

*Thomas Taylor,
the English Platonist*



Illustrious Master of Platonic Lore,
Grateful we greet thee from our Hylic Shore.
We come as lovers of thy living page,
Which mirrors Plato's Soul in our Dark Age.
Our torch is lit, around our Altars see
Vivific fruitage to thy ministry.
Thou art the builder of our Order — Thou
The Hierophant who doth with light endow
Thy little ones, who follow with frail feet
The mountain pathway of thy pure Retreat.
Scholar profound in Secrets all divine,
Thy mind a chalice of Platonic Wine,
Our Guardian be! Our Janitor! Our Guide!
Our Hermes, in Whose heart we may abide.
— BASILIUS

Impetuous Ignorance is thundering at the Bulwarks of Philosophy, and Her Sacred Retreats are in danger of being demolished through our feeble resistance. Rise, then, my friends, and the victory will be ours. The foe is indeed numerous, but at the same time feeble; and the weapons of Truth in the hands of vigorous union descend with irresistible force, and are fatal wherever they fall.
— THOMAS TAYLOR

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Thomas Taylor and his Great Work

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1. Introductory

How many great Men Nature is incessantly sending up out of night, to be His Men — Platonists!

Exclaims Emerson in his fine Essay on Plato.

How many have been the followers of the Immortal Plato? Their name is indeed legion. Men who will ever be more and more revered and honoured, as ranking among the greatest Teachers of this world. Men who, in their own time and land, were neither recognized nor understood by the 'many', but who, as Time rolls on, will stand out clearly as bright Lights burning throughout the Dark Periods. The truth of this is soon apparent to any student of the Platonic Lore, who will quickly discover that ever since the day when the great Sun of the Soul of Plato shone in beautiful ancient Athens there has been an unbroken Chain of "His Men — Platonists."

The period in which Plato lived, and that which followed him down to about the time of Proclus, was well named by Thomas Taylor the Golden Age of Philosophy, for during that age, when olden Greece was at the zenith of her glory, philosophy was looked upon in a very different way from the modern attitude towards it. In that age it was

. . . esteemed by kings, cultivated by noblemen and revered by the vulgar; empire was relinquished for its pursuit, and every danger encountered for its possession. (T.T.)

This great period came to an end during the Roman Empire, when ultimately the philosophy could not be taught openly. But notwithstanding the Dark Times that followed and the apparently complete suppression of the Ancient Wisdom, there have always been men who have kept this Lamp of the Divine Ancient Wisdom burning. Some, perhaps, in great obscurity and at the danger of their lives, some who could teach it more or less openly, and others who had to veil it under various forms.

Some founded schools and taught it publicly, and others established secret orders and carried the Great Work on in that way. But of all these great Souls who were touched by the Spirit of Plato or of other Masters, none, perhaps, was born in a more unphilosophical period or worked under greater difficulties than the illustrious Thomas Taylor.

None of these great Sages stood more alone, nor seemed so different from the people of his age. He was truly called “a Greek Priest born out of time.” But in spite of all this there was not one who accomplished more work, or work of such great value, nor one who laboured more unselfishly and thoroughly.

His great work will be dealt with below, but it can be mentioned here that he was the first of all translators to give to the world a complete English translation of the works of Plato. England in Thomas Taylor’s day was in the grip of rigid orthodoxy, and the Grecian Wisdom was then more than ever “attacked,” as Thomas Taylor would express it, “with all the insane fury of ecclesiastical wrath and . . . imbecile flashes of mistaken wit.”

It could not be expected, therefore, that Taylor could secure many followers nor make much visible headway, but by his great efforts he laid the immutable foundation for future work in the Great Cause and thus left behind him a Rock upon which a system can safely build. In the days to come the greatness of Thomas Taylor will be fully recognized, and he will be ranked, together with the immortal Plato himself, as one of the greatest Philosophers the world has ever known.

2. The Dawn

Early years of his life.

It was on the 15th of May in the year 1758, at a time when Halley’s Comet was causing a great stir among astronomers, that the Soul of Thomas Taylor descended to the mundane realm, the Soul that was destined to become a great Sun to illumine the Platonic Path for all seekers after Truth in subsequent ages, a sun far more luminous and transcendent than the light of the comet which appeared in the heavens at the same time.

He was born in London and was the son of Joseph Taylor, a Dissenting Minister of St Martin’s-le-Grand. He enjoyed no, exceptional advantages of birth or circumstances, and his boyhood days were spent in a mediocre way in the midst of London life. At the age of nine he entered St Paul’s School, where he remained for three years. He was quite an ordinary typical boy with plenty of spirit, and it is said that during his stay at the school he became more acquainted with the cane than with the classics.

After leaving school he began to take life a little more seriously and became a lover of mathematics, the study of which he then took up in earnest and his interest continued throughout his whole life. This study greatly influenced his growth and the early development of his mental faculties, fitting him more than anything else would have done for the great work that lay in store.

During this time he met the girl who was to become his wife, and although then very young — fourteen or fifteen — he fell in love with her just as blindly and deeply as he had with mathematics. But his parents considered a change in his life would be beneficial, and at the age of fifteen he was sent away from London and his beloved Mary Morton, to Sheerness, and placed under the care of his uncle. Whilst away he seems to have continued his mathematics and also to have studied to some extent the philosophy of such men as Hume and Bolingbroke. These inclined him in favour of

sceptical philosophy. But his uncle behaved towards him so tyrannically that at the age of nineteen he agreed to study for the ministry merely, apparently, in order to escape from Sheerness. He returned to London and began to study under a Rev. Worthington for the dissenting ministry.

But Fate had not ordained him to be an exponent of the Church, rather had She marked him out to be one who would become a powerful critic of it. At that date, however, Taylor did not know the destiny that was before him, and no doubt he would have become a Minister of the Non-conformist Church but for Mary Morton. His love for her caused a great change to take place in his life, and he married her without considering the consequence of his rash act. It was contrary to the wishes of both families, and he was soon left completely to himself to earn his own living and support as best he could the girl who loved him well enough to share his humble and certainly not inviting lot.

Then began the great struggle for material existence which continued until he was past the prime of life. It is said that for some months he and his wife existed on the munificent inherited allowance of seven shillings a week!

His first occupation was an usher's place at a school in Paddington, but subsequently he secured a clerkship in Lubbock's Bank at £50 per annum, and took a small house at 9 Manor Place, Walworth, where he lived for the remainder of his life. As a proof of his having now made considerable headway in the study of mathematics, despite the small amount of leisure at his disposal for following his favourite pursuit, he published at the age of twenty-two a work entitled *A new method of reasoning in Geometry*.

Thomas Taylor did not look upon the study of Mathematics in the way it is now regarded. It has become merely something that is studied and acquired for use in business or science, or for personal use and benefit in the material sphere of existence. To Thomas Taylor it was something quite different, as it was to the old Platonic Philosophers. As Taylor says in his *Proclus' Commentaries on Euclid*,

. . . the true end of geometry, and indeed mathematics in general, is to be referred to the energies of the Intellect (Higher Mind) and it is degraded when made subservient to the common utilities of a mere animal (material) life.

Euclid, incidentally, was one of the old Platonists, and is probably the greatest mathematician that ever lived. The study of pure mathematics exercises the reasoning mind, the dianoetic mind (that which "reasons scientifically" — T.T.) It is the faculty which eventually enables us to see Truth. As Thomas Taylor declares,

It opens the Eye of the Soul to Spectacles of perfect Reality and purifies it from the darkness of material oblivion!

The ancient Egyptians, Pythagoreans and Platonists were all lovers of pure mathematics.

After having studied mathematics for nearly ten years it can be appreciated how it was that Thomas Taylor so quickly and readily mastered the Platonic Writings, when ultimately he came in touch with them. But before going on to the subject of his work it is necessary first to say something about the man himself.

By this time he had reached manhood, he had his own little home and his dear wife to share it with him. He had an extremely active mind and was always busy with some occupation or another, working occasionally into the small hours of the morning, and thus not improving his already indifferent physical health. One rather amusing incident that occurred about this time was when he invented what he called a ‘Perpetual Light’¹ of phosphorus. Unfortunately for the young inventor, who perchance had dreams of fame as a result of this creation of his fertile imagination, when the lamp was exhibited at a Freemason’s Tavern it must needs explode!

As to Thomas Taylor’s personal appearance, one writer (J.J.W.) says of him that

. . . there is nothing remarkable in his external; he is of the middle size, well-proportioned and firmly put together: his countenance is regular, open and benevolent . . . There is a dignified simplicity and unaffected frankness of manner about him which are sure to win the affections of all who have the pleasure of seeing him. In his dress he is simple and unpretending, in his conduct irreproachable. Among friends he is unreserved and sincere: a determined foe of falsehood, and always ready to make sacrifices when the end to be obtained is worthy of a noble mind.

Taylor’s favourite motto was

To the Sacred Majesty of Truth.

Although not blessed with good health, he led a vigorous life and was a tremendous worker, thorough yet exceptionally quick. He possessed an extraordinary memory which enabled him to have at his fingertips immense stores of knowledge of facts and details. His well-trained mind could embrace with ease the most extensive and difficult subjects with the clearness of conception that could follow even the longest series of arguments and reasonings; and this clarity of thought was reflected in the beautiful clarity of his hand-writing. It was this faculty which gave him the power to re-write one of the books of Proclus’ *Theology of Plato* which had been completely lost. He entered so thoroughly into the mind of Proclus that had he not confessed to the authorship, the keenest student would probably not have detected it.

3. The Morning

He meets the Old Greeks and commences his work.

It was between the age of twenty and twenty-two that Thomas Taylor first met the Old Greek Philosophers through the pages of their imperishable writings.

Strange to say, it was Aristotle that attracted his attention before the others. He quickly became fascinated, and soon more or less mastered the teachings of this

¹ [Cf. “Among the many well-known personages who firmly believed and strenuously asserted that such sepulchral [perpetual] lamps burned for several hundreds of years, and would have continued to burn *maybe* forever, had they not been extinguished, or the vessels broken by some accident, we may reckon the following names: Clemens Alexandrinus, Hermolaus Barbarus, Appian, Burattinus, Citesius, Coelius, Foxius, Costaeus, Casalius, Cedrenus, Delrius, Ericius, Gesnerus, Jacobonus, Leander, Libavius, Lazius, Pico de la Mirándola, Eugenius Philalethes, Licetus, Maiolus, Maturantius, Baptista Porta, Pancirollus, Ruscellius, Scardeonius, Ludovicus Vives, Volateranus, Paracelsus, several Arabian alchemists, and finally, Pliny, Solinus, Kircher, and Albertus Magnus.” *Isis Unveiled*, I p. 226; (& reviewing the “Quenchless Lamps of Alchemy,” *ibid.*, pp. 224-32.) — ED. PHIL.]

supposed opponent of Plato. In later years Taylor showed, in his translation of the writings of Aristotle, that this great Philosopher and Master of Logic was in reality a Platonist, and that his teachings were quite in agreement with those of Plato. The difference is that Aristotle commences as it were from below, from Nature, whereas Plato starts from THE ONE and descends to the last of things.

After Aristotle it was Proclus that next riveted Taylor's attention. Here he found something he had unconsciously been seeking, and it was so much to his liking that he promptly read through in Greek Proclus' *Theology of Plato* three times: a feat that one writer remarks "had surely never before been accomplished."

From Proclus Taylor naturally went on to his beloved Plato, and to complete his course of reading he next accidentally came across the works of Plotinus, which, it is said, "he read with an insatiable avidity and the most rapturous delight."

His training being now almost finished and his philosophical beliefs and convictions firmly established, Taylor could now be said to have commenced his great work and to have set out upon the Platonic Path, which he afterwards spoke of as "a novel and solitary Path." Solitary indeed, because it had been but rarely frequented since the reign of the Emperor Justinian, and novel, no doubt, because it could never appeal to the materialist, to those who, Taylor says,

. . . have been nursed, as it were, in the bosom of matter, the pupils of experiment, the darlings of sense, and the legitimate descendants of the earth-born race that warred on the Olympian Gods.

He was now about twenty-five or twenty-six years old, was a master of the Latin language as well as the Greek, although this has been questioned by those who judge only from the point of view of formal scholarship, no doubt on account of the fact that Taylor was essentially a self-taught man. It was the fashion to jeer at him as a man who translated Aristotle and Plato without knowing the Greek grammar. But be this as it may, it is fairly certain that although other translators may have known more Greek, few, if any, knew so much 'Plato.'

Nowadays there exist many admirable translations of Plato and of the Platonists in addition to those of Taylor, and many that are much better known; but a true disciple of Plato will soon distinguish which suits him best, and which is 'touched' most with the spirit of Plato. Of all modern translations of Plato it can safely be asserted that Taylor (with a small band of subsequent followers) stands quite alone as a genuine believer in the Immortal Gods and a lover and worshipper of Them. This should be enough to bring Taylor near to the hearts of all lovers of the Ancient Wisdom.

It was at the age of twenty-nine (in the year 1787) that Taylor's first work on the Ancient Wisdom was published. This was *The Mystical Hymns of Orpheus*, a work which amply demonstrates that even at that comparatively early age, and without the help of any teacher, Taylor had completely mastered the Platonic Philosophy and was a true follower of the Gods. It has been well said of him that he was "saturated with Greek learning," although one commentator says of him that he possessed no critical faculty, because he had no doubt of the existence of such an historical person as Orpheus! In the same year his *Plotinus on the Beautiful* was issued. Five years later his two volumes of *Proclus on Euclid* appeared — a work which was designed to show the

true end of geometry and mathematics. These volumes also contain the life of Proclus, by Maximus Tyrius, and Porphyry, by Taylor. In this work Thomas Taylor blends metaphysics with the study of true mathematics, illustrating how these two subjects go hand in hand.

4. The Noontide

The modern Plato at work in earnest.

After some ten years of less important work, Taylor could now be said to have commenced in earnest. It was to the translation of Plato himself — the old Plato — that the modern Plato now turned his attention, and not only the translation but also the exposition and true interpretation of the Divine Platonic Philosophy. At the age of thirty-five (in the year 1793) he published *Four Platonic Dialogues*. The following year saw the appearance of his *Five Books of Plotinus*.

By this time his writings were attracting attention and secured for him a number of friends, through the generosity of whom he was enabled to quit the clerkship he held in the bank and become a private teacher of languages and mathematics, with much more spare time for following the occupation upon which he had set his heart.

Subsequently, at the age of forty, he secured the post of Assistant Secretary of a Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. He was also noticed and helped by the Duke of Norfolk, through whose support he was able, in the year 1804, to give to the English-speaking world a complete translation of Plato (by translating those works which had not already been translated by his older contemporary Floyer Sydenham), with copious notes of great value; this inestimable work being contained in five large volumes. It may be mentioned incidentally that after this work was printed the Duke caused the greater portion of the edition to be locked up, where it remained until after his death.

In the year 1812 he published the complete works of Aristotle in nine volumes, the cost of which had been borne by two of his wealthy followers, William and George Meredith.

In the year 1816 this prolific worker published what can in some respects be considered his masterpiece, viz. *Proclus' Theology of Plato*. This is the book par excellence for every true Platonic student to read and digest. It is difficult to procure or even to see, as only the largest libraries possess copies. It gives in the most wonderful language the full teaching of the Platonic Wisdom, commencing from THE ONE AND THE GOOD and then going down through all the Hierarchies of the Gods. It concludes with a collection of Propositions composed in a similar style to the Propositions of Euclid, but instead of dealing with geometry and mathematics these propositions deal with God and the Gods, Soul and Intellect. Any student who masters them has gained something that he or she can never lose.

Our modern Plato was now in full swing, and he must have worked at great speed to have accomplished the amount of work he did from now onwards, for a continuous stream of books from his mighty pen was published yearly right up to the very last few months of his earthly life.

Altogether he was the author of sixty-three volumes, every one of which deals with some phase or aspect of the Ancient Divine Wisdom. A more or less complete list of his writings is given at the end of this paper in chronological order. It is estimated that the total cost of publishing these works exceeded £12,000. The only complete set known is in the British Museum, although the Rylands Library, Manchester, has a fairly complete collection.

It will not be out of place here to say something of the manner in which Taylor's books are written.

The first thing that impresses one is that they do not appear to be what one could call easy reading. They are written in a style that a beginner finds rather difficult to comprehend. And yet there is a certain indefinable charm about them which a student feels more and more, something which makes him come back again to them; something which has in it doubtless the very Spirit of Plato and the soul of his interpreter, the illustrious Thomas; something which makes one come to love the Immortal Gods, and to be imbued with an ardent longing to spread this Divine Knowledge and make it universal.

Thomas Taylor, in preparing his books, paid very little heed to such things as punctuation, absolute correctness in grammar, or any aids to easy reading. He considered that it should be a part of the work of those who studied them to master the style in which they were written. He did not aim at literal exactness, and because of this he does not appeal to the modern professors of Classical Languages and Philosophy. He says with regard to his own translations, when speaking of his own style of composition, that

. . . had I been anxious to gratify false taste with respect to composition, I should doubtless have attended less to the precise meaning of the original, have omitted almost all connective particles, have divided long periods into a number of short ones, and branched out the strong and deep river of Plato's language into smooth, gliding, shallow and feeble streams; but the present work (translation of Plato) was composed with the hope indeed of benefiting all, but with an eye to the criticism solely of men of elevated souls, I have endeavoured not to lose a word of the original and yet at the same time have attempted to give the translation as much elegance as such verbal accuracy can be supposed capable of admitting.

As is fairly well known, Plato's own writings in the original Greek were composed in such a masterful manner that it is affirmed that not a single word could be taken away without spoiling the meaning, and that not a single word could be added that would make the meaning any more clear. To translate such writing as this, and to give to the English-speaking students Plato's full and true ideas and teachings, was no easy matter. As to whether Taylor has accomplished this, doubtless the future will decide; for the present each student can judge for himself.

In concluding this section of the paper it can be said that Taylor resigned the Secretaryship of the Society of Arts in the year 1806, and through the goodness of Mr. William Meredith (who gave him an allowance of £100 per annum) was able to live in comfortable retirement working away at his translations and writings to his heart's

content. He also possessed other friends, one, named Bennet Langton, allowing him free use of his library, another, Flamm the noted sculptor, arranged for a series of twelve lectures on Plato to be given in his house by Taylor.

Another great friend and ardent disciple of Taylor was the Marquis de Valadi (G. Izarn Valadi) a young French nobleman and soldier who was born in 1766. He was an enthusiastic follower of Pythagoras, and lived with Thomas Taylor for a time in 1788 as his disciple, but later felt called upon to return to France to take his share in the momentous political upheaval in his native country and he subsequently lost his life in the French Revolution at the early age of twenty-seven.

5. The Eventide

The reception of his work.

From a general perusal of Thomas Taylor's works it is soon evident that he was writing and labouring for the future and not for the present.

His books from the first received but a poor reception, and few indeed were the readers who really understood them or could appreciate what Taylor was aiming at.² Some seemed even wilfully to misunderstand him, while others made a systematic search through his books merely to find errors in punctuation or grammar, and then parade these before the public eye as evidences of their own learnedness and of Taylor's ignorance.

He received practically no recognition or praise from the Press, but instead was ridiculed and belittled by the learned men of his age at every possible opportunity. He was satirized by contemporary writers. He figures as the modern Pletho in Isaac Disraeli's *Curiosities of Literature*, and in his novel *Vaurien*. He was also referred to as England's Gentile Priest in Mathias' *Pursuits of Literature*. Tales were invented about him, exaggerating any peculiarities he may have possessed. It was said of him that not only had he returned to the beliefs of so-called Heathenism, but that also he practised its ritual, and that he went so far as to sacrifice a ram to Jupiter in his back parlour!

In the introduction to his complete translation of Aristotle, which was published in 1812 when Taylor was fifty-five years old, he makes the following confession which shows so clearly what had been the reception of his previous works that it is well worth quoting in full. He says:

I have devoted myself to the study of Ancient Wisdom amidst the pressure of want, the languor and weakness occasioned by continual disease, and severe toil in situations not only uncongenial with my disposition and highly unfavourable to such a pursuit, but oppressed by tyranny and aggravated by insult. Amidst all this, and yet this is but a rude delineation of endurance, what has been my recompense from the critics for having brought to light Truths which

² [Cf. ". . . it is certain that [Thomas Taylor] was known to such people as James Boswell, Thomas Holcroft, Thomas Love Peacock, Mary Wollstonecraft, probably William Blake, and quite possibly Shelley; that his books were read by Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, and Emerson in America"; — Evans F.B. III. *Thomas Taylor, Platonist of the Romantic Period*. In: "Transactions and Proceedings of the Modern Language Association of America," Vol. 55, No. 4 (December 1940), p. 1060. — ED. PHIL.]

have been concealed for ages in oblivion, for having translated and illustrated writings which from their intrinsic merit have been preserved amidst the ravages and revolutions of time, fanatic fury and barbaric devastation? Not the praise due to well-merited endeavours and generous exertion; not the equitable decision of candid criticism; not even the cool, dispassionate and benevolent censure which Pity suggests while Humanity writes, but the savage invective of merciless malevolence, the stupid slander of Ignorance and the imbecile scorn of dull Impertinence. These have been my rewards from the critics. Through the combined efforts of these foes to great and virtuous emulation, my writings have been explored for the purpose of detecting and magnifying faults which in other authors have been consigned to oblivion, and not with any intention (and for this indeed they were inadequate) of combating the doctrines which I have so zealously endeavoured to propagate. Yet it is from a faithful representation of these doctrines that I look forward with ardent, and I trust unpresuming hope, to the approbation of a better age, in which the page of criticism will not be stained by malignant defamation, and in which the labours of the now oppressed champion of Truth and Wisdom shall be appreciated by Equity Herself, and be at least honourably, if not largely, recorded in the Archives of Immortality.

This unpresuming hope will find an echo in many breasts; that it will be realized ultimately in full there is not much doubt. Some of his works have been reprinted in *The Shrine of Wisdom* and a small amount elsewhere,³ and those who seek will find that second-hand copies of his original works are difficult and expensive to procure.

In another of his books Taylor says,

I am in no respect a debtor to the gratitude of the public: for my writings hitherto have neither been attentively studied nor liberally received.

He seems, however, to have become quite reconciled to the attitude of the world towards his writings, and to have gone on quite heedless as to whether his books would 'sell or not' being perfectly convinced that the results of his labours would someday appear, for he knew he was working for the Gods. Added to this was the endless amount of pleasure he experienced in the study of the Divine Wisdom and in carrying on his work generally. He says,

. . . amidst the various storms of a life distinguished by outrage and disease, it has been a never-failing support and an inviolable retreat. It has smoothed the hour of care and dispelled the gloom of despondency: sweetened the bitterness of grief, and lulled agony to rest.

It will be seen that altogether the illustrious Thomas Taylor had a far from smooth and comfortable career. He stood so very much alone and unsupported that it is indeed remarkable he should have continued working so doggedly right until the end of his long life; Many another warrior would have given up in despair. Even nowadays, when the country is certainly more broadminded than it was in Taylor's day, most followers know how comparatively few are the lovers of the Divine Wisdom. They have

³ [In 1994 "The Prometheus Trust" began reprinting the entire works of Thomas Taylor.]

felt how hopeless it is to broach this Sacred Subject to the vast majority of their fellow-beings. It is therefore easy to understand what must have been Taylor's position, but it is not so easy, perhaps, to realize what impelled him to go on with his unselfish lonely mission.

To be scoffed at: to have the whole of one's efforts belittled: to be jeered at on all sides: this would be more than enough to cool the ardour of most men. But add to this the continual struggle to make both ends meet and the incessant worry and trouble of ill-health, and how many would have gone on? Few indeed, if they had any thought for their own comfort and so-called happiness. But material hardships such as these were all insufficient to hold back so great a Soul as Taylor. Nevertheless when one thinks of what might have been, and considers how other men infinitely less worthy have been, and are being, belauded by the world, one cannot but help feel something of the sadness that oftentimes must steal into the hearts of those Great Souls who renounce all the pleasures and advantages of the physical world and devote themselves to the Service of Humanity. This deep, inexpressible feeling of sadness, which at times is almost akin to despair, because of the apparent hopelessness of making mankind understand the simplicity, the beauty, the sublimity of the Ancient Divine Wisdom, at other times is touched with a sweetness, a serenity, that comes of a perfect confidence in the certain Return of the Golden Age in the radiant future, when the Immortal Gods so will it.

So Thomas Taylor could well afford to smile at his hard critics, and, quite unconcerned by their efforts to discourage him, to go steadily on with his Great Work. No doubt he was at times despondent and melancholy, when pondering the miserable reception and recognition his unselfish labours had received; yet when he turned to his Immortal Plato and entered into sweet communion with his Great Master and with the other Great Souls of the Integral Succession, then was his sadness changed into a gladness, a charming serenity and divine peace.

6. The Night

He leaves his work to darkness and to . . . ?

But little now remains to tell about this Great Ancestor.

He married twice. His first wife, Mary Morton, who so markedly influenced his life, died on the 1st of April 1809. She was the mother of two daughters and four sons. It will be remembered that Halley's Comet made its appearance in the heavens near the time of Taylor's birth. By a strange coincidence it appeared again in the same year that he died. As Shakespeare wrote:

When beggars die there are no comets seen:
The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.⁴

The Soul of Thomas Taylor left its fleshly prison-house on the 1st of November 1835 at the ripe age of seventy-seven. He was buried on the 6th of November at St Mary's, Newington Butts, so near to November 7th, the reputed birthday of his beloved Master Plato. With his departure from the mundane sphere his writings seem to have

⁴ [*Julius Caesar* II, ii, 30-31]

gradually sunk into oblivion, shut up in private or public libraries and rarely if ever referred to. It might almost have seemed as if his life work had been a complete failure and all to no purpose.

But after every night, howsoever dark it may be, there must come the Dawn. The Night that commenced on the 6th of November 1835, when the remains of Thomas Taylor disappeared into the darkness, lasted for exactly seventy-six years.⁵

7. The New Dawn

The Grecian Wisdom is a Doorway to Higher Things for the Western World. Thomas Taylor laid the foundation for the future elaboration and further exposition of the philosophical side of this Imperishable Wisdom, which is the synthesis of the East and the West.

The philosophical side of the Wisdom is in itself insufficient, and needs its natural complement, the religious side, so that head and heart learning can be blended. In Thomas Taylor's days, as has already been seen, little or no headway was possible in connection with the religious side of the Wisdom of the Gods. The days are now at hand, however, when mankind will be more ready to receive this Wisdom, which is Religion itself, and not *a* religion, and its development is certainly needed now more than ever. It has been said that the Sublime Wisdom of the Immortal High Gods, when rightly understood, is the only cure for all the ills that now afflict mankind. Thomas Taylor prophesied that strife and troublous times would be the forerunners of the Return of the Imperishable Lore of the Adorable Gods.

Now, then, is the time for all those who believe in the Gods to devote themselves to the Great Cause. The future lies before us; it is in the hands of others to carry on this great work, in a way perhaps never before attempted. Much has already been accomplished, but this is infinitesimal compared with what there is yet to achieve. May the efforts go on and on, in constant remembrance of those of Thomas Taylor; and with him and others like him may we place ourselves under the Banner of the Immortal Gods, depending upon Them for strength, guidance and assistance, never looking for praise or reward, but leaving all that may be done in Their Hands, with the perfect assurance that They will water the Seed and cause it to bring forth fruit in due time.



⁵ [In 1911 "The Shrine of Wisdom" was founded.]

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Dissertation on the Platonic Theory of Ideas
Phaedrus
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H.P. Blavatsky on Thomas Taylor

One of the very few commentators on old Greek and Latin authors, who have given their just dues to the ancients for their mental development, is Thomas Taylor.¹

Taylor devoted his whole useful life to the search after such old manuscripts as would enable him to have his own speculations concerning several obscure rites in the Mysteries corroborated by writers who had been initiated themselves.²

As Thomas Taylor, the most intuitional of all the translators of Greek Fragments,³ shows, no nation has ever conceived the One principle as the immediate creator of the visible Universe, for no sane man would credit a planner and architect with having built with his own hands the edifice he admires.⁴

The first manifestation of the eternal monad was never meant to stand as the symbol of another symbol, the UNBORN for the Element-born, or the one LOGOS for the Heavenly man. Tetragrammaton, or the Tetractys of the Greeks, is the *Second logos*, the Demiourgos. The Tetrad, as Thomas Taylor thought,

. . . is . . . the *animal itself* of Plato, who, as Syrianus justly observes, was the best of the Pythagoreans; [it] subsists at the extremity of the intelligible triad, as is most satisfactorily shown by Proclus in the third book of his treatise on the theology of Plato. And between these two triads [the double triangle], the one intelligible, and the other intellectual, another order of gods exists which, partakes of both extremes.⁵

As, however, no one would deny that Plato had been initiated into the MYSTERIES, there is an end to the other denials.⁶ There are hundreds of expressions and hints in the *Dialogues* which no modern translator or commentator — save one, Thomas Taylor — has ever correctly understood. The presence, moreover, of the Pythagorean number-doctrine and the sacred numerals in Plato's lectures settles the question conclusively.⁷

Without entering again into a demonstration that in Christian, and especially Irish Roman Catholic, churches⁸ the same apparently indecent customs as the above⁹

¹ *Isis Unveiled*, I p. 284

² *ibid.*, II pp. 108-9

³ Introduction to Plato's *Parmenides* in: *The Cratylus, Phaedo, Parmenides and Timaeus of Plato*, London, 1793, pp. 256 ff.

⁴ *Secret Doctrine*, I p. 425

⁵ *ibid.*, II p. 599; [quoting Rev. G. Oliver's *The Pythagorean Triangle*, p. 104; cf. Proclus, *On the Theology of Plato*, Bk. III, ch. xiv-xv]

⁶ [Of the presence of "any definite trace of a secret doctrine" in his *Dialogues*.]

⁷ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (OLD PHILOSOPHERS AND MODERN CRITICS) VII p. 207

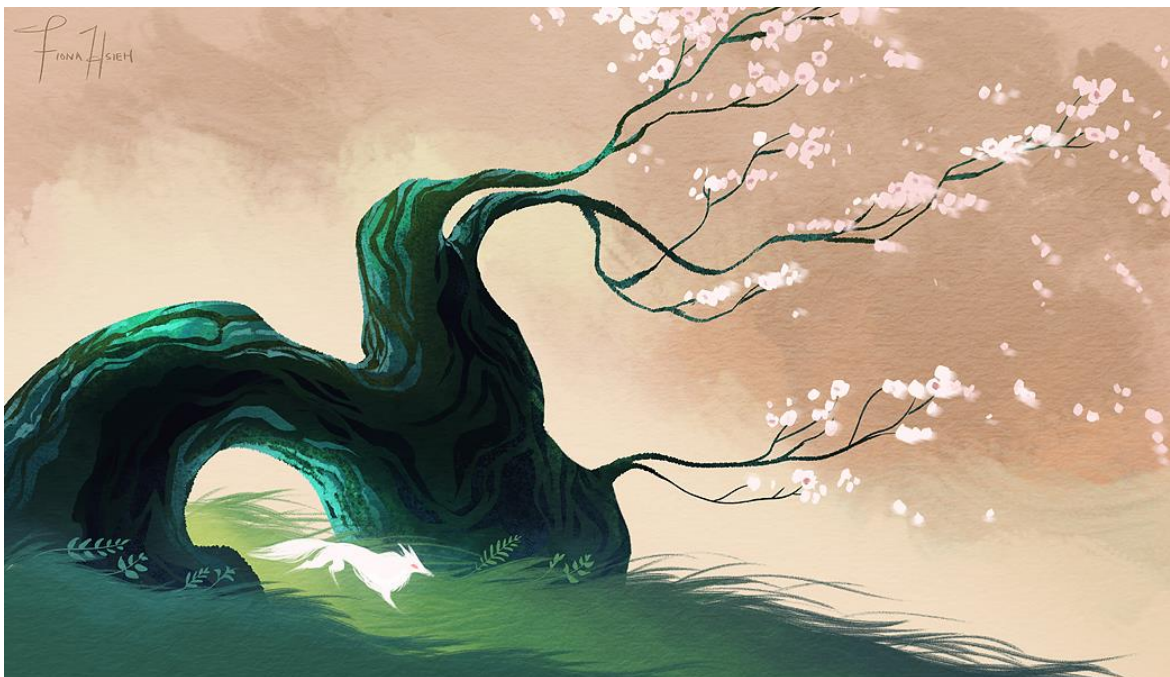
⁸ See Inman, *Ancient Pagan and Modern Christian Symbolism*, 1874, p. 66.

⁹ [e.g., plagiarising and spoofing neophyte's trials during the Minor Mysteries of Agrae. — ED. PHIL.]

prevailed until the end of the last century, we will recur to the untiring labours of that honest and brave defender of the ancient faith, Thomas Taylor, and his works. However much dogmatic Greek scholarship may have found to say against his “mis-translations,” his memory must be dear to every true Platonist, who seeks rather to learn the inner thought of the great philosopher than enjoy the mere external mechanism of his writings. Better classical translators may have rendered us, in more correct phraseology, Plato’s *words*, but Taylor shows us Plato’s *meaning*, and this is more than can be said of Zeller, Jowett, and their predecessors. Yet, as writes Professor A. Wilder, Taylor’s works

. . . have met with favour at the hands of men capable of profound and recondite thinking; and it must be conceded that he was endowed with a superior qualification — that of an intuitive perception of the interior meaning of the subjects which he considered. Others may have known more Greek, but he knew more Plato.¹

And this we take to be our own position.²



¹ Introduction to Taylor’s *Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*, p. 27; 4th ed.

² *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE NEGATORS OF SCIENCE — II) XIII p. 153