

PLATO

**PORTRAIT OF
SOCRATES**

**The Apology,
Crito, and Phaedo**

Introductions and notes by
Richard Livingstone



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PORTRAIT OF SOCRATES

BEING

THE *APOLOGY*, *CRITO*, AND *PHAEDO*
OF PLATO IN AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION
WITH INTRODUCTIONS AND
NOTES

BY

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PREFACE

SOME books and some persons belong to the general inheritance of all educated men. It would be strange to know nothing of Shakespeare or of Napoleon; but it is quite as strange to know nothing of Socrates, for morally and intellectually he is one of the most remarkable figures in history, and he has had a deeper influence on western civilization than any one except Jesus Christ. The object of this book is to enable readers who know no Greek to study him in three works of Plato, each in itself a masterpiece, which give a picture of him that no other description can approach.

No one could read the *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo* without realizing that in them he is meeting a very great man. But he is meeting something more. From time to time, without realizing what it is doing, mankind makes a step forward and finds itself in a new world. I am not thinking of such discoveries as those of fire or the boat or printing or electricity or natural selection, important as they are, but of something more fundamental—a new outlook, a new attitude to life, in which possibilities of endless development are contained, a tiny seed which is the parent of a forest, a stone flung into the waters whose ripple is carried to their remotest shores. At the moment of their making the importance of such discoveries may not be realized and certainly their ultimate effects will be unguessed, but, once the step forward is taken, the world is changed for ever.

Such moments in history are the birth of Christ, and those centuries between 600 and 400 B.C. when

Greece brought forth the Spirit of Reason—the desire to see things as they are, or, as Socrates expressed it in words equally simple and profound, to follow the argument where it leads. The appearance of this spirit is one of the greatest events in history, and the world has never been the same since its epiphany. It seems at times (and the same is true of Christianity) that it has made little difference, that men have not even begun to learn its lesson, and that intolerance, prejudice, and unreason are still unchallenged. But it is not so. The leaven has been hid in the measure of meal and is working towards the leavening of the whole, though its action is slow, and though perhaps to the end there may be lumps of dough that it will never reach. Even to-day the achievements of reason are more impressive than its failures.

Reason was incarnate in Socrates and can be seen in him in its purest and simplest form. That is another ground why some acquaintance with him should be part of any liberal education. And here lies the excuse for this book. It is a tragedy that so many people, because they happen to know no Greek, never come in contact with the wisdom that Greek contains. Yet with the widening of the circle of education, there has grown up an immense number of Greekless readers who would enjoy and profit by reading some of the masterpieces of Greek in translation, but who never think of doing so, or, if they attempt it, find little guidance and help. I believe that an important duty of classical scholars is to provide such readers with *annotated* English editions of these Greek and Latin works which should be the

common property of educated people. It would be easy to draw up a list of them. A man has missed some of the greatest forces in European thought if he knows nothing of Plato's writings—above all the *Republic*, and the dialogues included in this book—the History of Thucydides, and the *Ethics* and *Politics* of Aristotle. It would of course be easy to add to this list, which only contains prose authors.

The present volume contains the *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo* in an English translation.¹ There exist already good translations of Plato, and there would be no justification for this book if a bare translation was sufficient for English readers. But it is not. Those who read Plato in English need notes at least as much as those who read him in Greek, if they are not to lose their way, fail to understand some of what they read, and miss the significance of much. I have therefore given a general introduction with an account of the life of Socrates and some comments on his importance to the modern world, headings to the chapters which show their content and bearing, and notes at the foot of the page which explain allusions, &c., though I have not attempted to save readers from using a Dictionary of Mythology, such as that in the Everyman Library or the *Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* by Sir Paul Harvey.

Writing for the ordinary educated person who wishes not to go through the world in ignorance of some of the greatest things in it, but who knows little or no Greek, I have avoided problems of scholar-

¹ The Trustees of the Jowett Copyright Fund have generously allowed me to use Jowett's translation, which, with a few alterations, forms the text of this book.

ship and concentrated on what makes these dialogues immortal. This also explains another feature of the edition. One of the dialogues in it—the *Phaedo*—contains stretches of argument, which is of much interest to specialists and philosophers, but has little value for a general reader and is not necessary to an appreciation of Socrates. These passages are printed in smaller type so that they can be either read or omitted.¹ This may shock purists; but it is not easy to see why ordinary people, who are interested in the importance of Socrates to the world, need struggle through pages of difficult argument on immortality, which would not convince any modern of its truth.

It is intended shortly to publish an edition of the *Poetics* of Aristotle, which will be uniform with the present volume and will be edited by Dr. W. H. Fyfe, Principal of Aberdeen University. If these volumes succeed sufficiently, the Publishers hope to produce other volumes on the same lines.

The best English editions of the *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo* (in Greek) are by J. Burnet (Clarendon Press): the editions (with French translation) by L. Robin in the Budé Series are excellent.² I am indebted to both, and also to A. E. Taylor's *Plato, the Man and his Work* (Methuen), which is indispensable for students of Plato. Simpler, but first-rate, are Lowes Dickinson, *Plato and his Dialogues* (Allen & Unwin), and A. E. Taylor, *Platonism*

¹ A short passage in the *Apology* has been treated in the same way.

² Archer Hind's edition of the *Phaedo* is alluded to in this volume as A.H., Burnet's as B.

(Harrap). *The Claim of Antiquity* (Oxford University Press) gives a list of translations and books on Plato for the general reader.

Those who know nothing of Greek are recommended to read some brief history of Greece such as those by C. E. Robinson (Methuen), C. A. Fyffe (Macmillan's History Primers), or M. A. Hamilton (Oxford University Press). H. W. Household's *Hellas the Forerunner* (Dent, 2 vols.) and H. R. James's *Our Hellenic Heritage* (Macmillan, 2 vols.) are also excellent introductions.

I cannot conclude this Preface without recording my obligation to the lynx eye of the Clarendon Press reader.

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT the year 470 B.C. there was born in Athens the son of a working sculptor and a midwife: Socrates, of whom the English philosopher John Stuart Mill has said that the world cannot too often remember that he has existed. The man about whom these words were spoken was executed by his countrymen on charges of irreligion and of corrupting the young. Who was he? What was his life? Why was he put to death? Why cannot he be too often remembered?

A modern traveller in Greece sees the mountains, plains, and seas which Socrates knew, the Acropolis and temples where he worshipped, the Pnyx or Place of Assembly which is associated with one famous scene in his life; but to realize Greece as it was in the fifth century B.C. we must imagine a country split up into a number of small independent states, few of them as large as an English county, each with its own government, law-courts, army, and (if on the sea-coast) its own navy, each jealous of its independence and only co-operating with its neighbours under the threat of external danger. Among these small states three were pre-eminent: Corinth, famous for its commerce; Sparta, the ancient Prussia but much more Prussian, a rigid military state ruled by a small oligarchical caste, where all interests were excluded except those that bred healthy human beings and good soldiers; Athens, with an area of about 700 square miles and a population in the time of Socrates of some 350,000, of whom perhaps 40,000 were adult male citizens, the first democracy in history,

governing an empire, trading all over the Mediterranean, and producing at the same time masterpieces of art, poetry, and thought. Socrates lived in the greatest and most exciting period of his country's history, when Athens developed from a mere city-state to be the head of an empire, and from a moderate to an unrestricted democracy, which proved unequal to its task.

In the political drama of that century there are three Acts. The first, concluded before the birth of Socrates but still vivid in men's minds, was the Persian attempt to make Greece a province of an Oriental monarchy, which the Greek states, or the majority of them, had successfully united to repel. The second Act was the rise of Athens to the moral and intellectual leadership of Greece, the formation of an Athenian Empire, and the creation of a body of poetry, architecture, and sculpture unsurpassed before or after in human history. The third Act was a coalition of rival Greek states which were jealous of Athenian power, and the so-called Peloponnesian War beginning in 431 and ending in 404 with the overthrow of Athens; Sparta, Corinth, Thebes, and the rest uniting to destroy a neighbour whose domination they feared. Such was the external history of Athens in the fifth century—a great victory, a great political and spiritual expansion, a long war, and a disastrous defeat. Home politics were not less momentous and exciting. In his lifetime Socrates saw a democracy develop with the motto: 'Our constitution is named a democracy because it is in the hands not of the few but of the many. But our laws secure equal justice for all in their private disputes, and our

public opinion welcomes and honours talent in every branch of achievement, on grounds of excellence alone.'¹ But the military disasters of the Peloponnesian War led to constitutional change, and within the ten years between 413 and 404 there followed in quick succession a moderate oligarchy, a limited democracy (the best government, Aristotle thought, which Athens ever enjoyed), again an unrestricted democracy, and finally at the end of the war the rule of the 'Thirty Tyrants',² eight months of ruthless despotism, confiscations, and lawless executions of the Soviet type. Then gradually a democracy re-established itself which lasted for nearly eighty years. Under this régime and by one of its leaders Socrates was prosecuted and put to death. Such, telescoped into a few phrases, was the history of Athens in his lifetime; but it will mean nothing to us unless we realize in imagination something of the ardours, agonies, and intense stresses which these brief years comprised. Our era is one of unexampled rapidity of change: but even the last seventy years have not been more crowded and swift in revolution than the age of Socrates.

The revolution and unrest were not in politics alone. It was an epoch of intellectual confusion, when orthodox religion and traditional morals, which at its opening were less questioned than in England a hundred years ago, were before its close shaken by destructive criticism. How modern, how revolu-

¹ Thucydides ii. 37.

² 'Tyrant' is a misleading translation of the Greek word *τύραννος* which originally simply meant absolute monarch (it is used both of Zeus and of ordinary kings). Even later it rarely, if ever, bears as sinister a sense as the English word. 'Dictator' is a nearer equivalent.

tionary the critics were, can be seen if we compare the crude polytheism of Homer and Hesiod or even of Pindar (b. 522 B.C.) with such phrases as 'About the gods I cannot know that they exist or that they do not exist or what is their nature'; 'Man is the measure of all things' (Protagoras, d. 411); 'Nothing is certain except that birth leads to death and that life cannot escape ruin' (Critias, d. 403); 'Did justice ever deter any one from taking by force whatever he could? Men who indulge the natural ambition of empire deserve credit if they are in any degree more careful of justice than their position demands' (Thucydides). The only analogy in history to the intellectual chaos of the fifth century B.C. is the intellectual chaos of our own. Those years saw what we have seen, a radical revision of accepted views on religion, conduct, and politics, and in Athens as with us the disturbing agent was a rationalism which began by creating natural science and, having supplanted a theological account of the universe by a physical explanation, turned to religion and morals and there, too, criticized current beliefs. In these latter fields the new views were spread by men who often appear in Plato's dialogues and with whom the ordinary Athenian classed Socrates—the so-called sophists. The name means 'wise men' and was given to contemporary thinkers (the H. G. Wells, Julian Huxleys, Gerald Heard, &c., of the day; among them were some great men), who, having neither printed book nor wireless to expound their views, travelled from city to city, lecturing, talking, collecting pupils. Plato disliked them because he thought their methods superficial,¹

¹ 'Most of our literary men belong to the class and certainly our

and the advanced views which many of them held made them unpopular with the conservative and orthodox, but they were successful and influential. A democracy will always demand higher education, if for no other reason, because without it political success is impossible. There was no organized higher education in fifth-century Athens, and men flocked to the sophists, who offered to teach the art of politics. Now politics (above all in a Greek state) are almost coextensive with human life, and therefore the sophist discussed every kind of moral and political problem. The result was great intellectual stimulus. But the sophists were unable to lay the spirits which they called up, and it is true of them, as perhaps of their modern counterparts, that 'though they stimulated intellectual hunger in wide circles, in the end they only contributed to the general inner insecurity and unrest of the age'.¹

Till its close the life of Socrates was ordinary enough. There is no trace of his following his father's trade—small private means and willingness to be very poor² enabled him to lead a thinker's life.

popularisers of science and of ethical and political ideas. On the other hand our specialists in science have towards the popularisers the same kind of attitude that Socrates had towards the Greek sophists.' Lowes Dickinson, *Plato and his Dialogues*, p. 35.

¹ Jaeger, *Humanistische Reden u. Vorträge*, p. 157.

² Speaking to a friend he said: 'If I could find a good purchaser, I think I could get for all my property including my house quite easily five minae' (about £20: for an equivalent modern money value, multiply 6 times). Xen. *Oecon.* ii. 3. A comic poet wrote: 'I hate Socrates who has thought everything out but ignored the problem how to provide himself with food' (Eupolis, fr. 372). In earlier life he was better off, but the war impoverished him.

He married in late life—at the time of his death his eldest son was a youth and the third an infant in arms. His wife Xanthippe, who was possibly of better family than his own, has become a byword for shrewishness, but there is nothing in these dialogues to suggest that she was anything worse than a woman with little control over her emotions and no power of entering into her husband's mind. This explains, perhaps, why his children were very ordinary, and why it has been said that he had no home life—the cause possibly in him, as in other Greek writers, of something wanting in a character otherwise so rich. We have no details of Socrates' early life. At the age of 47 he was sufficiently well known to be the central figure in an extant comedy of Aristophanes called *The Clouds*, where he is caricatured as a worshipper of the Clouds, the Air, and other strange deities appropriate to a scientist, and as the master of a Thinking-shop where his pupils study problems of Physics, Biology, and other sciences, and learn the art of making the worse argument appear the better. But we have vivid glimpses of him in situations unconnected with philosophy—at a siege, in a routed army, at a dinner-party, and twice in politics, taking with courage and calmness the unpopular side, and disregarding in the first case the angry demands of the democratic Assembly, and in the second the order of the all-powerful 'Thirty Tyrants'.

But though such instances show that he could play a part in public with decision and effect, Socrates avoided politics so far as this was possible in a state that exacted political and military service from all its members, and his interests and life were those of a

thinker. His early studies had been in natural science—physics, astronomy, geography—but for reasons given in the *Phaedo* he deserted these for human problems, of the right life for man and how best to live it, and directed his thought to the most practical and pressing of all questions, that of human conduct; on the study of this he spent his time and his amazing energy. Yet he is not our idea of an intellectual. Some of his contemporaries had libraries—that of Euripides was famous—his greatest successors, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, the Stoics, had schools where they and other scholars studied philosophy or science. Socrates had neither library nor school, and the place to find him was in the market or a gymnasium or a friend's house—the greatest of the Platonic Dialogues opens as he is walking back from a festival at the port of Athens—where he might be found talking sometimes to contemporary philosophers, but quite as probably to a politician, a business man, or an artisan. In this country he would have been thoroughly at home in a country public house or in Hyde Park—if he could have persuaded the orators to descend from their soap-boxes and answer questions. He was in continual touch with the ordinary man and the interests of the ordinary man; that distinguishes him from many great thinkers (including his pupil, Plato). He had, indeed, an intimate circle of ‘companions’ or ‘disciples’, men of all ages and from all parts of the Greek world—we meet some of them in the *Phaedo* and can form from that dialogue an idea of their discussions. But we find all sorts of people in his company, as was easy in that small city where men of every type met each

other in a way impossible in our large and crowded capitals. It is difficult to appreciate the atmosphere of the city-state, but unless we do so we shall not understand the life of Socrates. Every one in Athens knew every one else; every one knew what was going on, for not only did political, social, and literary news spread much more quickly than in a big country, but it was much more interesting, since every one was acquainted with the people concerned. Life had a directness, a personal interest, and went with a vigour and intensity unknown in the somewhat torpid circulation of our huge communities—England or France or America, or even London or Paris or New York—which are like vast animals, weighty and powerful, but slow to move. Inhabitants of Dublin or Belfast live in somewhat similar conditions and know at first hand what a city-state is.

The smallness of Athens and the open-air life made easy these endless discussions which Socrates enjoyed. Nor was it mere enjoyment. For him (and here we can learn from him) discussion was the way to knowledge. It is an unfamiliar road to us who pursue it through books and lectures, both of which Socrates held in low esteem. He wrote nothing himself, he mistrusted books because they can neither ask nor answer questions and are apt to be swallowed whole, and he said of their readers that they hear much and learn nothing, appear full of knowledge, but for the most part are without it, and have the show of wisdom without its reality.¹ He disliked lectures equally and for the same reason, and said of orators: 'If any one asks them a question, they are as

¹ *Phaedrus* 275.

incapable as a book of answering it or themselves putting a question. If any of their statements are challenged they behave like a brass pot which gives out a continuous ringing sound, if you strike it, till some one puts his hand on it; so the orators, at the least query, go off into a long-drawn speech.¹ The true approach to knowledge was not through books or lectures, but through conversation, discussion, question and answer, two or more persons beating a subject up and down, till the chaff is winnowed from the wheat,

And what hath mass and matter, by itself
Lies rich in virtue and unmingled.

Hence these endless conversations in the market-place and elsewhere, by which opinions were tested, fallacies detected, and the truth revealed. In part his method resulted from his view of knowledge. To Socrates it was not an article handed out by those who possessed it to those who do not, but something which men have inside them already. Only, few of them are able unaided to bring it to birth; they need, as he put it, a midwife to help them, the instruments used are question and answer, and his own function was to 'attend the souls of men when they are in labour' and help them to bring forth something which is not 'a phantom or a lie but genuine and true'.² It is a surprising doctrine, and somewhat dangerous, for it underestimates the necessity for brute knowledge of facts—doubtless because that age did not possess our accumulations of them. To do it justice, we must remember both that it is a paradox and that

¹ *Protagoras* 329.

² *Theaetetus* 150.