

# Socrates, the Martyr

Phillip Nicholas

READING about Luther's throwing the inkpot at Satan, one automatically associates the action with the dynamic spirit of this civilization. To be aware of such associations is natural and not unjustified in fact. Often, however, the accepted or traditional attitude toward an act prevents the natural intellectual relating of it to the spirit of an era or to a common attitude, although it should be recognized that the significance of any occurrence is related to the era in which it appears. A limiting attitude about the death of Socrates has served to isolate the event entirely from the period to which it belongs and, in fact, has separated the tragedy from the reality of any era.

The sacrifice of Socrates was born of the spirit of the Orphic mysteries; there is as much of the spirit of purification, "catharization," as there is of unwarranted suffering in the legend which grew around his execution. The blind zeal of the Athenian crowd was not unlike that of the Thracian women who in their orgiastic rage slaughtered the unhappy Orpheus only to mourn his demise immediately thereafter. In this sense Socrates was a sacrifice to the multitude, which was soon to grieve his death and soon to regard him as one of the chief ornaments of Athenian greatness. Socrates was quite aware of this fickle, demanding element in the people when he spoke to Crito of the multitude "who would be as ready to restore people to life, if they were able, as they are to put them to death."

If such an analysis of a sacrifice-idea continues, the existence of a certain awareness of necessity for sacrifice and its accompanying mass "purification" becomes apparent. This awareness situates the Athenians considerably closer to the inner significance of the Crucifixion and the martyrdom of the early Christians than the modern Christian, who is the historical beneficiary of these acts, finds himself. Any feeling of imminent or necessary martyrdom has been lost in the dynamism of Western culture. Since the heir of the West feels eternally motivated to resist, the feeling of a possibility of any victory through succumbing has been limited to a few generally ignored groups such as the Friends.

In this manner the function of the martyr has become quite concealed to the Westerner, who would permanently deny the martyr-idea from the orbit of his enlightened existence. In spite of the fact that elements of Christian dogma emphasize the importance and nature of this inner demand for purification sacrifice, the sophistication of the era turns its back to such a thought and regards any incident related thereto as entirely isolated. However, if the position of martyrdom in the Western world has changed, martyrdom has not disappeared into the ignorant, unlettered past; rather, the technical effectiveness of this civilization has converted the usage into the familiar, efficient blood purge characteristic of the Spanish inquisition, Tudor reform, and National Socialist Germany. Although the essence or intellectual viewpoint of culture often becomes altered, the same crowd gathers in the market-place.

## America

Eugenie Miletitsch\*

IT IS a friendly day in October, 1951, in Bremerhaven, Germany. A short, piercing whistle of the ship vibrates through the air and mixes with the rumble of the machines. The passengers stay on the deck, waiting for the great moment when the United States Navy Ship *General McRae* weighs her anchor to set sail for New York.

There is a deep silence among the people; everybody tries to catch with his eyes enough of the receding landscape to shut this picture in his heart as a souvenir of the Old World. Aside from the group is Mrs. Marie Tauber, who like all the others had lost her home during the war and is now to be admitted to the United States as a displaced person under the Alien Act. She is small and grey-haired; one would say that she has already passed sixty. Around her she hears many strange languages, and she has not made any new friends yet. Suddenly she turns around; she hears the familiar sounds of her mother tongue spoken by two girls, and she smiles happily.

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