

Blavatsky refutes the modern negators of Ancient Science



Part 1

It is a sign of relative inferiority to believe oneself superior

An offering to those who, though may be enlightened on some special point of science, take upon themselves the right of pronouncing arbitrarily their judgment on all things; and are ready to reject everything new which shocks their ideas, often for the sole reason that if it were true they could not remain ignorant of it!

First published in *Lucifer*, Vol. VIII, No. 44, April 1891, pp. 89-98.

Republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE NEGATORS OF SCIENCE) XIII pp. 138-51.

As for what thou hearest others say, who persuade the many that the soul, when once freed from the body, neither suffers evil nor is conscious, I know that thou art better grounded in the doctrines received by us from our ancestors and in the sacred oracles of Dionysos, than to believe them; for the mystic symbols are well known to us, who belong to the "Brotherhood."

— PLUTARCH

Of late, Theosophists in general, and the writer of the present paper especially, have been severely taken to task for *disrespect to science*. We are asked what right we have to question the conclusions of the most eminent men of learning, to refuse recognition of infallibility (which implies omniscience) to our modern scholars? How dare we, in short, "contemptuously ignore" their most undeniable and "universally accepted theories," etc., etc. This article is written with the intention of giving some reasons for our sceptical attitude.

To begin with, in order to avoid a natural misunderstanding in view of the preceding paragraph, let the reader at once know that the title, "The NEGATORS of Science," applies in nowise to Theosophists. Quite the reverse. By "Science" we here mean ANCIENT WISDOM, while its "Negators" represent *modern materialistic Scientists*. Thus we have once more "the sublime audacity" of, David-like, confronting, with an old-fashioned theosophical sling for our only weapon, the giant Goliath "armed with a coat of mail," and weighing "five thousand shekels of brass," truly. Let the Philistine deny facts, and substitute for them his "working hypotheses": we reject the latter and defend facts, "the armies of the one living TRUTH."

The frankness of this plain statement is certain to awake all the sleeping dogs, and to set every parasite of modern science snapping at our editorial heels. "Those wretched Theosophists!" will be the cry. "How long shall they refuse to humble themselves; and how long shall we bear with this evil congregation?" Well, it will certainly take a considerable time to put us down, as more than one experiment has already shown. Very naturally, our confession of faith must provoke the wrath of every sycophant of

the mechanical and animalistic theories of the Universe and Man; and the numbers of these sycophants are large, even if not very awe-inspiring. In our cycle of whole-sale denial the ranks of the Didymoi are daily reinforced by every new-baked materialist and so-called “infidel,” who escapes, full of reactive energy, from the narrow fields of church dogmatism. We know the numerical strength of our foes and opponents, and do not underrate it. More: in this present case even some of our best friends may ask, as they have done before now: “*Cui bono?* why not leave our highly respectable, firmly-rooted, official Science, with her scientists and their flunkeys, severely alone?”

Further on it will be shown *why*; when our friends will learn that we have very good reason to act as we do. With the true, genuine man of science, with the earnest, impartial, unprejudiced and truth-loving scholar — of the minority, alas! we can have no quarrel, and he has all our respect. But to him who, being only a *specialist* in physical sciences — however eminent, matters not — still tries to throw into the scales of public thought his own materialistic views upon metaphysical and psychological questions (a dead letter to him) we have a good deal to say. Nor are we bound by any laws we know of, divine or human, to respect opinions which are held erroneous in our school, only because they are those of so-called authorities in materialistic or agnostic circles. Between *truth* and *fact* (as we understand them) and the working hypotheses of the greatest living physiologists — though they answer to the names of Messrs. Huxley, Claude Bernard, Du Bois-Reymond, *etc., etc.* — we hope never to hesitate for one instant. If, as Mr. Huxley once declared, soul, immortality and all spiritual things “lie outside of [his] philosophical enquiry,”¹ then, as he has never enquired into these questions, he has no right to offer an opinion. They certainly lie outside the grasp of materialistic physical science, and, what is more important, to use Dr. Paul Gibier’s felicitous expression, *outside the luminous zone* of most of our materialistic scientists. These are at liberty to believe in the “*automatic* action of nervous centres” as primal creators of thought; that the phenomena of *will* are only a complicated form of reflex actions, and what not — but we are as much at liberty to deny their statements. They are specialists — no more. As the author of *Le Spiritisme (fakirisme occidental)* admirably depicts it, in his latest work:

A number of persons, extremely enlightened on some special point of science, take upon themselves the right of pronouncing arbitrarily their judgment on all things; are ready to reject everything new which shocks *their* ideas, often for the sole reason that *if it were true they could not remain ignorant of it!* For my part I have often met this kind of self-sufficiency in men whom their knowledge and scientific studies ought to have preserved from such a sad moral infirmity, had they not been *specialists*, holding to their specialty. It is a sign of relative inferiority to believe oneself superior. In truth, the number of intellects afflicted with such gaps (*lacunes*) is larger than is commonly believed. As there are individuals completely refractory to the study of music, of mathematics, *etc.*, so there are others to whom certain areas of thought are closed. Such of these who

¹ *Physical Basis of Life*. [Thomas Huxley, “On the Physical Basis of Life,” sermon delivered at Edinburgh, November 8th, 1868, and published subsequently in the *Fortnightly Review*. See *Lay Sermons, Addresses, and Reviews* of Prof. Huxley, 1880 ed. — Boris de Zirkoff.]

might have distinguished themselves in . . . medicine or literature, would probably have signally failed in any occupation outside of what I will call their *lucid zone*, by comparison with the action of those reflectors, which, during night, throw their light into a zone of luminous rays, outside of which all is gloomy shadow and uncertainty. Every human being has his own lucid zone, the extension, range and degree of luminosity of which, varies with each individual.

There are things which lie outside the *conceptivity* of certain intellects; they are outside their lucid zone.¹ . . .

This is absolutely true whether applied to the scientist or his profane admirer. And it is to such scientific specialists that we refuse the right to sit in Solomon's seat, in judgment over all those who will not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears. To them we say: We do not ask you to believe as we do, since your *zone* limits you to your specialty; but then do not encroach on the *zones* of other people. And, if you will do so nevertheless, if, after laughing in your moments of honest frankness at your own ignorance; after stating repeatedly, orally and in print, that you, physicists and materialists, know nothing whatever of the ultimate potentialities of matter, nor have you made one step towards solving the mysteries of life and consciousness — you still persist in teaching that all the manifestations of life and intelligence, and the phenomena of the highest mentality, are merely *properties of that matter of which you confess yourselves quite ignorant*,² then — you can hardly escape the charge of *humbugging* the world.³ The word "humbug" is used here advisedly, in its strictest etymological Websterian meaning, that is, "imposition under unfair pretences — in this case, of science." Surely it is not expecting too much of such learned and scholarly gentlemen that they should not abuse their ascendancy and prestige over people's minds to teach them something they themselves know nothing about; that they should abstain from preaching the limitations of nature, when its most important problems have been, are, and ever will be, insoluble riddles to the materialist! This is no more than asking *simple honesty* from such teachers.

What is it, that constitutes the real man of learning? Is not a true and faithful servant of science (if the latter is accepted as the synonym of truth) he, who besides having mastered a general information on all things is ever ready to learn more, because there are things *that he admits he does not know*?⁴ A scholar of this description will

¹ *Physiologie Transcendentale. Analyse des Choses, etc.*, Dr. Paul Gibier, Dentu, Paris (1889), pp. 33, 34

² "In perfect strictness, it is true that chemical investigation can tell us *little or nothing*, directly of the composition of living matter, and. . . it is also, in strictness, true that we KNOW NOTHING about the composition of any body whatever, as it is." [See p. 129 of Thomas H. Huxley's *Lay Sermons, Addresses, and Reviews*. London: Macmillan, 1880; italics and capitalizations are H.P. Blavatsky's.]

³ This is what the poet laureate of matter, Mr. Tyndall, confesses in his works concerning atomic action:

"Through pure excess of complexity . . . the most highly trained intellect, the most refined and disciplined imagination *retires in bewilderment from the contemplation of the problem*. We are struck dumb by an astonishment which no microscope can relieve, doubting not only the power of our instrument, but *even whether we ourselves possess the intellectual elements which will ever enable us to grapple with the ultimate structural energies of nature*." [John Tyndall, *Fragments of Science*; 1870. Lecture on "The Scientific Use of Imagination," pp. 153-54, New York: Appleton, 1872]

And yet they do not hesitate to grapple with nature's spiritual and psychic problems — life, intelligence and the highest consciousness — and attribute them all to matter.

⁴ And therefore it is not to such that these well-known humorous verses, sung at Oxford, would apply:

"I am the master of this college,
And *what I know not is not knowledge*."

never hesitate to give up his own theories, whenever he finds them — not clashing with fact and truth, but — merely dubious. For the sake of truth he will remain indifferent to the world's opinion, and that of his colleagues, nor will he attempt to sacrifice the spirit of a doctrine to the dead-letter of a popular belief. Independent of man or party, fearless whether he gets at logger-heads with biblical chronology, theological claims, or the preconceived and in-rooted theories of materialistic science; acting in his researches in an entirely unprejudiced frame of mind, free from personal vanity and pride, he will investigate truth for her own fair sake, not to please this or that faction; nor will he dislocate facts to make them fit in with his own hypothesis, or the professed beliefs of either state religion or official science. Such is the ideal of a true man of science; and such a one, whenever mistaken — for even a Newton and a Humboldt have made occasional mistakes — will hasten to publish his error and correct it, and not act as the German naturalist, Haeckel, has done. What the latter did is worth a repetition. In every subsequent edition of his *Pedigree of Man* he has left uncorrected the *sozoura* (“unknown to science,” Quatrefages tells us),¹ and his *prosimiae* allied to the *loris*, which he describes as “without marsupial bones, but *with placenta*,”² when years ago it has been proved by the anatomical researches of Messrs. “Alphonse Milne-Edwards and Grandidier . . . that the *prosimiae* of Haeckel have no decidua . . . *no placenta*.”³ This is what we, Theosophists, call downright *dishonesty*. For he knows the two creatures he places in the fourteenth and eighteenth stages of his genealogy in the *Pedigree of Man* to be myths in nature, and that far from any possibility of their being the direct or indirect ancestors of apes — let alone *man*, “they cannot even be regarded as the ancestors of the zonoplacental mammals” according to Quatrefages. And yet Haeckel palms them off still, on the innocent, and the sycophants of Darwinism, only, as Quatrefages explains, “because the proof of their existence arises *from the necessity of an intermediate type*”!! We fail to see any difference between the pious frauds of a Eusebius “for the greater glory of God,” and the impious deception of Haeckel for “the greater glory of matter” and — man's dishonour. Both are *forgeries* — and we have a right to denounce both.

The same with regard to other branches of science. A specialist — say a Greek or Sanskrit scholar, a palaeographer, an archaeologist, an Orientalist of any description — is an “authority” only within the limits of his special science just as is an electrician or a physicist in theirs. And which of these may be called *infallible* in his conclusions? They have made, and still go on making mistakes, each of their hypotheses being only a surmise, a theory for the time being — and no more. Who would believe today, with Koch's craze upon us, that hardly a few years ago, the greatest authority on pathology in France, the late Professor Vulpian, Doyen of the Faculty of Medicine in Paris, *denied the existence of the tubercular microbe*? When, says Doctor Gibier, (his friend and pupil) M. Bouley laid before the Academy of Sciences a paper on the tubercular bacillus, he was told by Vulpian that “this germ *could not exist*,” for “had

¹ [“ . . . an amphibious animal which is equally unknown to science.”]

² *Pedigree of Man*, p. 77

³ Quatrefages, *The Human Species*, p. 110; [. . . “a diffuse placenta,” according to the New York: Appleton & Co., 1884 ed. — Boris de Zirkoff.]

it existed it would have been discovered *before* now, having been hunted after for so many years!”¹

Just in the same way every scientific specialist of whatever description denies the doctrines of Theosophy and its teachings; not that he has ever attempted to study or analyse them, or to discover how much truth there may be in the old sacred science, but simply because it is not modern science that has discovered any of them; and also because, having once strayed away from the main road into the jungles of material speculation, the men of science cannot return back without pulling down the whole edifice after them. But the worst of all is, that the average critic and opponent of the Theosophical doctrines is neither a scientist, nor even a specialist. He is simply a *flunkey* of the scientists in general; a repeating parrot and a mimicking ape of that or another “authority,” who makes use of the personal theories and conclusions of some well-known writer, in the hope of breaking our heads with them. Moreover, he identifies himself with the “gods” he serves or patronizes. He is like the Zouave of the Pope’s body-guard who, because he had to beat the drum at every appearance and departure of St. Peter’s “Successor,” ended by identifying himself with the apostle. So with the self-appointed flunkey of the modern Elohim of Science. He fondly imagines himself “as one of us,” and for no more cogent reason than had the Zouave: he, too, beats the big drum for every Oxford or Cambridge Don whose conclusions and personal views do not agree with the teachings of the Occult Doctrine of antiquity.

To devote, however, to these braggarts with tongue or pen one line more than is strictly necessary, would be waste of time. Let them go. They have not even a “zone” of their own, but have to see things through the light of other people’s intellectual “zones.”

And now to the reason why we have once more the painful duty of challenging and contradicting the scientific views of so many men considered each more or less “eminent,” in his special branch of science. Two years ago, the writer promised in *The Secret Doctrine*,² a third and even a fourth volume of that work. This third volume (now almost ready) treats of the ancient Mysteries of Initiation, gives sketches — from the esoteric stand-point — of many of the most famous and historically known philosophers and hierophants (every one of whom is set down by the Scientists as an *impostor*), from the archaic down to the Christian era, and traces the teachings of all these sages to one and the same source of all knowledge and science — the esoteric doctrine or WISDOM-RELIGION. No need our saying that from the esoteric and legendary materials used in the forthcoming work, its statements and conclusions differ greatly and often clash irreconcilably with the data given by almost all the English and German Orientalists. There is a tacit agreement among the latter — including even those who are personally inimical to each other — to follow a certain line of policy in the matter of dates;³ of denial to “adepts” of any transcendental knowledge of any intrinsic

¹ *Physiologie Transcendentale. Analyse des Choses, etc.*, Dr. P. Gibier, pp. 213 and 214

² Vol. II, p. 798

³ Says Prof. A.H. Sayce in his excellent *Preface* to Dr. Schliemann’s *Troja, etc.*:

“The natural tendency of the student of today is to post-date rather than to ante-date, and to bring everything down to the latest period that is possible.”

[Continued overleaf.]

sic value; of the utter rejection of the very existence of *siddhis*, or abnormal spiritual powers in man. In this the Orientalists, even those who are materialists, are the best allies of the clergy and biblical chronology. We need not stop to analyse this strange fact, but such it is. Now the main point of Volume III of *The Secret Doctrine* is to prove, by tracing and explaining the *blinds* in the works of ancient Indian, Greek, and other philosophers of note, and also in all the ancient Scriptures — the presence of an uninterrupted esoteric allegorical method and symbolism; to show, as far as lawful, that with the keys of interpretation as taught in the Eastern Hindu-Buddhistic Canon of Occultism, the *Upanishads*, the *Purānas*, the *Sutras*, the Epic poems of India and Greece, the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, the Scandinavian *Eddas*, as well as the Hebrew Bible, and even the classical writings of Initiates (such as Plato, among others) — all, from first to last, yield a meaning quite different from their dead letter texts. This is flatly denied by some of the foremost scholars of the day. They have not got the keys, *ergo* — no such keys can exist. According to Dr. Max Müller no pandit of India has ever heard of an esoteric doctrine (*Gupta-Vidyā, nota bene*). In his Edinburgh *Lectures* the Professor made almost as cheap of Theosophists and their interpretations, as some learned Śastris — let alone *initiated* Brahmins — make of the learned German philologist himself. On the other hand, Sir Monier-Williams undertakes to prove that the Lord Gautama Buddha *never taught any esoteric philosophy* (!!), thus giving the lie to all subsequent history, to the Arhat-Patriarchs, who converted China and Tibet to Buddhism, and charging with fraud the numerous esoteric schools still existing in China and Tibet.¹ Nor, according to Professor B. Jowett, the Master of Balliol College, is there any esoteric or gnostic element in the Dialogues of Plato, not even in that pre-eminently occult treatise, the *Timaeus*.² The Neo-Platonists, such as Ammonius Saccas, Plotinus, Porphyry, *etc.*, *etc.*, were ignorant, superstitious mystics, who saw a secret meaning where none was meant, and who, Plato heading them, had no idea of real science. In the scholarly appreciation of our modern scientific luminaries, in fact, science (*i.e.*, knowledge) was in its infancy in the days of Thales, Pythagoras and even of Plato; while the grossest superstition and “twaddle” reigned in the times of the Indian Rishis. Pānini, the greatest grammarian in the world, according to Professors Weber and Max Müller *was unacquainted with the art of writing*, and so also everyone else in India, from Manu to Buddha, even so late as 300 years B.C. On the other hand, Professor A.H. Sayce, an undeniably great palaeographer and Assyriologist, who kindly admits such a thing as an esoteric school and occult symbology among the Accado-Babylonians, nevertheless claims that the Assyriologists have now in their possession all the keys required for the right interpretation of the secret glyphs of the hoary past. Methinks, we know the chief key used by himself and his colleagues: — trace every god and hero, whose character is in the least doubtful, to a solar myth, and you have discovered

This is so, and they do it with a vengeance. The same reluctance is felt to admit the antiquity of man, as to allow to the ancient philosopher any knowledge of that which the modern student *does not know*. Conceit and vanity!

¹ See Edkin’s *Chinese Buddhism*, and read what this missionary, an eminent Chinese scholar who lived long years in China, though himself very prejudiced as a rule, says of the esoteric schools.

[Excerpts under the heading “Joseph Edkins on the Esoteric Schools of China” are shown at the end of this document. — ED. PHIL.]

² See Preface to his translation of *Timaeus*. [*Dialogues*, Vol. III, p. 524 in Oxford ed. of 1875]

the whole secret; an easier undertaking, you see, than for a “Wizard of the North” to cook an omelette in a gentleman’s hat.¹ Finally, in the matter of esoteric symbology and Mysteries, the Orientalists of today seem to have forgotten more than the initiated priests of the days of Sargon (3750 years B.C., according to Dr. Sayce) ever knew. Such is the modest claim of the Hibbert Lecturer for 1887.

Thus, as the personal conclusions and claims of the above-named scholars (and of many more) militate against the theosophical teachings, in this generation, at any rate, the laurels of conquest will never be accorded by the majority to the latter. Nevertheless, since truth and fact are on our side, we need not despair, but will simply bide our time. Time is a mighty conjuror; an irresistible leveller of artificially grown weeds and parasites, a universal solvent for truth. *Magna est veritas et prevalebit.*² Meanwhile, however, the Theosophists cannot allow themselves to be denounced as visionaries, when not “frauds,” and it is their duty to remain true to their colours, and to defend their most sacred beliefs. This they can do only by opposing to the prejudiced hypotheses of their opponents,

(a) the diametrically opposite conclusions of their colleagues — other scientists as eminent *specialists* in the same branches of study as themselves; and

(b) the true meaning of sundry passages disfigured by these partisans, in the old scriptures and classics.

But to do this, we can pay no more regard to these illustrious personages in modern science, than they do to the gods of the “inferior races.” Theosophy, the Divine Wisdom or TRUTH is, no more than was a certain tribal deity — “a respecter of persons.” We are on the defensive, and have to vindicate that which we know to be implicit truth: hence, for a few editorials to come, we contemplate a series of articles refuting our opponents — however learned.

And now it becomes evident why it is impossible for us to “leave our highly respectable, firmly-rooted official *science* severely alone.”

Meanwhile we may close with a few parting words to our readers *Power belongs to him who knows*; this is a very old axiom: knowledge, or the first step to power, especially that of comprehending the truth, of discerning the real from the false — belongs only to those who place truth above their own petty personalities. 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 the latter is undeniable and has been demonstrated to them — those alone, I say, may hope to get at the ultimate knowledge of things. It is useless to search for such among the proud scientists of the day, and it would be folly to expect the aping masses of the profane to turn against their tacitly accepted idols. Therefore is it also useless for a theosophical work of any description to expect justice. Let some unknown MS. of Macaulay, of Sir W. Hamilton, or John Stuart Mill, be printed and issued today by the Theosophical Publishing Company, and the reviewers — if any — would proclaim it ungram-

¹ [An old magic trick. See Martin Young (*Comp.*). *The Secrets of Ancient and Modern Magic: or the art of conjuring unveiled*. New York: M. Young, 1880; pp. 44-46.]

² [Truth is mighty, and it shall prevail.]

matical and *un-English*, misty and illogical. The majority judge of a work according to the respective prejudices of its critics, who in their turn are guided by the popularity or unpopularity of the authors, certainly never by its intrinsic faults or merits. Outside theosophical circles, therefore, the forthcoming volumes of *The Secret Doctrine* are sure to receive at the hands of the general public a still colder welcome than their two predecessors have found.¹ In our day, as has been proved repeatedly, no statement can hope for a fair trial, or even hearing, unless its arguments run on the lines of legitimate and *accepted* enquiry, remaining strictly within the boundaries of either official, materialistic science, or emotional, orthodox theology.

Our age, reader, is a paradoxical anomaly. It is pre-eminently materialistic, and as pre-eminently pietist, a Janus age, in all truth. Our literature, our modern thought and progress so-called, run on these two parallel lines, so incongruously dissimilar, and yet both so popular and so very “proper” and “respectable,” each in its own way. He who presumes to draw a third line, or even a hyphen of reconciliation, so to speak, between the two, has to be fully prepared for the worst. He will have his work mangled by reviewers, who after reading three lines on the first page, two in the middle of the book, and the closing sentence, will proclaim it “unreadable”; it will be mocked by the sycophants of science and church, misquoted by their flunkies, and rejected even by the pious railway stalls, while the average reader will not even understand its meaning. The still absurd misconceptions in the cultured circles of Society about the teachings of the “Wisdom-religion” (Bodhism),² after the admirably clear and scientifically presented explanations of its elementary doctrines by the author of *Esoteric Buddhism*, are a good proof in point. They might serve as a caution even to those amongst us, who, hardened in almost a life-long struggle in the service of our Cause, are neither timid with their pens, nor in the least disconcerted or appalled by the dogmatic assertions of scientific “authorities.” And yet they persist in their work, although perfectly aware that, do what they may, neither materialism nor doctrinal pietism will give theosophical philosophy a fair hearing in this age. To the very end, our doctrine will be systematically rejected, our theories denied a place, even in the ranks of those ever-shifting, scientific ephemera — called the “working hypotheses” of our day. To the advocates of the “animalistic” theory, our cosmogenetical and anthropogenetical teachings must be “fairy tales,” truly. “How can we” asked one of the champions of the men of science of a friend, “accept the *rigmaroles* of ancient Babus (?!) even if taught in antiquity, once they go in every detail against the conclusions of modern science. As well ask us to replace Darwin by Jack the Giant-Killer!” Quite so; for 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, rather than acknowledge the fatherhood of the Pitris, the fair “sons of the gods,” or to have to recognize as a brother, a starveling from the slums, or a copper-coloured man of an “inferior” race. “Hold back!” shout in their turn the pietists, “you can never hope to make respectable church-going Christians — ‘*Esoteric Buddhists*!’”

¹ [Vols. III and IV of *The Secret Doctrine* are not definitely known to have existed in manuscript form. Evidence concerning them is contradictory.]

² [Cf. “Budhism and Buddhism” in our Confusing Words Series. — ED. PHIL.]

Nor are we in any way anxious to attempt the metamorphosis; the less so, since the majority of the pious Britishers¹ have already, and of their own free will and choice, become *Exoteric Boothists*.

*De gustibus non est disputandum.*²

In our next, we mean to enquire how far Prof. Jowett is right, in his Preface to *Ti-maeus*, in stating that “the fancies of the Neo-Platonists . . . have nothing to do with the interpretation of Plato,” and that “the so-called mysticism of Plato is purely Greek, arising out of his imperfect knowledge,” not to say ignorance. The learned Master of Balliol denies the use of any esoteric symbology by Plato in his works. We Theosophists maintain it and must try to give our best proofs for the claims preferred. Meanwhile the reader’s attention is drawn to the excellent article on “The Purānas” which follows.

[Two years later, the second instalment of this essay was published in the pages of *Lucifer*, with the following Introductory note signed by Annie Besant:

“This fragment was accidentally overlooked among H.P. Blavatsky’s MSS. and was put aside with some not yet wanted. It is the second part of her last article, and though it is only a fragment I publish it, for it has the pathetic quality of having been written at the very last, and is the work at which she was engaged when her pen was broken by the touch of Death.”]



¹ [This term is mainly used in the Indian subcontinent, having originated there during the British Raj. Its use was once considered pejorative, but is now mostly considered jocular.]

² [*i.e.*, in matters of taste, there can be no dispute.]

Part 2

On authorities in general, and the authority of materialists, especially

First published in *Lucifer*, Vol. XII, No. 68, April 1893, pp. 97-101.
Republished in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE NEGATORS OF SCIENCE) XIII pp. 152-57.

In assuming the task of contradicting “authorities” and of occasionally setting at nought the well-established opinions and hypotheses of men of Science, it becomes necessary in the face of repeated accusations to define our attitude clearly at the very outset. Though, where the truth of our doctrines is concerned, no criticism and no amount of ridicule can intimidate us, we would nevertheless be sorry to give one more handle to our enemies, as a pretext for an extra slaughter of the innocent; nor would we willingly lead our friends into an unjust suspicion of that to which we are not in the least prepared to plead guilty.

One of such suspicions would naturally be the idea that we must be terribly self-opinionated and conceited. This would be false from A to Z. It does not at all stand to reason that because we contradict eminent professors of Science on certain points, we therefore claim to know more than they do of Science; nor, that we even have the benighted vanity of placing ourselves on the same level as these scholars. Those who would accuse us of this would simply be talking nonsense, for even to harbour such a thought would be the madness of conceit — and we have never been guilty of this vice. Hence, we declare loudly to all our readers that most of those “authorities” we find fault with, *stand in our own opinion immeasurably higher in scientific knowledge and general information than we do*. But, this conceded, the reader is reminded that great scholarship in no way precludes great bias and prejudice; nor is it a safeguard against personal vanity and pride. A Physicist may be an undeniable expert in acoustics, wave-vibrations, *etc.*, and be no Musician at all, having no ear for music. None of the modern bootmakers can write as Count Leo Tolstoy does; but any tyro in decent shoemaking can take the great novelist to task for spoiling good materials in trying to make boots. Moreover, it is only in the legitimate defence of our time-honoured Theosophical doctrines, opposed by many on the authority of materialistic Scientists, entirely ignorant of psychic possibilities, in the vindication of ancient Wisdom and its Adepts, that we throw down the gauntlet to Modern Science. If in their inconceivable conceit and blind materialism they will go on dogmatizing upon that about which they know nothing — nor do they want to know — then those who do know something have a right to protest and to say so publicly and in print.

Many must have heard of the suggestive answer made by a lover of Plato to a critic of Thomas Taylor, the translator of the works of this great Sage. Taylor was charged with being but a poor Greek scholar, and not a very good English writer. “True,” was

the pert reply; “Tom Taylor may have known far less Greek than his critics; but *he knew Plato far better than any of them does.*”¹ And this we take to be our own position.

We claim no scholarship in either dead or living tongues, and we take no stock in Philology as a modern Science. But we do claim to understand the living spirit of Plato’s Philosophy, and the symbolical meaning of the writings of this great Initiate, better than do his modern translators, and for this very simple reason. The Hierophants and Initiates of the Mysteries in the Secret Schools in which all the Sciences inaccessible and useless to the masses of the profane were taught, had one universal, Esoteric tongue — the language of symbolism and allegory. This language has suffered neither modification nor amplification from those remote times down to this day. It still exists and is still taught. There are those who have preserved the knowledge of it, and also of the arcane meaning of the Mysteries; and it is from these Masters that the writer of the present protest had the good fortune of learning, howbeit imperfectly, the said language. Hence her claim to a more correct comprehension of the arcane portion of the ancient texts written by avowed Initiates — such as were Plato and Iamblichus, Pythagoras, and even Plutarch — than can be claimed by, or expected from, those who, knowing nothing whatever of that “language” and even denying its existence altogether, yet set forth authoritative and conclusive views on everything Plato and Pythagoras knew or did not know, believed in or disbelieved. It is not enough to lay down the audacious proposition, “that an ancient Philosopher is to be interpreted from himself [*i.e.*, from the dead-letter texts] and *by the contemporary history of thought*”;² he who lays it down has first of all to prove to the satisfaction, not of his admirers and himself alone, but *of all*, that modern thought does not wool-gather in the question of Philosophy as it does on the lines of materialistic Science. Modern thought denies Divine Spirit in Nature, and the Divine element in mankind, the Soul’s immortality and every noble conception inherent in man. We all know that in their endeavours to kill that which they have agreed to call “superstition” and the “relics of ignorance” (*read* “religious feelings and metaphysical concepts of the Universe and Man”), Materialists like Prof. Huxley or Mr. Grant Allen are ready to go to any length in order to ensure the triumph of their soul-killing Science. But when we find Greek and Sanskrit scholars and doctors of theology, playing into the hands of modern materialistic thought, pooh-poohing everything *they* do not know, or that of which the public — or rather Society, which ever follows in its impulses the craze of fashion, of popularity or unpopularity — disapproves, then we have the right to assume one of two things: the scholars who act on these lines are either moved by personal conceit, or by the fear of public opinion; they dare not challenge it at the risk of unpopularity. In both cases they forfeit their right to esteem as authorities. For, if they are blind to facts and sincere in their blindness, then their learning, however great, will do more harm than good, and if, while fully alive to those universal truths which Antiquity knew better than we do — though it did express them in more ambiguous and less scientific language — our Philosophers will still keep them under

¹ [Prof. A. Wilder. Also quoted in *Isis Unveiled*, Vol. II, p. 109 from his Introduction to Taylor’s *Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries* p. 27, 4th ed.; p. xix, 3rd ed. 1875. Reprinted by Wizards Bookshelf, 1980]

² [M.A. Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*; Introduction to the *Timaeus*, Vol. III, 1875, p. 524; 2nd ed.]

the bushel for fear of painfully dazzling the majority's eyes, then the example they set is most pernicious. They suppress the truth and disfigure metaphysical conceptions, as their colleagues in physical Science distort facts in material Nature into mere props to support their respective views, on the lines of popular hypotheses and Darwinian thought. And if so, what right have they to demand a respectful hearing from those to whom TRUTH is the highest, as the noblest, of all religions?

The negation of any fact or claim believed in by the teeming millions of Christians and non-Christians, of a fact, moreover, *impossible to disprove*, is a serious thing for a man of recognized scientific authority, in the face of its inevitable results. Denials and rejections of certain things, hitherto held sacred, coming from such sources, are for a public taught to respect scientific data and *bulls*, as good as unqualified assertions. Unless uttered in the broadest spirit of *Agnosticism* and offered merely as a personal opinion, such a spirit of wholesale negation — especially when confronted with the universal belief of the whole of Antiquity, and of the incalculable hosts of the surviving Eastern nations in the things denied — becomes pregnant with dangers to mankind. Thus the rejection of a Divine Principle in the Universe, of Soul and Spirit in man and of his Immortality, by one set of Scientists; and the repudiation of any Esoteric Philosophy existing in Antiquity, hence, of the presence of any hidden meaning based on that system of revealed learning in the sacred writings of the East (the Bible included), or in the works of those Philosophers who were confessedly Initiates, by another set of “authorities” — are simply fatal to humanity. Between missionary enterprise — encouraged far more on political than religious grounds¹ — and scientific Materialism, both teaching from two diametrically opposite poles that which neither can prove or disprove, and mostly that which they themselves take on blind faith or blind hypothesis, the millions of the growing generations must find themselves at sea. They will not know, any more than their parents know now, what to believe in, whither to turn for truth. Weightier proofs are thus required now by many than the mere personal assumptions and negations of religious fanatics and irreligious Materialists, that such or another thing exists or has no existence.

We, Theosophists, who are not so easily caught on the hook baited with either salvation or annihilation, we claim our right to demand the weightiest, and to us *undeniable* proofs that truth is in the keeping of Science and Theology. And as we find no answer forthcoming, we claim the right to argue upon every undecided question, by analysing the assumptions of our opponents. We, who believe in Occultism and the archaic Esoteric Philosophy, do not, as already said, ask our members to believe as we do, nor charge them with ignorance if they do not. We simply leave them to make their choice. Those who decide to study the old Science are given proofs of its existence; and corroborative evidence accumulates and grows in proportion to the personal progress of the student.

¹ We maintain that the fabulous sums spent on, and by, Christian missions, whose propaganda brings forth such wretched moral results and gets so few renegades, are spent with a political object in view. The aim of the missions, which, as in India, are only said to be “*tolerated*” (*sic*) seems to be to *pervert* people from their ancestral religions, rather than to *convert* them to Christianity, and this is done in order to destroy in them every spark of national feeling. When the spirit of patriotism is dead in a nation, it very easily becomes a mere puppet in the hands of the rulers.

Why should not the negators of ancient Science — to wit, modern Scholars — do the same in the matter of their denials and assertions; *i.e.*, why don't they refuse to say either *yea* or *nay* in regard to that which they really *do not know*, instead of denying or affirming it *a priori* as they all do?

Why do not our Scientists proclaim frankly and honestly to the whole world, that most of their notions — *e.g.*, on life, matter, ether, atoms, *etc.*, each of these being an unsolvable mystery to them — *are not scientific facts and axioms*, but simple “working hypotheses.”

Or again, why should not Orientalists — but too many of them are “Reverends” — or Regius Professor of Greek, a Doctor of Theology, and a translator of Plato, like Professor Jowett, mention, while giving out his personal views on the Greek Sage, that there are other scholars as learned as he is who think otherwise.

This would only be fair, and more prudent too, in the face of a whole array of evidence to the contrary, embracing thousands of years in the past. And it would be more honest than to lead less learned people than themselves into grave errors, by allowing those under the hypnotic influence of “authority,” and thus but too inclined to take every ephemeral hypothesis on trust, to *accept as proven* that which has *yet* to be proved. But the “authorities” act on different lines. Whenever a fact, in Nature or in History, does not fit in with, and refuses to be wedged into, one of their personal hypotheses, accepted as Religion or Science by the solemn majority, forthwith it is denied, declared a “myth,” or, *revealed* Scriptures are appealed to against it.

It is this which brings Theosophy and its Occult doctrines into everlasting conflict with certain Scholars and Theology. Leaving the latter entirely out of question in the present article, we will devote our protest, for the time being, but to the former. So, for instance, many of our teachings — corroborated in a mass of ancient works, but denied piecemeal, at various times, by sundry professors — have been shown to clash not only with the conclusions of modern Science and Philosophy, but even with those passages from the old works to which we have appealed for evidence. We have but to point to a certain page of some old Hindu work, to Plato, or some other Greek classic, as corroborating some of our peculiar Esoteric doctrines, to see.



Joseph Edkins on the Esoteric Schools of China

Expansion of fn. 1 on page 7 above, being excerpts from Rev. Joseph Edkins, DD. *Chinese Buddhism: a volume of sketches, historical, descriptive, and critical*. London: Trübner & Co., 1880.

At seventy-one years of age, Buddha gave instruction in his esoteric or mystic doctrine. It was in answer to thirty-six questions propounded to him by Kashiapa. Nagardjuna lays it down as a rule that “every Buddha has both a revealed and a mystic doctrine.” The exoteric is for the multitude of new disciples. The esoteric is for the Bodhisattwas and advanced pupils, such as Kashiapa. It is not communicated in the form of definite language, and could not, therefore, be transmitted by Ananda as definite doctrine among the Sutras. Yet it is virtually contained in the Sutras. For example, the *Fa-hwa-king*, or “Sutra of the Lotus of the Good Law,” which is regarded as containing the cream of the revealed doctrine, is to be viewed as a sort of original document of the esoteric teaching, while it is in form exoteric.¹

He was a Brahman, born in the kingdom Magadha, in Central India. To him was intrusted the deposit of esoteric doctrine, called *Cheng-fa-yen-tsang*, “the pure secret of the eye of right doctrine.” The symbol of this esoteric principle, communicated orally without books, is ∞ *man* or *wan*. This, in Chinese, means “10,000,” and implies the possession of 10,000 perfections. It is usually placed on the heart of Buddha in images and pictures of that divinity. It is sometimes called *sin-yin*, “heart’s seal.” It contains within it the whole mind of Buddha. In Sanscrit it is called *svastika*. It was the monogram of Vishnu and Shiva, the battle-axe of Thor in Scandinavian inscriptions, an ornament on the crowns of the Bonpa deities in Thibet, and a favourite symbol with the Peruvians.²

The common word for the esoteric schools is *dan*, the Sanscrit *Dhyana*, now called in the modern sound given to the character, ch’an.³

In tracing the rise of the various schools of esoteric Buddhism it must be kept in mind that a principle somewhat similar to the dogma of apostolical succession belongs to them all. They all profess to derive their doctrines through a succession of teachers, each instructed personally by his predecessor, till the time of Bodhidharma, and so further up in the series to Shakyamuni himself and the earlier Buddhas.⁴



¹ p. 43

² pp. 62-63

³ pp. 155-56

⁴ p. 159