reason of the Universal,” as Plato called Deity, and causes us to blunder most egregiously because of our boasted

¹ This assertion is clearly corroborated by Plato himself, who says: “You say that, in my former discourse, I have not sufficiently explained to you the nature of the *First*. *I purposely spoke enigmatically*, that in case the tablet should have happened with any accident, either by sea or land, a person *without some previous knowledge of the subject*, might not be able to understand its contents.” (*Epistles* II, 312e; cf. Cory, *Ancient Fragments*, p. 304)

² *Contra Apionem*, II, § 37

³ *Isis Unveiled*, I pp. 287-88

⁴ *The Dialogues of Plato*, translated by B. Jowett, Regius Professor of Greek at the University of Oxford, Vol. III, p. 523

inductive methods. Plato may have been “incapable of induction or generalization in the modern sense”;¹ he may have been ignorant also, of the circulation of the blood, which, we are told, “was absolutely unknown to him,”² but then, there is naught to disprove that he knew what blood *is* — and this is more than any Physiologist or Biologist can claim nowadays.

Though a wider and far more generous margin for knowledge is allowed the “physical philosopher” by Prof. Jowett than by nearly any other modern commentator and critic, nevertheless, his criticism so considerably outweighs his laudation, that it may be as well to quote his own words, to show clearly his bias. Thus he says:

To bring sense under the control of reason; to find some way through the labyrinth or chaos of appearances, either the highway of mathematics, or more devious paths suggested by the analogy of man with the world, and of the world with man; to see that all things have a cause and are tending towards an end — this is the spirit of the ancient physical philosopher.³ But we neither appreciate the conditions of knowledge to which he was subjected, nor have the ideas which fastened upon his imagination the same hold upon us. For he is hovering between matter and mind; he is under the dominion of abstractions; his impressions are taken almost at random from the outside of nature; he sees the light, but not the objects which are revealed by the light; and he brings into juxtaposition things which to us appear wide as the poles asunder, because he finds nothing between them.

The last proposition but one must evidently be distasteful to the modern “physical philosopher,” who sees the “objects” before him, but fails to see the light of the Universal Mind, which reveals them, *i.e.*, who proceeds in a diametrically opposite way. Therefore the learned Professor comes to the conclusion that the ancient Philosopher, whom he now judges from Plato’s *Timaeus*, must have acted in a decidedly unphilosophical and even irrational way. For:

He passes abruptly from persons to ideas and numbers, and *from ideas and numbers to persons*;⁴ he confuses subject and object, *first* and *final* causes, and is dreaming of geometrical figures⁵ lost in a flux of sense. And an effort of mind

¹ *op. cit.*, p. 561

² *op. cit.*, p. 591

³ This definition places (unwittingly, of course), the ancient “physical philosopher” many cubits higher than his modern “physical” *confrère*, since the *ultima Thule* of the latter is to lead mankind to believe that neither universe nor man have any cause at all — not an intelligent one at all events — and that they have sprung into existence owing to blind chance and a senseless whirling of atoms. Which of the two hypotheses is the more rational and logical is left to the impartial reader to decide. [*op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 523]

⁴ Italics are mine. Every tyro in Eastern Philosophy, every Kabbalist, will see the reason for such an association of persons with ideas, numbers, and geometrical figures. For number, says Philolaus, “is the dominant and self-produced bond of the eternal continuance of things.” [See his *Fragments On the Universe*; in Diels: *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers*.] Alone the modern Scholar remains blind to the grand truth.

⁵ Here again the ancient Philosopher seems to be ahead of the modern. For he only “confuses . . . first and final causes” (which confusion is denied by those who know the spirit of ancient scholarship), whereas his modern successor is confessedly and absolutely ignorant of both. Mr. Tyndall shows Science “powerless” to solve a single one of the final problems of Nature and “disciplined [read, modern materialistic] imagination retiring in bewilderment from the contemplation of the problems” of the world of matter. He even doubts whether the men of present Science possess “the intellectual elements which would enable them to grapple with the ultimate structural energies of Nature.” But for Plato and his disciples, the lower types were but the concrete images of the higher abstract ones; the immortal Soul has an arithmetical, as the body has a geometrical, beginning. This

is required on our parts *in order to understand this double language*, or to apprehend *the twilight character of this knowledge*, and the genius of ancient philosophers, which under such conditions [?] seems by a divine power in many instances to have anticipated the truth.¹

Whether “such conditions” imply those of ignorance and mental stolidity in “the genius of ancient philosophers” or something else, we do not know. But what we do know is that the meaning of the sentences we have italicized is perfectly clear. Whether the Regius Professor of Greek believes or disbelieves in a hidden sense of geometrical figures and of the Esoteric “jargon,” he nevertheless admits the presence of a “double language” in the writings of these Philosophers. Thence he admits a hidden meaning, which must have had an interpretation. Why, then, does he flatly contradict his own statement on the very next page? And why should he deny to the *Timaeus* — that pre-eminently Pythagorean (mystic) Dialogue — any Occult meaning and take such pains to convince his readers that

The influence which the *Timaeus* has exercised upon posterity is partly due to a misunderstanding.

The following quotation from his Introduction is in direct contradiction with the paragraph which precedes it, as above quoted:

In the supposed depths of this dialogue the Neo-Platonists found hidden meanings and connections with the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, and out of them they elicited doctrines quite at variance with the spirit of Plato. Believing that he was inspired by the Holy Ghost, or had received his wisdom from Moses,² they seemed to find in his writings the Christian Trinity, the Word, the Church . . . and the Neo-Platonists had a method of interpretation which could elicit any meaning out of any words. They were really incapable of distinguishing between the opinions of one philosopher and another, or between the serious thoughts of Plato and his passing fancies.³ . . . [But] there is no danger of the modern commentators on the *Timaeus* falling into the absurdities of the Neo-Platonists.

No danger whatever, of course, for the simple reason that the modern commentators have never had the key to Occult interpretations. And before another word is said in defence of Plato and the Neo-Platonists, the learned master of Balliol College ought to be respectfully asked: What does, or can he know of the Esoteric canon of interpreta-

beginning, as the reflection of the great universal Archæus (*Anima Mundi*), is self-moving, and from the centre diffuses itself over the whole body of the Macrocosm.

¹ *op. cit.*, p. 523-24

² Nowhere are the Neo-Platonists guilty of such an absurdity. The learned Professor of Greek must have been thinking of two spurious works attributed by Eusebius and St. Jerome to Ammonius Saccas, who wrote nothing; or must have confused the Neo-Platonists with Philo Judæus. But then Philo lived over 130 years before the birth of the founder of Neo-Platonism He belonged to the School of Aristobulus the Jew, who lived under Ptolemy Philometor (150 years B.C.), and is credited with having inaugurated the movement which tended to prove that Plato and even the Peripatetic Philosophy were derived from the “revealed” Mosaic Books. Valckenaer tries to show that the author of the *Commentaries on the Books of Moses*, was not Aristobulus, the sycophant of Ptolemy [Cf. *Diatribe de Aristobulo, Judæo*, etc., ed. by J. Juzacio, Lugd. Bat., 1806]. But whatever he was, he was not a Neo-Platonist, but lived before, or during the days of Philo Judæus, since the latter seems to know his works and follow his methods.

³ Only Clemens Alexandrinus, a Christian Neo-Platonist and a very fantastic writer.

tion? By the term “canon” is here meant that key which was communicated orally from “mouth to ear” by the Master to the disciple, or by the Hierophant to the candidate for initiation; this from time immemorial throughout a long series of ages, during which the inner — not public — Mysteries were the most sacred institution of every land. Without such a key no correct interpretation of either the *Dialogues* of Plato or of any Scripture, from the *Vedas* to Homer, from the *Zend-Avesta* to the Mosaic Books, is possible. How then can the Rev. Dr. Jowett know that the interpretations made by the Neo-Platonists of the various sacred books of the nations were “absurdities”? Where, again, has he found an opportunity of studying these “interpretations”? History shows that all such works were destroyed by the Christian Church Fathers and their fanatical catechumens, wherever they were found. To say that such men as Ammonius, a genius and a saint, whose learning and holy life earned for him the title of *Theodidaktos* (“god-taught”), such men as Plotinus, Porphyry, and Proclus, were

. . . incapable of distinguishing between the opinions of one philosopher and another, or between the serious thoughts of Plato and his fancies,

is to assume an untenable position for a Scholar. It amounts to saying that,

(a) Scores of the most famous Philosophers, the greatest Scholars and Sages of Greece and of the Roman Empire were dull fools,

(b) And that all the other commentators, lovers of Greek Philosophy, some of them the acutest intellects of the age — who do not agree with Dr. Jowett — are also fools and no better than those whom they admire.

The patronising tone of the last above-quoted passage is modulated with the most *naive* conceit, remarkable even in our age of self-glorification and mutual-admiration cliques. We have to compare the Professor’s views with those of some other scholars.

Says Prof. Alexander Wilder of New York, one of the best Platonists of the day, speaking of Ammonius, the founder of the Neo-Platonic School:

His deep spiritual intuition, his extensive learning, his familiarity with the Christian Fathers, Pantaenus, Clement and Athenagoras, and with the most erudite philosophers of the time, all fitted him for the labour which he performed so thoroughly.¹ He was successful in drawing to his views the greatest scholars and public men of the Roman Empire, who had little taste for wasting time in dialectic pursuits or superstitious observances. The results of his ministration are perceptible at the present day in every country of the Christian world; every prominent system of doctrine now bearing the marks of his plastic hand. Every ancient philosophy has had its votaries among the moderns; and even Judaism . . . has taken upon itself changes which were suggested by the “God-taught” Alexandrian . . . He was a man of rare learning and endowments, of blameless life and amiable disposition. His almost superhuman ken and many excellencies won for him the title of *theodidaktos*, or God-taught; but he

¹ The labour of reconciling the different systems of religion.

followed the modest example of Pythagoras, and only assumed the title of *philaletheian*, or, lover of truth.¹

It would be happy for truth and fact were our modern scholars to follow as modestly in the steps of their great predecessors. But not they — Philaletheians!

Moreover, we know that:

Like Orpheus, Pythagoras, Confucius, Socrates, and Jesus himself,² Ammonius committed nothing to writing.³ Instead, he . . . communicated his most important doctrines to persons duly instructed and disciplined, imposing on them the obligations of secrecy; as was done before him by Zoroaster and Pythagoras, and in the Mysteries. Except a few treatises of his disciples, we have only the declarations of his adversaries from which to ascertain what he actually taught.⁴

It is from the biased statements of such “adversaries,” probably, that the learned Oxford translator of Plato’s *Dialogues* came to the conclusion that:

That which was truly great and truly characteristic of him [Plato], his effort to realise and connect abstractions, *was not understood* by them [the Neo-Platonists] at all [?]

He states, contemptuously enough for the ancient methods of intellectual analysis, that:

In the present day . . . an ancient philosopher is to be interpreted from himself, and by the contemporary history of thought.⁵

This is like saying that the ancient Greek canon of proportion (if ever found), and the Athena Promachos of Phidias, have to be interpreted in the present day from the contemporary history of architecture and sculpture, from the Albert Hall and Memorial Monument, and the hideous Madonnas in crinolines sprinkled over the fair face of Italy. Prof. Jowett remarks that “mysticism is not criticism.” No; but neither is criticism always fair and sound judgment.

¹ *New Platonism and Alchemy*, by Alexander Wilder, M.D., pp. 7, 4. [See 1975 reprint of the 1869 ed. by Wizards Bookshelf. Full text in our Theosophy and Theosophists Series.]

² It is well-known that, though born of Christian parents, Ammonius had renounced the tenets of the Church — Eusebius and Jerome notwithstanding. Porphyry, the disciple of Plotinus, who had lived with Ammonius for eleven years together, and who had no interest in stating an untruth, positively declares that he had renounced Christianity entirely. On the other hand, we know that Ammonius believed in the bright Gods, Protectors, and that the Neo-Platonic Philosophy was as “pagan” as it was mystical. But Eusebius, the most unscrupulous forger and falsifier of old texts, and St. Jerome, an out-and-out fanatic, who had both an interest in denying the fact, contradict Porphyry. We prefer to believe the latter, who has left to posterity an unblemished name and a great reputation for honesty.

³ Two works are falsely attributed to Ammonius. One, now lost, called *De Consensu Moysis et Jesu*, is mentioned by the same “trustworthy” Eusebius, the Bishop of Caesarea, and the friend of the Christian Emperor Constantine, who died, however, a heathen. All that is known of this pseudo-work is that Jerome bestows great praise upon it (*Vir. Illust.*, cap lv, and Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, VI, xix). The other spurious production is called the *Diatessaron* (or the “Harmony of the Gospels”). This is partially extant. But then, again, it exists only in the Latin version of Victor, Bishop of Capua (sixth century), who attributed it himself to Tatian, and as wrongly, probably, as later scholars attributed the *Diatessaron* to Ammonius. Therefore no great reliance can be placed upon it, nor on its “esoteric” interpretation of the Gospels. Is it this work, we wonder, which led Prof. Jowett to regard the Neo-Platonic interpretations as “absurdities”?

⁴ Wilder, *op. cit.*, p. 7

⁵ Jowett, *op. cit.*, III, p. 524

La critique est aisée, mais l'art est difficile.

And such “art” our critic of the Neo-Platonists — his Greek scholarship notwithstanding — lacks from *a* to *z*. Nor has he, very evidently, the key to the true spirit of the Mysticism of Pythagoras and Plato, since he denies even in the *Timaeus* an element of Oriental Mysticism, and seeks to show Greek Philosophy reacting upon the East, forgetting that the truth is the exact reverse; that it is “the deeper and more pervading spirit of Orientalism” that had — through Pythagoras and his own initiation into the Mysteries — penetrated into the very depths of Plato’s soul.

But Dr. Jowett does not see this. Nor is he prepared to admit that anything good or rational — in accordance with the “contemporary history of thought” — could ever come out of that Nazareth of the Pagan Mysteries; nor even that there is anything to interpret of a hidden nature in the *Timaeus* or any other *Dialogue*. For him,

The so-called mysticism of Plato is purely Greek, arising out of his imperfect knowledge¹ and high aspirations, and is the growth of an age in which philosophy is not wholly separated from poetry and mythology.²

Among several other equally erroneous propositions, it is especially the assumptions (*a*) that Plato was entirely free from any element of Eastern Philosophy in his writings, and (*b*) that every modern scholar, without being a Mystic and a Kabbalist himself, can pretend to judge of ancient Esotericism — which we mean to combat. To do this we have to produce more authoritative statements than our own would be, and bring the evidence of other scholars as great as Dr. Jowett, if not greater, specialists in their subjects, moreover, to bear on and destroy the arguments of the Oxford Regius Professor of Greek.

That Plato was undeniably an ardent admirer and follower of Pythagoras no one will deny. And it is equally undeniable, as Matter has it, that Plato had inherited on the one hand his doctrines, and on the other had drawn his wisdom, from the same sources as the Samian Philosopher.³ And the doctrines of Pythagoras are Oriental to the backbone, and even Brāhmanical; for this great Philosopher ever pointed to the far East as the source whence he derived his information and his Philosophy, and Colebrooke shows that Plato makes the same profession in his *Epistles*, and says that he has taken his teachings “from ancient and sacred doctrines.”⁴ Furthermore, the ideas of both Pythagoras and Plato coincide too well with the systems of India and with Zoroastrianism to admit any doubt of their origin by anyone who has some acquaintance with these systems.

¹ “Imperfect knowledge” of what? That Plato was ignorant of many of the modern “working hypotheses” — as ignorant as our immediate posterity is sure to be of the said hypotheses when they in their turn, after exploding, join the “great majority” — is perhaps a blessing in disguise.

² *op. cit.*, pp. 524-25

³ *Histoire Critique du Gnosticisme*, by J. Matter, Professor of the Royal Academy of Strasbourg. “It is in Pythagoras and Plato that we find, in Greece, the first elements of [Oriental] Gnosticism,” he says. (Vol. I, ch. iii, p. 53; Strasbourg ed. 1843-44)

⁴ *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, London, 1827, Vol. I, pp. 578-79

Again:

Pantaenus, Athenagoras and Clement were thoroughly instructed in the Platonic philosophy, and *comprehended* its essential unity with the Oriental systems.¹

The history of Pantaenus and his contemporaries may give the key to the Platonic, and at the same time Oriental, elements that predominate so strikingly in the Gospels over the Jewish Scriptures.²



¹ *New Platonism and Alchemy*, p. 4

² Excerpted from *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (INTRODUCTORY) XIV pp. 1-16