The Sources of Madame Blavatsky's Writings

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During the past three years I have made a more or less exhaustive analysis of the contents of the writings of Madame H. P. Blavatsky; and I have traced the sources whence she derived - and mostly without credit being given - nearly the whole of their subject-matter. The presentation, in detail, of the evidences of this derivation would constitute a volume; but the limitations of this paper will admit only of a brief summary of the results attained by my analysis of these writings. The detailed proofs and evidence of every assertion herein are now partly in print and partly in manuscript; and they will be embodied in full in a work I am preparing for publication, - an expose of theosophy as a whole. So far as pertains to Isis Unveiled, Madame Blavatsky’s first work, the proofs of its wholesale plagiarisms have been in print two years, and no attempt has been made to deny or discredit any of the data therein contained. In that portion of my work which is already in print, as well as that as yet in manuscript, many parallel passages are given from the two sets of writings, - the works of Madame Blavatsky, and the books whence she copied the plagiarised passages; they also contain complete lists of the passages plagiarised, giving in each case the page of Madame Blavatsky’s work in which the passage is found, and the page and name of the book whence she copied it. Any one can, therefore, easily test the accuracy of my statements.

In Isis Unveiled, published in 1877, I discovered some 2000 passages copied from other books without proper credit. By careful analysis I found that in compiling Isis about 100 books were used. About 1400 books are quoted from and referred to in this work; but, from the 100 books which its author possessed, she copied everything in Isis taken from and relating to the other 1300. There are in Isis about 2100 quotations from and references to books that were copied, at second-hand, from books other than the originals; and of this number only about 140 are credited to the books from which Madame Blavatsky copied them at second-hand. The others are quoted in such a manner as to lead the reader to think that Madame Blavatsky had read and utilised the original works, and had quoted from them at first-hand, - the truth being that these originals had evidently never been read by Madame Blavatsky. By this means many readers of Isis, and subsequently those of her Secret Doctrine and Theosophical Glossary, have been misled into thinking Madame Blavatsky an enormous reader, possessed of vast erudition; while the fact is her reading was very limited, and her ignorance was profound in all branches of knowledge.

The books utilised in compiling Isis were nearly all current nineteenth-century literature. Only one of the old and rare books named and quoted from was in Madame Blavatsky’s possession, - Henry More’s Immortality of the Soul, published in the seventeenth century. One or two others dated from the early part of the present century; and all the rest pertained to the middle and later part of this century. Our author made great pretensions to Cabbalistic learning; but every quotation from and every allusion to the Cabbala, in Isis and all her later works, were copied at second-hand from certain books containing scattered quotations from Cabbalistic writings; among them being Mackenzie’s Masonic Cyclopaedia, King’s Gnostics, and the works of S. F. Dunlap, L. Jacolliot, and Eliphas Levi. Not a line of the quotations in Isis, from the old-time mystics, Paracelsus, Van Helmont, Cardan, Robert Fludd, Philalethes, Gaffarel, and others, was taken from the original works; the whole of them were copied from other books containing scattered quotations from those writers. The same thing obtains with her quotations from Josephus, Philo, and the Church Fathers, as Justin Martyr, Origen, Clement, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Eusebius, and all the rest. The same holds good with the classical authors, - Homer, Ovid, Horace, Virgil, Plato, Pliny, and many others. The quotations from all these were copied at second-hand from some of the 100 books which were used by the compiler of Isis.

In a number of instances Madame Blavatsky, in Isis claimed to possess or to have read certain books quoted from, which it is evident she neither possessed nor had read. In Isis, i., 369-377, are a number of quotations from a work of Figuier’s, that she claimed to have taken from the original work, which she says (i., 369) now "lies before us". As every word from Figuier in Isis was copied from Des Mousseaux’s Magie au Dix-neuvieme Siecle, pp. 451-457, the word "lies" in the sentence used by her is quite a propos. In Isis, i., 353, 354, et seq., she professed to quote from a work in her possession, whereas all that she quoted was copied from Demonologia, pp. 224-259. In ii., 8, she claimed that she had read a work by Bellarmin, whereas all that she says about him, and all that she quotes from him, are copied from Demonologia, pp. 294, 295. In ii., 71, she stated that she had a treatise by De Nogen, but all that she knows about him or his treatise was taken from Demonologia, p. 431. In ii., 74, 75, the reader is led to believe that certain quotations from The Golden Legend were copied by her from the original; the truth being that they were taken from Demonologia, 420-427. In ii., 59, she gave a description of a standard of the Inquisition, derived, she said, from "a photograph in our possession, from an original procured at the Escurial of Madrid"; but this description was copied from Demonologia, p. 300.

In Isis, i., pp. xii, to xxii., is an account of the philosophy of Plato and his successors. Nearly the whole of these ten pages was copied from two books, - Cocker’s Christianity and Greek Philosophy, and Zeller’s Plato and the Old Academy. There are some 25 passages from Cocker and 35 from Zeller; and, of all these, credit is given for but one citation from Cocker and about a dozen lines from Zeller. In Isis, ii., 344, 345, 9 passages are copied from Zeller, but one of which is credited.

Here follows a list of some other of the more extensive plagiarisms in Isis. It includes the names of the books plagiarised from, and the number of passages in them that were plagiarised: -

Ennemoser’s History of Magic, English translation 107 passages.

Demonologia, 85 "

Dunlap’s Sod: the Son of the Man, 134 "

Dunlap’s Sod: the Mysteries of Adoni, 65 "

Dunlap’s Spirit History of Man, 77 "

Salverte’s Philosophy of Magic, English translation 68 "

Des Mousseaux’s Magic au Dix-neuvieme Siecle, 63 "

Des Mousseaux’s Hauts Phenomenes de la Magie, 45 "

Des Mousseaux’s Moeurs et Pratiques des Demons,. 16 "

Supernatural Religion, 40 "

King’s Gnostics, 1st edition, 42 "

Mackenzie’s Masonic Cyclopaedia, 36 "

Jacolliot’s Christna et le Christ, 23 "

Jacolliot’s Bible in India, English translation. 17 "

Jacolliot’s Le Spiritisme dans le Monde, 19 "

Hone’s Apocryphal New Testament, 27 "

Cory’s Ancient Fragments, 20 "

Howitt’s History of the Supernatural, 20 "

Among the other books plagiarised from may be named Eliphas Levi’s Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie, and his La Science des Esprits, La Clef des Grands Mysteres, and Histoire de la Magie; Amberley’s Analysis of Religious Belief, Yule’s Ser Marco Polo, Max Muller’s Chips, vols. i. and ii., Lundy’s Monumental Christianity, Taylor’s Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries (1875 ed.), Reber’s Christ of Paul, Jenning’s Rosicrucians, Higgins’s Anacalypsis, Inman’s Ancient Faiths in Ancient Names, Inman’s Ancient Pagan and Modern Christian Symbolism, Inman’s Ancient Faiths and Modern, Wright’s Sorcery and Witchcraft, Bunsen’s Egypt, Payne Knight’s Symbolical Language of Ancient Art and Mythology, Westropp and Wake’s Ancient Symbol Worship, Pococke’s India in Greece, Findel’s History of Freemasonry, The Unseen Universe, Elam’s A Physician’s Problems, Emma Hardinge’s Modern American Spiritualism, More’s Immortality of the Soul, Draper’s Conflict between Religion and Science, Randolph’s Pre-Adamite Man, Peebles’s Jesus: Myth, Man, or God, Peebles’s Around the World, Principles of the Jesuits (1893), Septenary Institutions (1850), Gasparin’s Science and Spiritualism, Report on Spiritualism of the London Dialectical Society (1873), Wallace’s Miracles and Modern Spiritualism, and Maudsley’s Body and Mind.

Two years ago I published the statement that the whole of Isis was compiled from a little over 100 books and periodicals. In the Theosophist, April, 1893, pp. 387, 388, Colonel Olcott states that when Isis was written the library of the author comprised about 100 books, and that during its composition various friends lent her a few books, - the latter with her own library thus making up a little over 100, in precise accordance with the well-established results of my critical analysis of every quotation and plagiarism in Isis.

The Secret Doctrine, published in 1888, is of a piece with Isis. It is permeated with plagiarisms, and is in all its parts a rehash of other books. Two books very largely form the basis of this work, - Wilson’s translation of the Vishnu Purana, and Prof. Winchell’s World Life. The Secret Doctrine is saturated with Hinduism and Sanskrit terminology, and the bulk of this was copied from Wilson’s Vishnu Purana. A large part of the work is devoted to the discussion of various points in modern science, and the work most largely used by Madame Blavatsky in this department of her book was Winchell’s World Life. A specimen of the wholesale plagiarisms in this book appears in vol. ii., pp. 599-603. Nearly the whole of four pages was copied from Oliver’s Pythagorean Triangle, while only a few lines were credited to that work. Considerable other matter in Secret Doctrine was copied, uncredited, from Oliver’s work. Donnelly’s Atlantis was largely plagiarised from. Madame Blavatsky not only borrowed from this writer the general idea of the derivation of Eastern civilisation, mythology, etc., from Atlantis; but she coolly appropriated from him a number of the alleged detailed evidences of this derivation, without crediting him therewith. Vol. ii., pp. 790-793, contains a number of facts, numbered seriatim, said to prove this Atlantean derivation. These facts were almost wholly copied from Donnelly’s book, ch. iv., where they are also numbered seriatim; but there is no intimation in Secret Doctrine that its author was indebted to Donnelly’s book for this mass of matter. In addition to those credited, there are 130 passages from Wilson’s Vishnu Purana copied uncredited; and there are some 70 passages from Winchell’s World Life not credited. From Dowson’s Hindu Classical Dictionary, 123 passages were plagiarised. From Decharme’s Mythologie de la Grece Antique, about 60 passages were plagiarised; and from Myer’s Qabbala, 34. These are some of the other books plagiarised from: Kenealy’s Book of God, Faber’s Cabiri, Wake’s Great Pyramid, Gould’s Mythical Monsters, Joly’s Man before Metals, Stallo’s, Modern Physics, Massey’s Natural Genesis, Mackey’s Mythological Astronomy, Schmidt’s Descent and Darwinism, Quatrefages’s Human Species, Laing’s Modern Science and Modern Thought, Mather’s Cabbala Unveiled, Maspero’s Musee de Boulaq, Ragon’s Maconnerie Occulte, Lefevre’s Philosophy, and Buchner’s Force and Matter.

The Secret Doctrine is ostensibly based upon certain stanzas, claimed to have been translated by Madame Blavatsky from the Book of Dzyan, - the oldest book in the world, written in a language unknown to philology. The Book of Dzyan was the work of Madame Blavatsky, - a compilation, in her own language, from a variety of sources, embracing the general principles of the doctrines and dogmas taught in the Secret Doctrine. I find in this "oldest book in the world" statements copied from nineteenth-century books, and in the usual blundering manner of Madame Blavatsky. Letters and other writings of the adepts are found in the Secret Doctrine. In these Mahatmic productions I have traced various plagiarised passages from Wilson’s Vishnu Purana and Winchell’s World Life, - of like character to those in Madame Blavatsky’s acknowledged writings. Detailed proofs of this will be given in my book. I have also traced the source whence she derived the word Dzyan.

The Theosophical Glossary, published in 1892, contains an alphabetical arrangement of words and terms pertaining to occultism and theosophy, with explanations and definitions thereof. The whole of this book, except the garblings, distortions and fabrications of Madame Blavatsky scattered through it, was copied from other books. The explanations and definitions of 425 names and terms were copied from Dowson’s Hindu Classical Dictionary. From Wilson’s Vishnu Purana were taken those of 242 terms; from Eitel’s Handbook of Chinese Buddhism, 179; and from Mackenzie’s Masonic Cyclopaedia, 164. A modicum of credit was given to these four books in the preface. But, inasmuch as, scattered through the Glossary, credit was given at intervals to these books for a certain few of the passages extracted therefrom, its readers might easily be misled, by the remark in the preface relative to these four books, into the belief that said remark was intended to cover the various passages in the Glossary where these books are named as the sources whence they were derived and these alone, - that the passages duly credited to said books comprised the whole of the matter in the volume taken from them, instead of being but a small part of the immense collection of matter transferred en masse to the Glossary. But the four named in the preface are not the only books thus utilised. A glossary of Sanskrit and occultic terms was appended to a work called Five Years of Theosophy, published by Mohini M. Chatterji in 1885. At least 229 of these terms and their definitions were copied in Blavatsky’s Glossary, nearly verbatim in every instance; and no credit whatever was given for this wholesale appropriation of another’s work. I cannot find a single reference to Chatterji’s glossary in any part of the later Glossary. Nearly all of the matter concerning Egyptian mythology, etc., in the latter, was copied from Bonwick’s Egyptian Belief and Modern Thought. A small part of this was credited, but over 100 passages from Bonwick were not credited. Nearly every word in relation to Norse and Teutonic mythology was copied from Wagner’s Asgard and the Gods, - a little being credited, and some 100 passages not. Most of the Thibetan matter was taken from Schlagintweit’s Buddhism in Thibet, - some credited, but nearly 50 passages were not. Much of the material anent Southern Buddhism was copied from Spence Hardy’s Eastern Monachism, - nearly 50 passages being uncredited. Most of the Babylonian and Chaldean material was extracted from Smith’s Chaldean Account of Genesis, with nearly 50 passages not credited. The Parsi and Zoroastrian matter was from Darmesteter’s translation of the Zend-Avesta, and West’s translation of the Bundahish in the Sacred Books of the East, - mostly uncredited. Among other books levied upon in the compilation of the Glossary, principally with no credit given, are these: Sayce’s Hibbert Lectures Myer’s Qabbala, Hartmann’s Paracelsus, Crawford’s translation of the Kalevala, King’s Gnostics, Faber’s Cabiri, Beal’s Catena of Buddhist Scriptures, Rhys Davids’s Buddhism, Edkins’s Chinese Buddhism, Maspero’s Guide au Musee de Boulaq, Subba Row’s Notes on the Bhagavad Gita, Kenealy’s Book of God, Eliphas Levi’s Works, and various others.

The Voice of the Silence, published in 1889, purports to be a translation by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky from a Thibetan work. It is said to belong to the same series as the Book of Dzyan, which is true; as, like that work, it is a compilation of ideas and terminology from various nineteenth-century books, the diction and phraseology being those of Madame Blavatsky. I have traced the sources whence it was taken, and it is a hotch-potch from Brahmanical books on Yoga and other Hindu writings; Southern Buddhistic books, from the Pali and Sinhalese; and Northern Buddhistic writings, from the Chinese and Thibetan, - the whole having been taken by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky from translations by, and the writings of, European and other Orientalists of to-day. In this work are intermingled Sanskrit, Pali, Thibetan, Chinese, and Sinhalese terms, - a manifest absurdity in a Thibetan work. I have traced the books from which each of these terms was taken. I find embedded in the text of this alleged ancient Thibetan work quotations, phrases, and terms copied from current Oriental literature. The books most utilised in its compilation are these: Schlagintweit’s Buddhism in Thibet, Edkins's’s Chinese Buddhism, Hardy’s Eastern Monachism, Rhys Davids’s Buddhism, Dvivedi’s Raja Yoga, and Raja Yoga Philosophy (1888); also an article, "The Dream of Ravan," published in the Dublin University Magazine, January, 1854, extracts from which appeared in the Theosophist of January, 1880. Passages from this article, and from the books named above, are scattered about in the text of the Voice of the Silence, as well as in the annotations thereon, which latter are admitted to be the work of Blavatsky. Full proofs of this, including the parallel passages, will be given in my work on theosophy; including evidence that this old Thibetan book contains not only passages from the Hindu books quoted in the article in the Dublin Magazine, but also ideas and phrases stolen from the nineteenth-century writer of said article. One example of the incongruity of the elements composing the conglomerate admixture of terms and ideas in the Voice of the Silence will be given. On p. 87, it is said that the Narjols of the Northern Buddhists are "learned in Gotrabhu-gnyana and gnyana-dassana-suddhi". Helena Petrovna Blavatsky copied these two terms from Hardy’s Eastern Monachism, p. 281. The terms used in Northern Buddhism are usually Sanskrit, or from the Sanskrit; those in Southern Buddhism, Pali, or from the Pali. Hardy’s work, devoted to Sinhalese Buddhism, is composed of translations from Sinhalese books, and its terms and phrases are largely Sinhalese corruptions of the Pali. Sinhalese terms are unknown in Northern Buddhism. The two terms in the Voice of the Silence, descriptive of the wisdom of the Narjols, are Sinhalese-Pali corruptions, and therefore unknown in Thibet. Narjol is a word manufactured by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, from the Thibetan Nal-jor, which she found in Schlagintweit’s work, p. 138, - the r and l being transposed by her.

Esoteric Buddhism, by A. P. Sinnett, was based upon statements in letters received by Mr. Sinnett and Mr. A. O. Hume, through Madame Blavatsky, purporting to be written by the Mahatmas Koot Hoomi and Morya, - principally the former. Mr. Richard Hodgson has kindly lent me a considerable number of the original letters of the Mahatmas leading to the production of Esoteric Buddhism. I find in them overwhelming evidence that all of them were written by Madame Blavatsky, which evidence will be presented in full in my book. In these letters are a number of extracts from Buddhist books, alleged to be translations from the originals by the Mahatmic writers themselves. These letters claim for the adepts a knowledge of Sanskrit, Thibetan, Pali and Chinese. I have traced to its source each quotation from the Buddhist scriptures in the letters, and they were all copied from current English translations, including even the notes and explanations of the English translators. They were principally copied from Beal’s Catena of Buddhist Scriptures from the Chinese. In other places where the adept (?) is using his own language in explanation of Buddhistic terms and ideas, I find that his presumed original language was copied nearly word for word from Rhys Davids’s Buddhism, and other books. I have traced every Buddhistic idea in these letters and in Esoteric Buddhism, and every Buddhistic term, such as Devachan, Avitchi, etc., to the books whence Helena Petrovna Blavatsky derived them. Although said to be proficient in the knowledge of Thibetan and Sanskrit, the words and terms in these languages in the letters of the adepts were nearly all used in a ludicrously erroneous and absurd manner. The writer of those letters was an ignoramus in Sanskrit and Thibetan; and the mistakes and blunders in them, in these languages, are in exact accordance with the known ignorance of Madame Blavatsky thereanent. Esoteric Buddhism, like all of Madame Blavatsky’s works, was based upon wholesale plagiarism and ignorance.

From the Caves and Jungles of Hindostan, although published, in letters to a Russian journal, as a veracious narrative of actual experiences of Madame Blavatsky in India, was admitted by Colonel Olcott in Theosophist, January, 1893, pp. 245, 246, to be largely a work of fiction; and this has been even partially conceded in its preface. Like her other books it swarms with blunders, misstatements, falsehoods and garblings. Full expose of it will be included in my work. The Key to Theosophy, by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, being a compendium of doctrines, its plagiarism consists in the ideas and teachings which it contains, rather than in plagiarised passages from other books.

In addition to wholesale plagiarism, other marked characteristics of Madame Blavatsky’s writings are these: (1) Wholesale garbling, distortion and literary forgery, of which there are very many instances in Isis particularly. The Koot Hoomi letters to Hume and Sinnett contain garbled and spurious quotations from Buddhist sacred books, manufactured by the writer to embody her own peculiar ideas, under the fictitious guise of genuine Buddhism. (2) Wealth of misstatement and error in all branches of knowledge treated by her; e.g., in Isis there are over 600 false statements in Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Assyriology, Egyptology, etc. (3) Mistakes and blunders of many varied kinds - in names of books and authors, in words and figures and what not; nearly 700 being in Isis alone. (4) Great contradiction and inconsistency, both in primary and essential points and in minor matters and details. There are probably thousands of contradictions in the whole circuit of her writings.

The doctrines, teachings, dogmas, etc., of theosophy, as published by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, and affirmed to be derived from the quasi-infallible Mahatmas of Thibet, were borrowed from the philosophies and religions of the past and present, with some admixture of modern science. There is nothing original in this "Wisdom of the Gods," or "Wisdom Religion," save the work of compilation into a composite whole of the heterogeneous mass of materials gathered by Madame Blavatsky from so many sources, and the garblings, perversions, and fabrications indulged in by her in the preparation of the system of thought called theosophy. A careful analysis of her teachings shows that they were collected from the sources named below. (1) Madame Blavatsky was a spiritualistic medium many years before she became a theosophist, and in its inception theosophy was an off-shoot from spiritualism; and from this source was a large part of her theosophy taken. I find that its teachings upon some 267 points were copied from those of spiritualism. (2) In its later form, Hinduism constitutes one of the larger portions of theosophy. I have not attempted an exhaustive classification of the numerous minor points taken from this source, but I have noted 281 of the more important. (3) From Buddhism I have noted 63. (4) In the beginnings of theosophy, the basis of most of its teachings was derived from the works of Eliphas Levi, and I count 102 points therefrom borrowed. (5) From Paracelsus’s works were taken 49. (6) From Jacob Bohme, 81. (7) From the Cabbala, 86. (8) From Plato, the Platonists, the Neo-Platonists, and Hermes, 80. (9) From Gnosticism, 61. (10) From modern science and philosophy, 75. (11) From Zoroastrianism, 26. (12) From Kingsford and Maitland’s Perfect Way, 24. (13) From general mythology, 20. (14) From Egyptology, 17. (15) From the Rosicrucians, 16. (16) From other mediaeval and modern mystics, 20. (17) From miscellaneous classical writers, 16. (18) From Assyriology, 14. (19) From Christianity and the Bible, 10. In addition, doctrines and data, in lesser number, have been derived from the following-named sources: The writings of Gerald Massey, John Yarker, Subba Row, Ragon, J. Ralston Skinner, Inman, Keeley, Godfrey Higgins, Jacolliot, Wilford, Oliver, Donnelly, Mackenzie, Bulwer-Lytton, Kenealy, and various others; also from Chinese, Japanese, Phoenician, and Quiche mythologies.

There is not a single dogma or tenet in theosophy, nor any detail of moment in the multiplex and complex concatenation of alleged revelations of occult truth in the teachings of Madame Blavatsky and the pretended adepts, the source of which cannot be pointed out in the world’s literature. From first to last, their writings are dominated by a duplex plagiarism, - plagiarism in idea, and plagiarism in language.

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Note

(1) Member, American Oriental Society, Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, Pali Text Society, Egypt Exploration Fund, Geographical Society of California; Corresponding Member, Brooklyn Ethical Association; and Member, Advisory Council, Psychic Science Congress, Chicago, Illinois.