

SOCRATES

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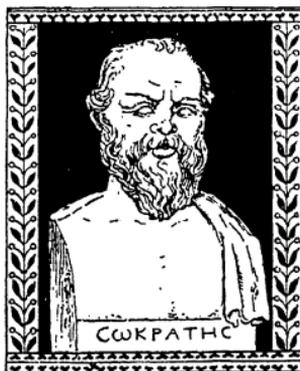
AND ATHENIAN SOCIETY IN HIS DAY

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

BY

A. D. GODLEY, M.A.

Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford



LONDON
SEELEY AND CO. LIMITED
ESSEX STREET, STRAND

1896

P R E F A C E

THIS work is not intended for classical scholars or professed Platonists; but rather for the large and increasing class of students who do not wish to be debarred altogether from an acquaintance with Greek literature by their ignorance of the Greek language. For the benefit of such readers I have endeavoured, with the help of extracts selected mostly from Plato, to draw a picture of Socrates' relation to his immediate *entourage* and to Athenian society in general. This being the object in view, the passages chosen—except indeed the myths, which whether strictly “Socratic” or not, are sometimes the most important part of a Socratic dialogue—are generally such as bear comparatively little reference to the speculative and dogmatic sides of Socrates' teaching, while on the other hand they tend to throw light on his habits and character, and the way in which he was regarded by his contemporaries. But it is especially difficult in this case to separate the philosopher from the man.

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CHAPTER I

ATHENS BEFORE AND AFTER THE PERSIAN WARS

THE all-important era in the history of Athens was the Persian War, and the victories of Marathon and Salamis; before the opening of the fifth century B.C. neither town nor people was in any way markedly differentiated from the rest of the little self-centred communities of Greece. Perhaps there are here and there indications of a quicker and brighter intelligence, a more restless spirit of enterprise. Herodotus cites Athenians as being distinguished for their "social gift" and conversational powers; and the fame of Solon, and later of Cleisthenes, is pre-eminent among early Greek legislators. They enjoyed, too, the nearly unique distinction in history of being, as Athenian speakers