

EULOGY FOR A GREAT PHILOSOPHER

He thwarted Thirty Tyrants;
He fought in Athens' wars;
He braved Xanthippe's shrewish tongue
And knocked a Wisdom's doors.
Midwifery of truth, his art,
Was all the passion of his heart.

His ears heard whispered voices,
Which told him of his task
To lead the search of Good and Truth
By questions he would ask.
He thought, in rags with feet unshod,
This work was issued him by God.

So, he set forth in questions
That all could understand,
A way to seek the heart of Light,
With common things in hand,
Deducing what makes up the whole
In virtue, beauty, love, the soul. . . .

He loved his city, Athens,
But of democracy
He thought its weakest point was found
In choosing regency:
He saw how unwise men could gain
Positions they could not maintain.

His wisdom gathered students,
And yet his questions brought
Attacks on him from many men:
He showed their lack of thought.
So, led by Anytus, they claimed
Both State and gods his words defamed.

Before Assembly's presence
He made Meletus falter:
Impiety? . . . a lie, for he
Respected every altar.
And, as for treason, if you please,
This man had less than Pericles.

Although he turned their speeches
To aid his own defense,
They questioned him on his belief—
In this they found offense:
He held more dear than State or creed
The mission he was called to lead.

His mina not accepted,
He would not beg exile;
For he loved Athens over death,
His sentence from the trial.
Nor, when escape was offered him
By Crito, did he change his whim.

Awaiting death, he lectured
His pupils as before.
A weeping jailer brought his cup;
He drank and taught some more
Until the hemlock made him lie
Upon a bed, there soon to die.

And then at last, on brink of Sleep,
With all friends standing by,
His thanks for health that he'd enjoyed
His last words did imply—
“To Aesculapius I owe
A cock; please, pay the debt, Crito.”

— *David L. Hatton, 1968*