

The Republic of Plato, Translated Into English: With an Analysis, and Notes (Classic Reprint)

John Llewelyn Davies

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Excerpt from The Republic of Plato, Translated Into English: With an Analysis, and Notes

The Dialogue commonly called the Republic is the acknowledged masterpiece of the large collection of similar compositions which have come down to us as the works

of Plato. These works have made the name of Plato one of the most familiar names in history. But we know little about Plato himself; astonishingly little, compared with what we might have expected to know. When we consider that he lived in a peculiarly historical period, concerning the events and personages of which we have an unusual amount of information; that he had an illustrious reputation during his lifetime, which was prolonged to an advanced old age; and that his writings were very numerous, and have reached us in so perfect a condition as to shew that their text was reverently watched over from the first: - it cannot but seem strange that the record of his life is so meagre, and that the mutual relations of his writings are involved in so much obscurity. In this absence of materials for a biography we may doubtless find one token of the fastidious reserve, the suppression of his own personality, which is eminently characteristic of Plato.

According to the generally received opinion, the facts which may be considered as certain in the life of Plato suffice for little more than an outline, and even this cannot be quite firmly drawn. His dialogues, - although the scene of them is laid in his own time, and the interlocutors, by a singular liberty, are often well known and living persons, including his own brothers, - hardly contribute a single incident or fact to a biographical sketch.

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