

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF SOCRATES

Among the oligarchies set up or supported by Sparta was a cruel and bloodthirsty group in Athens, known as 'The Thirty', led by one Critias, who had been an associate of Socrates. They ruled in terror for a few months, but oligarchy could not long survive in Attica. The democracy was restored, and with a courage and a moderation which do something to atone for the folly and the occasional violence which the democracy displayed during the war. It is true that the restored democracy was persuaded, in 399 B.C., to put Socrates to death, but this was far from being an act of brutal stupidity. Let the reader remember what had been seen endured by the jury who tried this case — their city defeated, starved and dismantled by the Spartans, the democracy overthrown, and the people harried by a savage tyranny. Let him then reflect that the man who had done Athens most harm and

had rendered the most outstanding services to Sparta was the Athenian aristocrat Alcibiades, and that this Alcibiades had been a constant associate of Socrates — and that the terrible Critias had been another. Let him reflect too that although Socrates had been a most conspicuously loyal citizen, he had been also an outspoken critic of the democratic principle. It is no matter for surprise if many simple Athenians thought that the treachery of Alcibiades and the oligarchic fury of Critias and his crew were the direct result of Socrates' teaching, and if many others, not unreasonably attributing the woes of the city to the upsetting of traditional standards of behaviour and morality, fastened some of the responsibility for this upon the continuous and public questioning of all things by Socrates. In such circumstances, would Socrates be acquitted today by a Gallup poll, especially after making

so uncompromising a defence? We may doubt if the figures would be more favourable to him — a majority of 60 out of 501. That the death penalty followed was of his own choosing; he deliberately refused to offer to go into exile, and, as deliberately, he refused to be smuggled out of prison. Nothing can be more sublime

than the bearing of Socrates during and after his trial, and this sublimity must not be sentimentalized by the representing of Socrates as the victim of an ignorant mob. His death was almost a Hegelian tragedy, a conflict in which both sides were right. — *By H. D. F. Kitto from The Greeks.*

ENGLISH

Nobody ever imagined that the serious-minded and somber-faced editor of dictionaries would flirt, least of all his wife. But one day she found him kissing the maid — and exclaimed:

"Why, John, I'm surprised!"

He retorted:

"Not you, my dear — I am *surprised*; you are *astounded*."