

THE TRIAL & DEATH OF SOCRATES

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OF SOCRATES

BEING

THE EUTHYPHRON, APOLOGY, CRITO,
AND PH^EDO OF PLATO

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH

BY

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PREFACE

THIS book, which is intended principally for the large and increasing class of readers who wish to learn something of the masterpieces of Greek literature, and who cannot easily read them in Greek, was originally published by Messrs. Macmillan in a different form. Since its first appearance it has been revised and corrected throughout, and largely re-written. The chief part of the Introduction is new. It is not intended to be a general essay on Socrates, but only an attempt to explain and illustrate such points in his life and teaching as are referred to in these dialogues, which, taken by themselves, contain Plato's description of his great master's life, and work, and death.

The books which were most useful to me in writing it are Professor Zeller's *Socrates and the Socratic Schools*, and the edition of the

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Apology by the late Rev. James Riddell,
published after his death by the delegates

of the Clarendon Press. His account of Socrates is singularly striking. I found the very exact and literal translation of the Phado into colloquial English by the late Mr. E. M. Cope often very useful in revising that dialogue. I have also to thank various friends for the patience with which they have looked over parts of my work in manuscript, and for the many valuable hints and suggestions which they have given me.

As a rule I have used the text of the Zurich editors. Twice or thrice, in the Ph&do, I have taken a reading from the text of Schanz : but it seems to me that what makes his edition valuable is its apparatus criticus rather than its text.

F. J. C.

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INTRODUCTION

THESE dialogues contain a unique picture of Socrates in the closing scenes of his life, his trial, his imprisonment, and his death. And they contain a description also of that unflagging search after truth, that persistent and merciless examination and sifting of men who were wise only in their own conceit, to which his latter years were devoted. Within these limits he is the most familiar figure of ancient Greek history. No one else stands out before us with so individual and distinct a personality of his own. Of the rest of Socrates' life, however, we are almost completely ignorant. All that we know of it consists of a few scattered and isolated facts, most of which are referred to in these dialogues. A considerable number of stories are told about him by late writers : but to scarcely any of them can credit be given. Plato and Xenophon are almost the only trustworthy authorities about him who remain ; and they describe him almost altogether as an old man. The earlier part of his life is to us scarcely more than a blank.

Socrates was born very shortly before the

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year 469 B.C. 1 His father, Sophroniscus, was a sculptor : his mother, Phamarete, a midwife. Nothing definite is known of his moral and intellectual development. There is no specific record of him at all until he served at the siege of Potidaa (432 B.C.-429 B.C.) when he was nearly forty years old. All that we can say is that his youth and manhood were passed in the most splendid period of Athenian or Greek history. 2 It was the time of that wonderful outburst

of genius in art, and literature, and thought, and statesmanship, which was so sudden and yet so unique Athens was full of the keenest intellectual and political activity. Among her citizens between the years 460 B.C. and 420 B.C. were men who in poetry, in history, in sculpture, in architecture, are our masters still. ^Eschylus' great Trilogy was brought out in the year 458 B.C., and the poet died two years later, when Socrates was about fifteen years old. Sophocles was born in 495 B.C., Euripides in 481 B.C. They both died about 406 B.C., some seven years before Socrates. Pheidias, the great sculptor, the artist of the Elgin marbles, which are now in the British Museum, died in 432 B.C. Pericles, the supreme statesman and orator, 3 whose name marks an epoch in the history of civilisation, died in 429 B.C. Thucydides, the historian, whose history is ' a posses-

1 Apol 17 D. Crito, 52 E.

2 See the account of this period given by Professor Curtius in his History of Greece, Bk. iii. ch. 3.

3 6 irdw. Xen. Mem. iii. 5. i.

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sion for all ages,' 1 was born in 471 B.C., about the same time as Socrates, and died probably between 401 B.C- and 395 B.C. Ictinus, the architect, completed the Parthenon in 438 B.C. There have never been finer instruments of culture than the art and poetry and thought of such men as these. Socrates, who in 420 B.C. was about fifty years old, was contemporary with them all. He must have known and conversed with some of them : for Athens was not very large, 2 and the Athenians spent almost the whole of their day in public. To live in such a city was in itself no mean training for a man, though he might not be conscious of it. The great object of Pericles' policy had been to make Athens the acknowledged intellectual capital and centre of Greece, * the Prytaneum of all Greek wisdom.' 3 Socrates himself speaks

with pride in the Apology of her renown for ' wisdom and power of mind. ' 4 And Athens gave her citizens another kind of training also, through her political institutions. From having been the head of the confederacy of Delos, she had grown to be an Imperial, or, as her enemies

1 KTTJfJLCL S del. ThllCyd. 1. 22, 5.

2 In 441 B.C. there was a scrutiny of citizenship, and some 5000 men who were unable to prove their descent from Athenian parents on both sides were disfranchised. The qualified citizens were found to number a little over 14,000.

3 Protagoras, 337 D. Pericles' funeral oration (Thucyd. ii. 35-46) deserves careful study in this connection. It is a -statement of the Athenian ideal in the best days of Athens. 4 Apol. 29 D.

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called her, a tyrant city. She was the mistress of a great empire, ruled and administered by law. The Sovereign Power in the Jtate was the Assembly, of which every citizen, not under disability, was a member, and at which attendance was by law compulsory. There was no representative government, no intervening responsibility of ministers. The Sovereign people in their Assembly directly administered the Athenian empire. Each individual citizen was thus brought every day into immediate contact with matters of Imperial importance. His political powers and responsibilities were very great. He was accustomed to hear questions of domestic administration, of legislation, of peace and war, of alliances, of foreign and colonial policy, keenly and ably argued on either side. He was accustomed to hear arguments on one side of a question attacked and dissected and answered by opponents with the greatest acuteness and pertinacity. He himself had to examine, weigh, and decide between rival arguments. The Athenian judicial system

gave the same kind of training in another direction by its juries, on which every citizen was liable to be selected by lot to serve. The result was to create at Athens an extremely high level of general intelligence, such as cannot be looked for in a modern state. And it may well be that in the debates of the Assembly and the discussions of the courts of law Socrates first became aware of the necessity of sifting and examining plausible arguments.

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Such, shortly, were the influences under which Socrates passed the first fifty years of his life. !> It is evident that they were most powerful and efficient as instruments of education, in the wider sense of that word. Very little evidence remains of the formal training which he received, or of the nature and extent of his positive knowledge : and the history of his intellectual development is practically a matter of pure conjecture. As a boy he received the usual Athenian liberal education in music and gymnastic, 1 an education, that is to say, mental and physical. He was fond of quoting from the existing Greek literature, and he seems to have been familiar with it, especially with Homer. He is represented by Xenophon as repeating Prodicus' fable of the choice of Heracles at length. 2 He says that he was in the habit of studying with his friends ' the treasures which the wise men of old have left us in their books :' 3 collections, that is, of the short and pithy sayings of the seven sages, such as 'know thyself; a saying, it maybe noticed, which lay at the root of his whole teaching. And he had some knowledge of mathematics, and of science, as it existed in those days. He understood something of astronomy and of

1 Crito, 50 D. , and for an account of such an education see, Protagoras, 325 E. seg. , and Rep. ii. 376 E. to 412 A., an account of Plato's ideal reformed system of education.

2 -Ken. Mem, ii. i. 21.

3 Xen. Mem. i. 6. 14 ; cf. Protag. 343 A.

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advanced geometry: 1 and he was acquainted with certain, at any rate, of the theories of his predecessors in philosophy, the Physical or Cosmical philosophers, such as Heraclitus and Parmenides, and, especially, with those of Anaxagoras. 2 But there is no trustworthy evidence which enables us to go beyond the bare fact that he had such knowledge. We cannot tell whether he ever studied Physical Philosophy seriously, or from whom, or how, or even, certainly, when, he learnt what he knew about it. It is perhaps most likely that his mathematical and scientific studies are to be assigned to the earlier period of his life. There is a passage in the Phaedo in which he says (or rather is made to say) that in his youth he had had a passion for the study of Nature. 3 The historical value of this passage, however, which occurs in the philosophical or Platonic part of the dialogue, is very doubtful. Socrates is represented as passing on from the study of Nature to the doctrine of Ideas, a doctrine which was put forward for the first time by Plato after his death, and which he never heard of. The statement must be taken for what it is worth. The fact that Aristophanes in the Clouds (423 B.C.) represents Socrates as a natural philosopher, who teaches his pupils, among other things, astronomy and geometry, proves nothing. Aristophanes' misrepresenta-

1 Xen. Mem. iv. 7. 3. 5. Meno, 82, seq.

2 Xen. Mem. i. i. 14. Apol. 26 D. Phaedo, 96 A.
3 Phaedo, 96 A.

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tions about Socrates are so gross that his unsup-

ported testimony deserves no credit : and there is absolutely no evidence to confirm the statement that Socrates ever taught Natural Science. It is quite certain that latterly he refused to have anything to do with such speculations. 1 He admitted Natural Science only in so far as it is practically useful, in the way in which astronomy is useful to a sailor, or geometry to a land-surveyor. 2 Natural philosophers, he says, are like madmen : their conclusions are hopelessly contradictory, and their science unproductive, impossible, and impious ; for the gods are not pleased with those who seek to discover what they do not wish to reveal, The time which is wasted on such subjects might be much more profitably employed in the pursuit of useful knowledge. 3

All then that we can say of the first forty years of Socrates' life, consists of general statements like these. During these years there is no specific record of him. Between 432 B.C. and 429 B.C. he served as a common soldier at the siege of Potidaea, an Athenian dependency which had revolted, and surpassed every one in his powers of enduring hunger, thirst, and cold, and all the hardships of a severe Thracian winter. At this siege we hear of him for the first time in connection with Alcibiades, whose life he saved in a skirmish,

1 Apol. 19 C. D. Xen. Mem. i. i. u.

2 Xen. Mem. iv. 7. 2. 4.

3 Xen. Mem. i. i. 13. 15 ; iv. 7. 3. 5. 6.

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and to whom he eagerly relinquished the prize of valour. In 431 B.C. the Peloponnesian War broke out, and in 424 B.C. the Athenians were disastrously defeated and routed by the Thebans at the battle of Delium. Socrates and Laches were among the few who did not yield to panic. They retreated together steadily, and the resolute bearing of Socrates was conspicuous to

friend and foe alike. Had all the Athenians behaved as he did, says Laches, in the dialogue of that name, the defeat would have been a victory, 1 Socrates fought bravely a third time at the battle of Amphipolis [422 B.C.] against the Peloponnesian forces, in which the commanders on both sides, Cleon and Brasidas, were killed : but there is no record of his specific services on that occasion.

About the same time that Socrates was displaying conspicuous courage in the cause of Athens at Delium and Amphipolis, Aristophanes was holding him up to hatred, contempt, and ridicule in the comedy of the Clouds. The Clouds was first acted in 423 B.C., the year between the battles of Delium" and Amphipolis, and was afterwards recast in the form in which we have it. It was a fierce and bitter attack on what Aristophanes, a staunch " laudator temporis acti Se puero" considered the corruption and degeneracy of the age. Since the middle of the Fifth Century B.C. a new intellectual movement, in which the Sophists were the most prominent figures, had set in. Mep
1 Laches \ 181 B. Sympos. 219 E.

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had begun to examine and to call in question the old-fashioned commonplaces of morality and religion. Independent thought and individual judgment were coming to be substituted for immemorial tradition and authority. Aristophanes hated the spirit of the age with his whole soul. It appeared to him to be impious and immoral. He looked back with unmixed regret to the simplicity of ancient manners, to the glories of Athens in the Persian wars, to the men of Marathon who obeyed orders without discussing them, and * only knew how to call for their barley-cake, and sing yo-ho ! ' 1 The Clouds is his protest against the immorality of free thought and the Sophists. He chose Socrates for his central figure, chiefly, no doubt on account of Socrates' well-known and strange personal appearance. The grotesque ugliness,

and flat nose, and prominent eyes, and Silenus-like face, and shabby dress, might be seen every day in the streets, and were familiar to every Athenian. Aristophanes cared little probably he did not take the trouble to find out that Socrates' whole life was spent in fighting against the Sophists. It was enough for him that Socrates did not accept the traditional beliefs, 2 and was a good centre-piece for a comedy. The account of the Clouds given in the Apology 3 is substantially correct. There is a caricature of a natural philosopher, and then a caricature of a Sophist. Roll the two together,

1 Aristoph. Frogs 1071. 2 Cf. Euth. 6. A.

3 Aeschyl. 18 B. C., 19 C.

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and we have Aristophanes' picture of Socrates. Socrates is described as a miserable recluse, and is made to talk a great deal of very absurd and very amusing nonsense about * Physics. 1 He announces that Zeus has been dethroned, and that Rotation reigns in his stead.

Ati/05 tao-cA.ei'ei ruv Af

The new divinities are Air, which holds the earth suspended, and Ether, and the Clouds, and the Tongue people always think 'that natural philosophers do not believe in the gods.' 2 He professes to have Belial's power to 'make the worse Appear the better reason;' 3 and with it he helps a debtor to swindle his creditors by means of the most paltry quibbles. Under his tuition the son learns to beat his father, and threatens to beat his mother; and justifies himself on the ground that it is merely a matter of convention that the father has the right of beating his son. In the concluding lines of the play the chorus say that

Socrates' chief crime is that he has sinned against the gods with his eyes open. The Natural Philosopher was unpopular at Athens on religious grounds : he was associated with atheism. The Sophist was unpopular on moral grounds : he was supposed to corrupt young men, to make falsehood plausible, to be * a clever fellow who could make other people clever too.' 4 The natural philosopher was not

1 Clouds, 828. 380. 2 Apol 1 8 C.

3 Milton, Par. Lost, ii. 113. 4 Euth. 3 D.

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a Sophist, and the Sophist was not a natural philosopher. Aristophanes mixes them up together, and ascribes the sins of both of them to Socrates. The Clouds, it is needless to say, is a gross and absurd libel from beginning to end : ! but Aristophanes hit the popular conception. The charges which he made in 423 B.C. stuck to Socrates to the end of his life. They are exactly the charges made by popular prejudice, against which Socrates defends himself in the first ten chapters of the Apology, and which he says have been so long ' in the air.' He formulates them as follows : " Socrates is an evil-doer who busies himself with investigating things beneath the earth and in the sky, and who makes the worse appear the better reason, and who teaches others these same things." 2 If we allow for the exaggerations of a burlesque, the Clouds is not a bad com-

1 Crete's argument (Hist, of Greece, vol. vi. p. 260) that if we reject Aristophanes' evidence as against Socrates, we must reject it as against Cleon, ignores an essential distinction between the two cases. Aristophanes, like the majority of his countrymen, was totally incapable of understanding or fathoming Socrates' character. It was utterly strange and unintelligible to him. But he could understand the character of an ordinary man of the world and politician, like Cleon,

perfectly well. His portraits of both Socrates and Cleon are broad caricatures ; and no absolute rule can be laid down for determining the historical value of a caricature. In each case the value depends on circumstances,

2 Apol. 19 B. He was also accused at his trial of making children undutiful to their parents. Xen. Mem. i. 2. 49. Cf, Clouds , 1322 seq.

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mentary on the beginning of the Apology. And it establishes a definite and important historical fact namely, that as early as 423 B.C. Socrates' system of cross-examination had made him a marked man.

For sixteen years after the battle of Amphipolis we hear nothing of Socrates. The next events in his life, of which there is a specific record, are those narrated by himself in the twentieth chapter of the Apology. They illustrate, as he meant them to illustrate, his invincible moral courage. They show, as he intended that they should, that there was no power on earth, whether it were an angry popular assembly, or a murdering oligarchy, which could force him to do wrong. In 406 B.C. the Athenian fleet defeated the Lacedaemonians at the battle of Arginusae, so called from some small islands off the south-east point of Lesbos. After the battle the Athenian commanders omitted to recover the bodies of their dead, and to save the living from off their disabled triremes. The Athenians at home, on hearing of this, were furious. The due performance of funeral rites was a very sacred duty with the Greeks ; 1 and many citizens mourned for friends and relatives who had been left to drown. The commanders were immediately recalled, and an assembly was held in which they were accused of neglect of duty. They defended themselves by saying that they had ordered certain inferior officers

1 Cf. the Antigone of Sophocles.

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(amongst others, their accuser Theramenes) to perform the duty, but that a storm had come on which had rendered the performance impossible. The debate was adjourned, and it was resolved that the Senate should decide in what way the commanders should be tried. The Senate resolved that the Athenian people, having heard the accusation and the defence, should proceed to vote forthwith for the acquittal or condemnation of the eight commanders collectively. The resolution was grossly unjust, and it was illegal. It substituted a popular vote for a fair and formal trial. And it contravened one of the laws of Athens, which provided that at every trial a separate verdict should be found in the case of each person accused.

Socrates was at that time a member of the Senate, the only office that he ever filled. The Senate was composed of five hundred citizens, elected by lot, fifty from each of the ten tribes, and holding office for one year. The members of each tribe held the Prytany, that is, were responsible for the conduct of business, for thirty-five days at a time, and ten out of the fifty were proedri or presidents every seven days in succession. Every bill or motion was examined by the proedri before it was submitted to the Assembly, to see if it were in accordance with law : if it was not, it was quashed : one of the proedri presided over the Senate and the Assembly each day, and for one day only : he was called the Epistates :

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it was his duty to put the question to the vote
In short, he was the Speaker,

These details are necessary for the under-

standing of the passage in the Apology, On the day on which it was proposed to take a collective vote on the acquittal or condemnation of the eight commanders, Socrates was Epistates. The proposal was, as we have seen, illegal : but the people were furious against the accused, and it was a very popular one. Some of the proedri opposed it before it was submitted to the Assembly, on the ground of its illegality ; but they were silenced by threats and subsided. Socrates alone refused to give way. He would not put a question, which he knew to be illegal, to the vote. Threats of suspension and arrest, the clamour of an angry people, the fear of imprisonment or death, could not move him. * I thought it my duty to face the danger out in the cause of law and justice, and not to be an accomplice in your unjust proposal.' 1 But his authority lasted only for a day ; the proceedings were adjourned, a more pliant Epistates succeeded him, and the generals were condemned and executed.

Two years later Socrates again showed by his conduct that he would endure anything rather than do wrong. In 404 B.C. Athens was captured by the Lacedaemonian forces, and the long walls were thrown down. 2 The great

1 Apol. 32 B. C. Cf. Mr. Riddell's note, ad loc. Xen. A fern. i. i. 18.

2 See the description at the beginning of Mr. Browning's Aristophanes Apology.

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Athenian democracy was destroyed, and an oligarchy of thirty set up in its place by Critias (who in former days had been much in Socrates' company) with the help of the Spartan general Lysander. The rule of the Thirty lasted for rather less than a year : in the spring of 403 B.C. the democracy was restored. The reign of Critias and his friends was a Reign of Terror. Political opponents and private enemies were murdered as a matter of course. So were

respectable citizens, and wealthy citizens for the sake of their wealth. All kinds of men were used as assassins, for the oligarchs wished to implicate as many as possible in their crimes. With this object they sent for Socrates and four others to the Council Chamber, a building where formerly the Prytanies, and now they themselves, took their meals and sacrificed, and ordered them to bring one Leon over from Salamis to Athens, to be murdered. The other four feared to disobey an order, disobedience to which probably meant death. They went over to Salamis, and brought Leon back with them. Socrates disregarded the order and the danger, and went home. * I showed,' he says, I not by mere words, but by my actions, that I did not care a straw for death : but that I did care very much indeed about doing wrong.' I He had previously incurred the anger of Critias and the other oligarchs by publicly condemning their political murders in language which caused them to send for him, and forbid him to
1 Apol 32 D.

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converse with young men as he was accustomed to do, and to threaten him with death. 1

There are two events in the life of Socrates to which no date can be assigned. The first of them is his marriage with Xanthippe. By her he had three~"sbhs, ~Lamprocles,~"Sophroniscus, and Menexenus. The two latter are called * children' in the Apology, which was delivered in 399 B.C., and the former /xet-PU.KLOV ?/<\$?/ ; 2 a phrase which implies that he was some fifteen years old. The name Xanthippe has come to mean a shrew. Her son Lamprocles found her bitter tongue and her violent temper intolerable, and his father told him that she meant all her harshness for his good, and read him a lecture on filial duty. ;{ The parting between Socrates and Xanthippe, as described in the Phwdo, is not marked by any great tenderness. His last day was spent, not with his wife, but with his

friends, and she was not present at his death. No trustworthy details of his married life have been preserved ; but there is a consensus of testimony by late authors that it was not happy. Indeed the strong probability is that he had no home life at all.

Again, no date can be assigned to the answer of the Delphic oracle, spoken of in the fifth chapter of the Apology. There it is said that Chaerephon went to Delphi and asked if there was any man who was wiser than Socrates, and

1 Xen. A tern. i. 2. 32, seq. 2 Apol. 34 D.

3 Xen. Afem. ii. 2.

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the priestess answered that there was no man. Socrates offers to prove the truth of his statement by the evidence of Chaerephon's brother, Chaerephon himself being dead. In the next chapter he represents the duty of testing the oracle as the motive of that unceasing examination of men which is described in the Apology, and which gained him so much hatred. He says that he thought himself bound to sift every one whom he met, in order that the truth of the oracle might be thoroughly tested and proved. There is no reason to doubt that the answer of the oracle was actually given ; but, as Zeller observes, Socrates must have been a well-known and marked man before Chaerephon could have asked his question, or the oracle have given such an answer. < It may have done a similar service to Socrates as (sic) his doctor's degree did to Luther, assuring him of his inward call ; but it had just as little to do with making him a philosophical reformer as the doctor's degree had with making Luther a religious reformer.' 1 The use which he makes of the oracle, therefore, must be regarded as * a device of a semi-rhetorical character under cover of which he was enabled to avoid an avowal of the real purpose which had animated him in his tour of examination.' 2 His real

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