Since, in the first half of the nineteenth century, Trendelenburg published his work on the ideal Numbers of Plato, those who are occupied with the study of Platonism are bound to put to themselves the radical question: do we know Plato's doctrine? This question first of all arises from the existence of a certain discrepancy between the literary work of Plato and what Aristotle tells us about Platonism. Yet not exclusively from this. It is founded also on certain detractive utterances of Plato himself about books and the art of writing. In the first place we have to mention here the well-known passage in the seventh Letter 1), where Plato says: "There is no book of mine about these things (περὶ ὧν ἐγὼ σπουδάζω), nor will there ever be. For it is not possible to speak about them as about other objects of study. But from a long intercourse with the thing itself and from a common life springs suddenly a light, kindled from a spark that leaped over, and once being lit in the soul, it feeds itself further."

Next to this the parallel-lines in Ep. II, 314c: “There is no book of Plato nor will there ever be; but what is now called so is of Socrates, turned young and handsome.”

Finally there is Phaedr. 274e—275b, the answer of king Thamous to the Egyptian Theuth, who communicated to him the invention of the art of writing: “This discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves. The specific which you have discovered is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence, and you give your disciples not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality” 2).

1) 341 c-d.
2) Translation of B. Jowett.
Now, if Plato thought in this way about written books; when he, apparently, attached much more importance to the living contact of a personal intercourse, is it not plausible that to himself his most essential task was not the writing of books, but his oral teaching in the Academy? And, if so, is not the value of Plato's dialogues as a source of his doctrine strongly diminished, while that of the testimony of Aristotle and other disciples has greatly improved?

This, indeed, was the opinion of Burnet. "As we have seen" 3), he wrote 4), "he (Plato) did not choose to commit it to writing, and we are almost entirely dependent on what Aristotle tells us." Now Burnet's interpretation of Platonism as a whole has carried but little conviction in the world of Plato-scholars, principally because it was connected with an unfortunate theory about Socrates, founded on the doubtful authority of the second Letter and on other wrong interpretations. Yet, as to later Platonism, many others shared Burnet's opinion and attached a great importance to the testimony of Aristotle on the doctrine of Plato in his later years. Among them the names of J. Stenzel and L. Robin may be mentioned.

On the other hand, Platonists who radically doubted of the value of what Aristotle says about Plato never have failed. We may mention in the former century Teichmüller (Literarische Fehden. 1881), and a generation before us P. Shorey and C. Ritter. And let us not forget those Dutch scholars who have been our masters: B. J. H. Ovink and J. D. Bierens de Haan.

Ritter says in his last greater work, Die Kerngedanken der platonischen Philosophie (1930): Plato continued to write until his death. So it is practically impossible that Aristotle could report anything about his oral teaching which is not to be found in the dialogues.—Ritter had, as it appears from his chronicles of Plato-studies in Bursian's Jahresberichte, a marked aversion for those scholars who try to approach Plato through Aristotle. He read and knew the Dialogues, and the Plato he knew from them—his Plato—he did not find back in the works of these modern authors. In their works he felt as in a strange climate. He did not like them and he had no confidence in them. Having read a work of Stenzel for

3) Sc. in the Epistles, VII and I.
4) Gr. Phil. I, p. 312.