LIFE, TEACHINGS, AND DEATH OF SOCRATES: FROM GROTE'S HISTORY OF GREECE

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Life, Teachings, and Death of Socrates: From Grote's History of Greece by O. W. Wight

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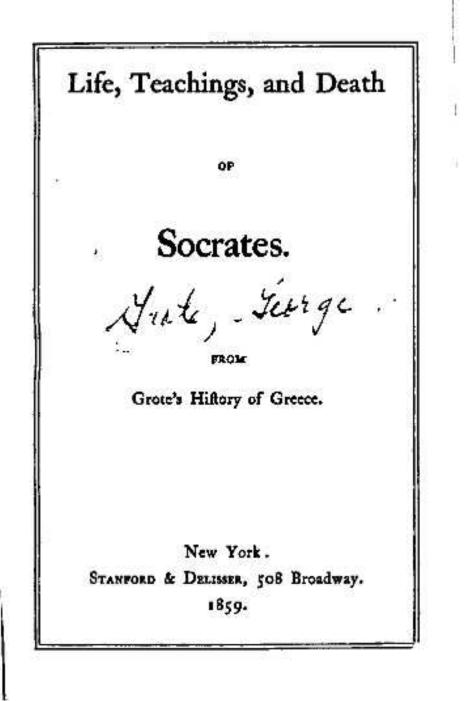
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O. W. WIGHT

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PREFACE.

The reader of a pleasing or instructive book always desires to know something of its author. To satisfy such a legitimate curiosity, we will give a brief biographical notice of Mr. Grote, from whose great History of Greece this Life of Socrates has been taken.

George Grote was born in 1794, at Clay-Hill, near Beckenham, in the county of Kent. His grandfather, descended from German ancestors, founded, in partnership with Mr. George Prescott, the London banking establishment of Prescott, Grote, & Co. Mr. Grote was educated at the Charter House School, London, and in 1809 commenced his course of instruction as a banker by being (iii)

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employed as a clerk in his father's house of business. All his leisure time, however, not only in the evening, but in the hours of early morning, was assiduously devoted to literature, and to the study of economic science with Mr. Mill and other gentlemen of the liberal class of politicians, with whom he had formed an acquaintance. In 1821, he published anonymously a pamphlet on "Parliamentary Reform," in reply to an article by Sir James Mackintosh in the Edinburgh Review; and he afterwards wrote a small work on the "Essentials of Parliamentary Reform." He also wrote some articles in the Westminster Review. He began to collect materials for his great work, the History of Greece, in 1823, but the political excitement of the years 1880 and 1831 drew him into public life, and for nine or ten years his literary labors were greatly interrupted. In 1832, he was elected a member of Parliament for the city of London, and was reelected till 1841, when he resigned his seat

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in order to devote his time to the completion of his historical work.

On the 25th of April, 1833, Mr. Grote made a motion in the House of Commons, that "it is expedient that in future elections of members to serve in Parliaments, the votes be taken in the way of ballot." The motion was negatived by 211 to 106. He took the lead in support of the principle of the ballot, and defended it by very powerful reasoning on a motion which he made in the House of Commons, every session, as long as he continued to be a member. His motion, made on the 18th of June, 1839, was negatived by 333 to 216. Mr. Grote's political principles were very decidedly liberal, and when he spoke, which he did occasionally at considerable length, he was always listened to with the greatest attention.

Mr. Grote's History of Greece commences with the earliest period of heroic legends. Volumes I. and II. were published early in 1846. Volume XII. (with portrait, maps,

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and index), published in 1856, completes the work, and terminates with the death of Alexander the Great, B.C. 323, which, in Mr. Grote's view, is the close of Grecian history properly so termed. For extent of research, critical skill, novelty and independence of thought, comprehensiveness of view, and soundness of judgment, it is one of the most important works in English historical literature.

This biographical sketch, which we have taken literally from the English Cyclopædia, shows us that Mr. Grote has approached the history of Greece in a truly Democratic spirit, which has enabled him to appreciate the political institutions of that wonderful and liberty-loving people. The chapter on Socrates is one of the ablest portions of the work. No words of ours are needed to recommend the teachings and heroic moral example of the sage who has done more than any other uninspired man towards civilizing the world.

O. W. WIGHT.

Brooklyn, 1858.

SOCRATES.

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The life of Socrates comprises seventy years, from 469 to 399 B. C. His father, Sophroniscus, being a sculptor, the son began by following the same profession, in which he attained sufficient proficiency to have executed various works; especially a draped group of the Charites, or Graces, preserved in the Acropolis, and shown as his work down to the time of Pausanias. His mother, Phænarete, was a midwife; and he had a brother, by the mother's side, named Patrocles. Respecting his wife Xanthippe, and his three sons, all that has passed into

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history is the violent temper of the former, and the patience of her husband in enduring it. The position and family of Socrates, without being absolutely poor, were humble and unimportant; but he was of genuine Attic breed, belonging to the ancient gens Dædalidæ, which took its name from Dædalus, the mythical artist, as progenitor.

The personal qualities of Socrates, on the other hand, were marked and distinguishing, not less in body than in mind. His physical constitution was healthy, robust, and enduring, to an extraordinary degree. He was not merely strong and active as a hoplite on military service, but capable of bearing fatigue or hardship, and indifferent to heat or cold, in a measure which astonished all his companions. He went barefoot in all seasons of the

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