

ΑΡΙΣΤΟΦΑΝΗ

THE ELEVEN

COMEDIES,

VOLUME 2

Аристофан Аристофан

The Eleven Comedies, Volume 2

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Аристофан А.

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Aristophanes

The Eleven Comedies, Volume 2

THE WASPS

INTRODUCTION

"This Comedy, which was produced by its Author the year after the performance of 'The Clouds,' may be taken as in some sort a companion picture to that piece. Here the satire is directed against the passion of the Athenians for the excitement of the law-courts, as in the former its object was the new philosophy. And as the younger generation—the modern school of thought—were there the subjects of the caricature, so here the older citizens, who took their seats in court as jurymen day by day, to the neglect of their private affairs and the encouragement of a litigious disposition, appear in their turn in the mirror which the satirist holds up."

There are only two characters of any importance to the action—Philocleon ('friend of Cleon') and his son Bdelycleon ('enemy of Cleon'). The plot is soon told. Philocleon is a bigoted devotee of the malady of litigiousness so typical of his countrymen and an enthusiastic attendant at the Courts in his capacity of 'dicast' or jurymen. Bdelycleon endeavours to persuade his father by every means in his power to change this unsatisfactory manner of life for something nobler and more profitable; but all in vain. As a last resource he keeps his father a prisoner indoors, so that he cannot attend the tribunals.

The old man tries to escape, and these attempts are conceived in the wildest vein of extravaganza. He endeavours to get out by the chimney, pretending he is "only the smoke"; and all hands rush to clap a cover on the chimney-top, and a big stone on that. He slips through a hole in the tiles, and sits on the roof, pretending to be "only a sparrow"; and they have to set a net to catch him. Then the Chorus of Wasps, representing Philocleon's fellow 'dicasts,' appear on the scene to rescue him. A battle royal takes place on the stage; the Wasps, with their formidable stings, trying to storm the house, while the son and his retainers defend their position with desperate courage. Finally the assailants are repulsed, and father and son agree upon a compromise. Bdelycleon promises, on condition that his father gives up attending the public trails, to set up a mock tribunal for him in his own house.

Presently the theft of a Sicilian cheese by the house-dog Labes gives the old fellow an opportunity of exercising his judicial functions. Labes is duly arraigned and witnesses examines. But alas! Philocleon inadvertently casts his vote for the defendant's *acquittal*, the first time in his life "such a thing has ever occurred," and the old man nearly dies of vexation.

At this point follows the 'Parabasis,' or Author's personal address to the audience, after which the concluding portion of the play has little connection with the main theme. This is a fault, according to modern ideas, common to many of these Comedies, but it is especially marked in this particular instance. The final part might almost be a separate play, under the title perhaps of 'The dicast turned gentleman,' and relates various ridiculous mistakes and laughable blunders committed by Philocleon, who, having given up his attendance on the law-courts, has set up for playing a part in polite society.

The drama, as was very often the case, takes its title from the Chorus—a band of old men dressed up as wasps, who acrimonious, stinging, exasperated temper is meant to typify the character fostered among Athenian citizens by excessive addiction to forensic business.

Racine, in the only comedy he attempted, 'Les Plaideurs,' borrows the incident of the mock trial of the house-dog, amplifying and adding further diverting features.

Perhaps 'The Wasps' is the least amusing of all our Author's pieces which have come down to us—at any rate to a modern reader. The theme of its satire, the litigious spirit of the Athenians, is after all purely local and temporary, while the fun often strikes us as thin and forced. Schlegel writes in his 'Dramatic Literature': "The subject is too limited, the folly it ridicules appears a disease of too singular a description, without a sufficient universality of application, and the action is too much drawn out."

* * * * *

THE WASPS

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

PHILOCLEON, a Dicast.
BDELYCLEON, his Son.
SOSIAS, House-servant of Philocleon.
XANTHIAS, House-servant of Philocleon.
BOYS.
A DOG.
A BAKER'S WIFE.
ACCUSER.
CHORUS OF ELDERS, costumed as Wasps.

SCENE: Philocleon's house at Athens

* * * * *

THE WASPS

SOSIAS. Why, Xanthias! what are you doing, wretched man?

XANTHIAS. I am teaching myself how to rest; I have been awake and on watch the whole night.

SOSIAS. So you want to earn trouble for your ribs,¹ eh? Don't you know what sort of an animal we are guarding here?

XANTHIAS. Aye indeed! but I want to put my cares to sleep for a while.

SOSIAS. Beware what you do. I too feel soft sleep spreading over my eyes.

Resist it, for you must be as mad as a Corybant if you fall asleep.²

XANTHIAS. No! 'Tis Bacchus who lulls me off.

SOSIAS. Then you serve the same god as myself. Just now a heavy slumber settled on my eyelids like a hostile Mede; A nodded and, faith! I had a wondrous dream.

XANTHIAS. Indeed! and so had I. A dream such as I never had before. But first tell me yours.

SOSIAS. Methinks I saw an eagle, a gigantic bird, descend upon the market-place; it seized a brazen buckler with its talons and bore it away into the highest heavens; then I saw 'twas Cleonymus had thrown it away.

XANTHIAS. This Cleonymus is a riddle worth propounding among guests. How can one and the same animal have cast away his buckler both on land, in the sky and at sea?³

SOSIAS. Alas! what ill does such a dream portend for me?

XANTHIAS. Rest undisturbed! An it please the gods, no evil will befall you.

¹ Meaning, Bdelycleon will thrash you if you do not keep a good watch on his father.

² The Corybantes, priests of Cybelé, comported themselves like madmen in the celebration of their mysteries and made the air resound with the noise of their drums.

³ Cleonymus had shown himself equally cowardly on all occasions; he is frequently referred to by Aristophanes, both in this and other comedies.

SOSIAS. Nevertheless, 'tis a fatal omen when a man throws away his weapons. But what was your dream? Let me hear.

XANTHIAS. Oh! it is a dream of high import. It has reference to the hull of the State; to nothing less.

SOSIAS. Tell it me quickly; show me its very keel.

XANTHIAS. In my first slumber I thought I saw sheep, wearing cloaks and carrying staves,⁴ met in assembly on the Pnyx; a rapacious whale was haranguing them and screaming like a pig that is being grilled.

SOSIAS. Faugh! faugh!

XANTHIAS. What's the matter?

SOSIAS. Enough, enough, spare me. Your dream stinks vilely of old leather.⁵

XANTHIAS. Then this scoundrelly whale seized a balance and set to weighing ox-fat.⁶

SOSIAS. Alas! 'tis our poor Athenian people, whom this accursed beast wished to cut up and despoil of their fat.

XANTHIAS. Seated on the ground close to it, I saw Theorus,⁷ who had the head of a crow. The Alcibiades said to me in his lisping way, "Do you thee? Theoruth hath a crow'th head."⁸

SOSIAS. Ah! 'twas very well lisp'd indeed!

XANTHIAS. This is might strange; Theorus turning into a crow!

SOSIAS. No, it is glorious.

XANTHIAS. Why?

SOSIAS. Why? He was a man and now he has suddenly become a crow; does it not foretoken that he will take his flight from here and go to the crows?⁹

XANTHIAS. Interpreting dreams so aptly certainly deserves two obols.¹⁰

SOSIAS. Come, I must explain the matter to the spectators. But first a few words of preamble: expect nothing very high-flown from us, nor any jests stolen from Megara;¹¹ we have no slaves, who throw baskets of nuts¹² to the spectators, nor any Heracles to be robbed of his dinner,¹³ nor is Euripides loaded with contumely; and despite the happy chance that gave Cleon his fame¹⁴ we shall not go out of our way to belabour him again. Our little subject is not wanting in sense; it is well within your capacity and at the same time cleverer than many vulgar Comedies.—We have a master of great renown, who is now sleeping up there on the other story. He has bidden us keep guard over his father, whom he has locked in, so that he may not go out. This father has a curious complaint; not one of you could hit upon or guess it, if I did not tell you.—Well then, try! I hear Amyntas, the son of Pronapus, over there, saying, "He is addicted to gambling."

XANTHIAS. He's wrong! He is imputing his own malady to others.

SOSIAS. No, yet love is indeed the principal part of his disease. Ah! here is Sosias telling Dercylus, "He loves drinking."

XANTHIAS. Not at all! The love of wine is the complaint of good men.

⁴ The cloak and the staff were the insignia of the dicasts; the poet describes them as sheep, because they were Cleon's servile tools.

⁵ An allusion to Cleon, who was a tanner.

⁶ In Greek, [Greek: d_emos] ([Greek: d_émós], *fat*; [Greek: d_ēmos], *people*) means both *fat* and *people*.

⁷ A tool of Cleon's; he had been sent on an embassy to Persia (*vide* 'The Acharnians'). The crow is a thief and rapacious, just as Theorus was.

⁸ In his life of Alcibiades, Plutarch mentions this defect in his speech; or it may have been a 'fine gentleman' affectation.

⁹ Among the Greeks, *going to the crows* was equivalent to our *going to the devil*.

¹⁰ No doubt the fee generally given to the street diviners who were wont to interpret dreams.

¹¹ Coarse buffoonery was welcomed at Megara, where, by the by, it is said that Comedy had its birth.

¹² To gain the favour of the audience, the Comic poets often caused fruit and cakes to be thrown to them.

¹³ The gluttony of Heracles was a constant subject of jest with the Comic poets.

¹⁴ The incident of Pylos (see 'The Knights').

SOSIAS. "Well then," says Nicostratus of the Scambonian deme, "he either loves sacrifices or else strangers."

XANTHIAS. Ah! great gods! no, he is not fond of strangers, Nicostratus, for he who says "Philoxenus" means a dirty fellow.¹⁵

SOSIAS. 'Tis mere waste of time, you will not find it out. If you want to know it, keep silence! I will tell you our master's complaint: of all men, it is he who is fondest of the Heliæa.¹⁶ Thus, to be judging is his hobby, and he groans if he is not sitting on the first seat. He does not close an eye at night, and if he dozes off for an instant his mind flies instantly to the clepsydra.¹⁷ He is so accustomed to hold the balloting pebble, that he awakes with his three fingers pinched together¹⁸ as if he were offering incense to the new moon. If he sees scribbled on some doorway, "How charming is Demos,¹⁹ the son of Ppyrilampes!" he will write beneath it, "How charming is Cemos!"²⁰ His cock crowed one evening; said he, "He has had money from the accused to awaken me too late."²¹ As soon as he rises from supper he bawls for his shoes and away he rushes down there before dawn to sleep beforehand, glued fast to the column like an oyster.²² He is a merciless judge, never failing to draw the convicting line²³ and return home with his nails full of wax like a bumble-bee. Fearing he might run short of pebbles²⁴ he keeps enough at home to cover a sea-beach, so that he may have the means of recording his sentence. Such is his madness, and all advice is useless; he only judges the more each day. So we keep him under lock and key, to prevent his going out; for his son is broken-hearted over this mania. At first he tried him with gentleness, wanted to persuade him to wear the cloak no longer,²⁵ to go out no more; unable to convince him, he had him bathed and purified according to the ritual²⁶ without any greater success, and then handed him over to the Corybantes;²⁷ but the old man escaped them, and carrying off the kettle-drum,²⁸ rushed right into the midst of the Heliasts. As Cybelé could do nothing with her rites, his son took him again to Aegina and forcibly made him lie one night in the temple of Asclepius, the God of Healing, but before daylight there he was to be seen at the gate of the tribunal. Since then we let him go out no more, but he escaped us by the drains or by the skylights, so we stuffed up every opening with old rags and made all secure; then he drove short sticks into the wall and sprang from rung to rung like a magpie. Now we have stretched nets all round the court and we keep watch and ward. The old man's name is Philocleon,²⁹ 'tis the best name he could have, and the son is called Bdelycleon,³⁰ for he is a man very fit to cure an insolent fellow of his boasting.

¹⁵ The Greek word for *friend of strangers* is [Greek: philoxenos], which happened also to be the name of one of the vilest debauchees in Athens.

¹⁶ The tribunal of the Heliasts came next in dignity only to the Areopagus. The dicasts, or jurymen, generally numbered 500; at times it would call in the assistance of one or two other tribunals, and the number of judges would then rise to 1000 or even 1500.

¹⁷ A water-clock, used in the courts for limiting the time of the pleaders.

¹⁸ The pebble was held between the thumb and two fingers, in the same way as one would hold a pinch of incense.

¹⁹ A young Athenian of great beauty, also mentioned by Plato in his 'Gorgias.' Lovers were fond of writing the name of the object of their adoration on the walls (see 'The Acharnians').

²⁰ [Greek: K_emos], the Greek term for the funnel-shaped top of the voting urn, into which the judges dropped their voting pebbles.

²¹ Racine has introduced this incident with some modification into his 'Plaideurs.'

²² Although called *Heliasts* ([Greek: H_eliosts], the sun), the judges sat under cover. One of the columns that supported the roof is here referred to.

²³ The jurymen gave his vote for condemnation by tracing a line horizontally across a waxed tablet. This was one method in use; another was by means of pebbles placed in one or other of two voting urns.

²⁴ Used for the purpose of voting. There were two urns, one for each of the two opinions, and each heliast placed a pebble in one of them.

²⁵ The Heliast's badge of office.

²⁶ To prepare him for initiation into the mysteries of the Corybantes.

²⁷ Who pretended to cure madness; they were priests of Cybelé.

²⁸ The sacred instrument of the Corybantes.

²⁹ *Friend of Cleon*, who had raised the daily salary of the Heliasts to three obols.

³⁰ *Enemy of Cleon*.

BDELYCLEON. Xanthias! Sosias! Are you asleep?

XANTHIAS. Oh! oh!

SOSIAS. What is the matter?

XANTHIAS. Why, Bdelycleon is rising.

BDELYCLEON. Will neither of you come here? My father has got into the stove-chamber and is ferreting about like a rat in his hole. Take care he does not escape through the bath drain. You there, put all your weight against the door.

SOSIAS. Aye, aye, master.

BDELYCLEON. By Zeus! what is that noise in the chimney? Hullo! who are you?

PHILOCLEON. I am the smoke going up.

BDELYCLEON. Smoke? smoke of what wood?

PHILOCLEON. Of fig-wood.³¹

BDELYCLEON. Ah! 'this the most acrid of all. But you shall not get out. Where is the chimney cover?³² Come down again. Now, up with another cross-bar. Now look out some fresh dodge. But am I not the most unfortunate of men? Henceforward, I shall only be called the son of the smoky old man. Slave, hold the door stoutly, throw your weight upon it, come, put heart into the work. I will come and help you. Watch both lock and bolt. Take care he does not gnaw through the peg.

PHILOCLEON. What are you doing, you wretches? Let me go out; it is imperative that I go and judge, or Dracontides will be acquitted.

BDELYCLEON. What a dreadful calamity for you!

PHILOCLEON. Once at Delphi, the god, whom I was consulting, foretold, that if an accused man escaped me, I should die of consumption.

BDELYCLEON. Apollo, the Saviour, what a prophecy!

PHILOCLEON. Ah! I beseech you, if you do not want my death, let me go.

BDELYCLEON. No, Philocleon, no never, by Posidon!

PHILOCLEON. Well then, I shall gnaw through the net³³ with my teeth.

BDELYCLEON. But you have no teeth.

PHILOCLEON. Oh! you rascal, how can I kill you? How? Give me a sword, quick, or a conviction tablet.

BDELYCLEON. Our friend is planning some great crime.

PHILOCLEON. No, by Zeus! but I want to go and sell my ass and its panniers, for 'this the first of the month.³⁴

BDELYCLEON. Could I not sell it just as well?

PHILOCLEON. Not as well as I could.

BDELYCLEON. No, but better. Come, bring it here, bring it here by all means—if you can.

XANTHIAS. What a clever excuse he has found now! What cunning to get you to let him go out!

BDELYCLEON. Yes, but I have not swallowed the hook; I scented the trick. I will no in and fetch the ass, so that the old man may not point his weapons that way again....³⁵ Stupid old ass, are you weeping because you are going to be sold? Come, go a bit quicker. Why, what are you moaning and groaning for? You might be carrying another Odysseus.³⁶

³¹ The smoke of fig-wood is very acrid, like the character of the Heliasts.

³² Used for closing the chimney, when needed.

³³ Which had been stretched all round the courtyard to prevent his escape.

³⁴ Market-day.

³⁵ He enters the courtyard, returning with the ass, under whose belly Philocleon is clinging.

³⁶ In the *Odyssey* (Bk. IX) Homer makes his hero, 'the wily' Odysseus, escape from the Cyclops' cave by clinging on under a ram's belly, which slips past its blinded master without noticing the trick played on him. Odysseus, when asked his name by the Cyclops, replies, *Outis*, Nobody.

XANTHIAS. Why, certainly, so he is! someone has crept beneath his belly.

BDELYCLEON. Who, who? Let us see.

XANTHIAS. 'Tis he.

BDELYCLEON. What does this mean? Who are you? Come, speak!

PHILOCLEON. I am Nobody.

BDELYCLEON. Nobody? Of what country?

PHILOCLEON. Of Ithaca, son of Apodrasippides.³⁷

BDELYCLEON. Ha! Mister Nobody, you will not laugh presently. Pull him out quick! Ah! the wretch, where has he crept to? Does he not resemble a she-ass to the life?

PHILOCLEON. If you do not leave me in peace, I shall commence proceedings.

BDELYCLEON. And what will the suit be about?

PHILOCLEON. The shade of an ass.³⁸

BDELYCLEON. You are a poor man of very little wit, but thoroughly brazen.

PHILOCLEON. A poor man! Ah! by Zeus! you know not now what I am worth; but you will know when you disembowel the old Heliast's money bag.³⁹

BDELYCLEON. Come, get back indoors, both you and your ass.

PHILOCLEON. Oh! my brethren of the tribunal! oh! Cleon! to the rescue!

BDELYCLEON. Go and bawl in there under lock and key. And you there, pile plenty of stones against the door, thrust the bolt home into the staple, and to keep this beam in its place roll that great mortar against it. Quick's the word.

SOSIAS. Oh! my god! whence did this brick fall on me?

XANTHIAS. Perhaps a rat loosened it.

SOSIAS. A rat? 'tis surely our gutter-judge,⁴⁰ who has crept beneath the tiles of the roof.

XANTHIAS. Ah! woe to us! there he is, he has turned into a sparrow; he will be flying off. Where is the net? where? pschit! pschit! get back!

BDELYCLEON. Ah! by Zeus! I would rather have to guard Scioné⁴¹ than such a father.

SOSIAS. And how that we have driven him in thoroughly and he can no longer escape without our knowledge, can we not have a few winks of sleep, no matter how few?

BDELYCLEON. Why, wretch! the other jurymen will be here almost directly to summon my father!

SOSIAS. Why, 'tis scarcely dawn yet!

BDELYCLEON. Ah, they must have risen late to-day. Generally it is the middle of the night when they come to fetch him. They arrive here, carrying lanterns in their hands and singing the charming old verses of Phrynichus' "Sidonian Women";⁴² 'tis their way of calling him.

SOSIAS. Well, if need be, we will chase them off with stones.

BDELYCLEON. What! you dare to speak so? Why, this class of old men, if irritated, becomes as terrible as a swarm of wasps. They carry below their loins the sharpest of stings, with which to sting their foe; they shout and leap and their stings burn like so many sparks.

SOSIAS. Have no fear! If I can find stones to throw into this nest of jurymen-wasps, I shall soon have them cleared off.

³⁷ A name formed out of two Greek words, meaning, *running away on a horse*.

³⁸ The story goes that a traveller who had hired an ass, having placed himself in its shadow to escape the heat of the sun, was sued by the driver, who had pretended that he had let the ass, not but its shadow; hence the Greek proverb, *to quarrel about the shade of an ass*, i.e. about nothing at all.

³⁹ When you inherit from me.

⁴⁰ There is a similar incident in the 'Plaideurs.'

⁴¹ A Macedonian town in the peninsula of Pallené; it had shaken off the Athenian yoke and was not retaken for two years.

⁴² A disciple of Thespis, who even in his infancy devoted himself to the dramatic art. He was the first to introduce female characters on the stage. He flourished about 500 B.C., having won his first prize for Tragedy in 511 B.C., twelve years before Aeschylus.

CHORUS. March on, advance boldly and bravely! Comias, your feet are dragging; once you were as tough as a dog-skin strap and now even Charinades walks better than you. Ha! Strymodorus of Conthylé, you best of mates, where is Euergides and where is Chales of Phyla? Ha, ha, bravo! there you are, the last of the lads with whom we mounted guard together at Byzantium.⁴³ Do you remember how, one night, prowling round, we noiselessly stole the kneading-trough of a baker's-wife; we split it in two and cooked our green-stuff with it.—But let us hasten, for the case of the Laches⁴⁴ comes on to-day, and they all say he has embezzled a pot of money. Hence Cleon, our protector, advised us yesterday to come early and with a three days' stock of fiery rage so as to chastise him for his crimes. Let us hurry, comrades, before it is light; come, let us search every nook with our lanterns to see whether those who wish us ill have not set us some trap.

BOY. Ah! here is mud! Father, take care!

CHORUS. Pick up a blade of straw and trim the lamp of your lantern.

BOY. No, I can trim it quite well with my finger.

CHORUS. Why do you pull out the wick, you little dolt? Oil is scarce, and 'tis not you who suffer when it has to be paid for. (*Strikes him.*)

BOY. If you teach us again with your fists, we shall put out the lamps and go home; then you will have no light and will squatter about in the mud like ducks in the dark.

CHORUS. I know how to punish other offenders bigger than you. But I think I am treading in some mud. Oh! 'tis certain it will rain in torrents for four days at least; look, what thieves are in our lamps; that is always a sign of heavy rain; but the rain and the north wind will be good for the crops that are still standing.... Why, what can have happened to our mate, who lives here? Why does he not come to join our party? There used to be no need to haul him in our wake, for he would march at our head singing the verses of Phrynichus; he was a lover of singing. Should we not, friends, make a halt here and sign to call him out? The charm of my voice will fetch him out, if he hears it.

Why does the old man not show himself before the door? why does he not answer? Has he lost his shoes? has he stubbed his toe in the dark and thus got a swollen ankle? Perhaps he has a tumour in his groin. He was the hardest of us all; he alone *never* allowed himself to be moved. If anyone tried to move him, he would lower his head, saying, "You might just as well try to boil a stone." But I bethink me, an accused man escaped us yesterday through his false pretence that he loved Athens and had been the first to unfold the Samian plot.⁴⁵ Perhaps his acquittal has so distressed Philocleon that he is abed with fever—he is quite capable of such a thing.—Friend, arise, do not thus vex your hear, but forget your wrath. Today we have to judge a man made wealthy by treason, one of those who set Thrace free;⁴⁶ we have to prepare him a funeral urn ... so march on, my boy, get a-going.

BOY. Father, would you give me something if I asked for it?

CHORUS. Assuredly, my child, but tell me what nice thing do you want me to buy you? A set of knuckle-bones, I suppose.

BOY. No, dad, I prefer figs; they are better.

CHORUS. No, by Zeus! even if you were to hang yourself with vexation.

BOY. Well then, I will lead you no father.

CHORUS. With my small pay, I am obliged to buy bread, wood, stew; and now you ask me for figs!

⁴³ Originally subjected to Sparta by Pausanias in 478 B.C., it was retaken by Cimon in 471, or forty-eight years previous to the production of 'The Wasps.' The old Heliasts refer to this latter event.

⁴⁴ An Athenian general, who had been defeated when sent to Sicily with a fleet to the succour of Leontini; no doubt Cleon had charged him with treachery.

⁴⁵ The Samians were in league with the Persians, but a certain Carystion betrayed the plot, and thanks to this the Athenians were able to retake Samos before the island had obtained help from Asia.

⁴⁶ The towns of Thrace, up to that time the faithful allies of Athens, were beginning to throw off her yoke.

BOY. But, father, if the Archon⁴⁷ should not form a court to-day, how are we to buy our dinner? Have you some good hope to offer us or merely "Hellé's sacred waves"?⁴⁸

CHORUS. Alas! alas! I have not a notion how we shall dine.

BOY. Oh! my poor mother! why did you let me see this day?

CHORUS. Oh! my little wallet! you seem like to be a mere useless ornament!

BOY. 'Tis our destiny to groan.

PHILOCLEON.⁴⁹ My friends, I have long been pining away while listening to you from my window, but I absolutely know not what do do. I am detained here, because I have long wanted to go with you to the law court and do all the harm I can. Oh! Zeus! cause the peals of thy thunder to roll, change me quickly into smoke or make me into a Proxenides, a perfect braggart, like the son of Sellus. Oh, King of Heaven! hesitate not to grant me this favour, pity my misfortune or else may thy dazzling lightning instantly reduce me to ashes; then carry me hence, and may thy breath hurl me into some burning pickle⁵⁰ or turn me into one of the stones on which the votes are counted.

CHORUS. Who is it detains you and shuts you in? Speak, for you are talking to friends.

PHILOCLEON. 'Tis my son. But no bawling, he is there in front asleep; lower your voice.

CHORUS. But, poor fellow, what is his aim? what is his object?

PHILOCLEON. My friends, he will not have me judge nor do anyone any ill, but he wants me to stay at home and enjoy myself, and I will not.

CHORUS. This wretch, this Demolochocleon⁵¹ dares to say such odious things, just because you tell the truth about our navy!

PHILOCLEON. He would not have dared, had he not been a conspirator.

CHORUS. Meanwhile, you must devise some new dodge, so that you can come down here without his knowledge.

PHILOCLEON. But what? Try to find some way. For myself, I am ready for anything, so much do I burn to run along the tiers of the tribunal with my voting-pebble in my hand.

CHORUS. There is surely some hole through which you could manage to squeeze from within, and escape dressed in rags, like the crafty Odysseus.⁵²

PHILOCLEON. Everything is sealed fast; not so much as a gnat could get through. Think of some other plan; there is no possible hold of escape.

CHORUS. Do you recall how, when you were with the army at the taking of Naxos,⁵³ you descended so readily from the top of the wall by means of the spits you have stolen?

PHILOCLEON. I remember that well enough, but what connection is there with present circumstances? I was young, clever at thieving, I had all my strength, none watched over me, and I could run off without fear. But to-day men-at-arms are placed at every outlet to watch me, and two of them are lying in wait for me at this very door armed with spits, just as folk lie in wait for a cat that has stolen a piece of meat.

CHORUS. Come, discover some way as quick as possible. Here is the dawn come, my dear little friend.

⁴⁷ Who fulfilled the office of president.

⁴⁸ Meaning, "Will it only remain for us to throw ourselves into the water?" Hellé, taken by a ram across the narrow strait, called the Hellespont after her name, fell into the waves and was drowned.

⁴⁹ He is a prisoner inside, and speaks through the closed doors.

⁵⁰ This boiling, acid pickle reminds him of the fiery, acrid temper of the heliasts.

⁵¹ A name invented for the occasion; it really means, *Cleon who holds the people in his snares*.

⁵² When he entered Troy as a spy.

⁵³ The island of Naxos was taken by Cimon, in consequence of sedition in the town of Naxos, about fifty years before the production of 'The Wasps.'

PHILOCLEON. The best way is to gnaw through the net. Oh! goddess, who watches over the nets,⁵⁴ forgive me for making a hole in this one.

CHORUS. 'Tis acting like a man eager for his safety. Get your jaws to work!

PHILOCLEON. There! 'tis gnawed through! But no shouting! let Bdelycleon notice nothing!

CHORUS. Have no fear, have no fear! if he breathes a syllable, 'twill be to bruise his own knuckles; he will have to fight to defend his own head. We shall teach him not to insult the mysteries of the goddesses.⁵⁵ But fasten a rope to the window, tie it around your body and let yourself down to the ground, with your heart bursting with the fury of Diopithes.⁵⁶

PHILOCLEON. But if these notice it and want to fish me up and drag me back into the house, what will you do? Tell me that.

CHORUS. We shall call up the full strength of our courage to your aid.

That is what we will do.

PHILOCLEON. I trust myself to you and risk the danger. If misfortune overtakes me, take away my body, bathe it with your tears and bury it beneath the bar of the tribunal.

CHORUS. Nothing will happen to you, rest assured. Come friend, have courage and let yourself slide down while you invoke your country's gods.

PHILOCLEON. Oh! mighty Lycus!⁵⁷ noble hero and my neighbour, thou, like myself, takest pleasure in the tears and the groans of the accused. If thou art come to live near the tribunal, 'tis with the express design of hearing them incessantly; thou alone of all the heroes hast wished to remain among those who weep. Have pity on me and save him, who lives close to thee; I swear I will never make water, never, nor relieve my belly with a fart against the railing of thy statue.

BDELYCLEON. Ho there! ho! get up!

SOSIAS. What's the matter?

BDELYCLEON. Methought I heard talking close to me.

SOSIAS. Is the old man at it again, escaping through some loophole?

BDELYCLEON. No, by Zeus! no, but he is letting himself down by a rope.

SOSIAS. Ha, rascal! what are you doing there? You shall not descend.

BDELYCLEON. Mount quick to the other window, strike him with the boughs that hang over the entrance; perchance he will turn back when he feels himself being thrashed.

PHILOCLEON. To the rescue! all you, who are going to have lawsuits this year—Smicythion, Tisiades, Chremon and Pheredipnus. 'Tis now or never, before they force me to return, that you must help.

CHORUS. Why do we delay to let loose that fury, that is so terrible, when our nests are attacked? I feel my angry sting is stiffening, that sharp sting, with which we punish our enemies. Come, children, cast your cloaks to the winds, run, shout, tell Cleon what is happening, that he may march against this foe to our city, who deserves death, since he proposes to prevent the trial of lawsuits.

BDELYCLEON. Friends, listen to the truth, instead of bawling.

CHORUS. By Zeus! we will shout to heaven and never forsake our friend.

Why, this is intolerable, 'tis manifest tyranny. Oh! citizens, oh!

Theorus,⁵⁸ the enemy of the gods! and all you flatterers, who rule us!
come to our aid.

XANTHIAS. By Heracles! they have stings. Do you see them, master?

⁵⁴ One of the titles under which Artemis, the goddess of the chase, was worshipped.

⁵⁵ Demeter and Persephone. This was an accusation frequently brought against people in Athens.

⁵⁶ An orator of great violence of speech and gesture.

⁵⁷ For Philocleon, the titular god was Lycus, the son of Pandion, the King of Athens, because a statue stood erected to him close to the spot where the tribunals sat, and because he recognized no other fatherland but the tribunals.

⁵⁸ A debauchee and an embezzler of public funds, already mentioned a little above.

BDELYCLEON. 'Twas with these weapons that they killed Philippus the son of Gorgias⁵⁹ when he was put on trial.

CHORUS. And you too shall die. Turn yourselves this way, all, with your stings out for attack and throw yourselves upon him in good and serried order, and swelled up with wrath and rage. Let him learn to know the sort of foes he has dared to irritate.

XANTHIAS. The fight will be fast and furious, by great Zeus! I tremble at the sight of their stings.

CHORUS. Let this man go, unless you want to envy the tortoise his hard shell.

PHILOCLEON. Come, my dear companions, wasps with relentless hearts, fly against him, animated with your fury. Sting him in the back, in his eyes and on his fingers.

BDELYCLEON. Midas, Phryx, Masyntias, here! Come and help. Seize this man and hand him over to no one, otherwise you shall starve to death in chains. Fear nothing, I have often heard the crackling of fig-leaves in the fire.⁶⁰

CHORUS. If you won't let him go, I shall bury this sting in your body.

PHILOCLEON. Oh, Cecrops, mighty hero with the tail of a dragon! Seest thou how these barbarians ill-use me—me, who have many a time made them weep a full bushel of tears?

CHORUS. Is not old age filled with cruel ills? What violence these two slaves offer to their old master! they have forgotten all by-gones, the fur-coats and the jackets and the caps he bought for them; in winter he watched that their feet should not get frozen. And only see them now; there is no gentleness in their look nor any recollection of the slippers of other days.

PHILOCLEON. Will you let me go, you accursed animal? Don't you remember the day when I surprised you stealing the grapes; I tied you to an olive-tree and I cut open your bottom with such vigorous lashes that folks thought you had been pedicated. Get away, you are ungrateful. But let go of me, and you too, before my son comes up.

CHORUS. You shall repay us for all this and 'twill not be long first.

Tremble at our ferocious glance; you shall taste our just anger.

BDELYCLEON. Strike! strike, Xanthias! Drive these wasps away from the house.

XANTHIAS. That's just what I am doing; but do you smoke them out thoroughly too.

SOSIAS. You will not go? The plague seize you! Will you not clear off?

Xanthias, strike them with your stick!

XANTHIAS. And you, to smoke them out better, throw Aeschinus, the son of Selartius, on the fire. Ah! we were bound to drive you off in the end.

BDELYCLEON. Eh! by Zeus! you would not have put them to flight so easily if they had fed on the verses of Philocles.

CHORUS. It is clear to all the poor that tyranny has attacked us sorely. Proud emulator of Arynias, you, who only take pleasure in doing ill, see how you are preventing us from obeying the laws of the city; you do not even seek a pretext or any plausible excuse, but claim to rule alone.

BDELYCLEON. Hold! A truce to all blows and brawling! Had we not better confer together and come to some understanding?

CHORUS. Confer with you, the people's foe! with you, a royalist, the accomplice of Brasidas!⁶¹ with you, who wear woollen fringes on your cloak and let your beard grow!

BDELYCLEON. Ah! it were better to separate altogether from my father than to steer my boat daily through such stormy seas!

⁵⁹ Aristophanes speaks of him in 'The Birds' as a traitor and as an alien who usurped the rights of the city.

⁶⁰ A Greek proverb signifying "Much ado about nothing."

⁶¹ A Spartan general, who perished in the same battle as Cleon, before Amphipolis, in 422 B.C.

CHORUS. Oh! you have but reached the parsley and the rue, to use the common saying.⁶² What you are suffering is nothing! but welcome the hour when the advocate shall adduce all these same arguments against you and shall summon your accomplices to give witness.

BDELYCLEON. In the name of the gods! withdraw or we shall fight you the whole day long.

CHORUS. No, not as long as I retain an atom of breath. Ha! your desire is to tyrannize over us!

BDELYCLEON. Everything is now tyranny with us, no matter what is concerned, whether it be large or small. Tyranny! I have not heard the word mentioned once in fifty years, and now it is more common than salt-fish, the word is even current on the market. If you are buying gurnards and don't want anchovies, the huckster next door, who is selling the latter, at once exclaims, "That is a man, whose kitchen savours of tyranny!" If you ask for onions to season your fish, the green-stuff woman winks one eye and asks, "Ha! you ask for onions! are you seeking to tyrannize, or do you think that Athens must pay you your seasonings as a tribute?"

XANTHIAS. Yesterday I went to see a gay girl about noon and suggested she should mount and ride me; she flew into a rage, pretending I wanted to restore the tyranny of Hippias.⁶³

BDELYCLEON. That's the talk that pleases the people! As for myself, I want my father to lead a joyous life like Morychus⁶⁴ instead of going away before dawn to basely calumniate and condemn; and for this I am accused of conspiracy and tyrannical practice!

PHILOCLEON. And quite right too, by Zeus! The most exquisite dishes do not make up to me for the life of which you deprive me. I scorn your red mullet and your eels, and would far rather eat a nice little law suitlet cooked in the pot.

BDELYCLEON. 'Tis because you have got used to seeking your pleasure in it; but if you will agree to keep silence and hear me, I think I could persuade you that you deceive yourself altogether.

PHILOCLEON. *I* deceive myself, when I am judging?

BDELYCLEON. You do not see that you are the laughing-stock of these men, whom you are ready to worship. You are their slave and do not know it.

PHILOCLEON. *I* a slave, I, who lord it over all!

BDELYCLEON. Not at all, you think you are ruling when you are only obeying. Tell me, father, what do you get out of the tribute paid by so many Greek towns?

PHILOCLEON. Much, and I appoint my colleagues jurymen.

BDELYCLEON. And I also. Release him, all of you, and bring me a sword. If my arguments do not prevail I will fall upon this blade. As for you, tell me whether you accept the verdict of the Court.

PHILOCLEON. May I never drink my Heliast's pay in honour of the good Genius, if I do not.

CHORUS. 'Tis now we have to draw upon our arsenal for some fresh weapon; above all do not side with this youth in his opinions. You see how serious the question has become; 'twill be all over with us, which the gods forbend, if he should prevail.

BDELYCLEON. Let someone bring me my tablets with all speed!

CHORUS. Your tablets? Ha, ha! what an importance you would fain assume!

BDELYCLEON. I merely wish to note down my father's points.

PHILOCLEON. But what will you say of it, if he should triumph in the debate?

CHORUS. That old men are no longer good for anything; we shall be perpetually laughed at in the streets, shall be called thalophores,⁶⁵ mere brief-bags. You are to be the champion of all our rights and sovereignty. Come, take courage! Bring into action all the resources of your wit.

⁶² Meaning, the mere beginnings of any matter.

⁶³ This 'figure of love'—woman atop of the man—is known in Greek as [Greek: hippos] (Latin *equus*, 'the horse'); note the play upon words with the name Hippias.

⁶⁴ A tragic poet, who was a great lover of good cheer, it appears.

⁶⁵ Old men, who carried olive branches in the processions of the Panathenaea. Those whose great age or infirmity forbade their being used for any other purpose were thus employed.

PHILOCLEON. At the outset I will prove to you that there exists no king whose might is greater than ours. Is there a pleasure, a blessing comparable with that of a jurymen? Is there a being who lives more in the midst of delights, who is more feared, aged though he be? From the moment I leave my bed, men of power, the most illustrious in the city, await me at the bar of the tribunal; the moment I am seen from the greatest distance, they come forward to offer me a gentle hand,—that has pilfered the public funds; they entreat me, bowing right low and with a piteous voice, "Oh! father," they say, "pity me, I adjure you by the profit *you* were able to make in the public service or in the army, when dealing with the victuals." Why, the man who thus speaks would not know of my existence, had I not let him off on some former occasion.

BDELYCLEON. Let us note this first point, the supplicants.

PHILOCLEON. These entreaties have appeased my wrath, and I enter—firmly resolved to do nothing that I have promised. Nevertheless I listen to the accused. Oh! what tricks to secure acquittal! Ah! there is no form of flattery that is not addressed to the heliast! Some groan over their poverty and they exaggerate the truth in order to make their troubles equal to my own. Others tell us anecdotes or some comic story from Aesop. Others, again, cut jokes; they fancy I shall be appeased if I laugh. If we are not even then won over, why, then they drag forward their young children by the hand, both boys and girls, who prostrate themselves and whine with one accord, and then the father, trembling as if before a god, beseeches me not to condemn him out of pity for them, "If you love the voice of the lamb, have pity on my son's"; and because I am fond of little sows,⁶⁶ I must yield to his daughter's prayers. Then we relax the heat of our wrath a little for him. Is not this great power indeed, which allows even wealth to be disdained?

BDELYCLEON. A second point to note, the disdain of wealth. And now recall to me what are the advantages you enjoy, you, who pretend to rule over Greece?

PHILOCLEON. Being entrusted with the inspection of the young men, we have a right to examine their organs. Is Aeagrus⁶⁷ accused, he is not acquitted before he has recited a passage from 'Niobe'⁶⁸ and he chooses the finest. If a flute-player gains his case, he adjusts his mouth-strap⁶⁹ in return and plays us the final air while we are leaving. A father on his death-bed names some husband for his daughter, who is his sole heir; but we care little for his will or for the shell so solemnly placed over the seal;⁷⁰ we give the young maiden to him who has best known how to secure our favour. Name me another duty that is so important and so irresponsible.

BDELYCLEON. Aye, 'tis a fine privilege, and the only one on which I can congratulate you; but surely to violate the will is to act badly towards the heiress.

PHILOCLEON. And if the Senate and the people have trouble in deciding some important case, it is decreed to send the culprits before the heliasts; then Euathlus⁷¹ and the illustrious Colaconymus,⁷² who cast away his shield, swear not to betray us and to fight for the people. Did ever an orator carry the day with his opinion if he had not first declared that the jury should be dismissed for the day as soon as they had given their first verdict? We are the only ones whom Cleon, the great bawler, does not badger. On the contrary, he protects and caresses us; he keeps off the flies, which is what you have never done for your father. Theorus, who is a man not less illustrious than Euphemius,⁷³ takes the sponge out of the pot and blacks our shoes. See then what good things you deprive and despoil me of. Pray, is this obeying or being a slave, as you pretended to be able to prove?

⁶⁶ An obscene pun. [Greek: Choiros] means both *a sow* and the female organ.

⁶⁷ A celebrated actor.

⁶⁸ There were two tragedies named 'Niobé,' one by Aeschylus and the other by Sophocles, both now lost.

⁶⁹ A double strap, which flute-players applied to their lips and was said to give softness to the tones.

⁷⁰ The shell was fixed over the seal to protect it.

⁷¹ A calumniator and a traitor (see 'The Acharnians').

⁷² Cleonymus, whose name the poet modifies, so as to introduce the idea of a flatterer ([Greek: kolax]).

⁷³ Another flatterer, a creature of Cleon's.

BDELYCLEON. Talk away to your heart's content; you must come to a stop at last and then you shall see that this grand power only resembles one of those things that, wash 'em as you will, remain as foul as ever.

PHILOCLEON. But I am forgetting the most pleasing thing of all. When I return home with my pay, everyone runs to greet me because of my money. First my daughter bathes me, anoints my feet, stoops to kiss me and, while she is calling me "her dearest father," fishes out my triobolus with her tongue;⁷⁴ then my little wife comes to wheedle me and brings a nice light cake; she sits beside me and entertains me in a thousand ways, "Do take this now; do have some more." All this delights me hugely, and I have no need to turn towards you or the steward to know when it shall please him to serve my dinner, all the while cursing and grumbling. But if he does not quickly knead my cake, I have this,⁷⁵ which is my defence, my shield against all ills. If you do not pour me out drink, I have brought this long-eared jar⁷⁶ full of wine. How it brays, when I bend back and bury its neck in my mouth! What terrible and noisy gurglings, and how I laugh at your wine-skins. As to power, am I not equal to the king of the gods? If our assembly is noisy, all say as they pass, "Great gods! the tribunal is rolling out its thunder!" If I let loose the lightning, the richest, aye, the noblest are half dead with fright and shit themselves with terror. You yourself are afraid of me, yea, by Demeter! you are afraid.

BDELYCLEON. May I die if you frighten me.

CHORUS. Never have I heard speech so elegant or so sensible.

PHILOCLEON. Ah! he thought he had only to turn me round his finger; he should, however, have known the vigour of my eloquence.

CHORUS. He has said everything without omission. I felt myself grow taller while I listened to him. Methought myself meting out justice in the Islands of the Blest, so much was I taken with the charm of his words.

BDELYCLEON. How overjoyed they are! What extravagant delight! Ah! ah! you are going to get a thrashing to-day.

CHORUS. Come, plot everything you can to beat him; 'tis not easy to soften me if you do not talk on my side, and if you have nothing but nonsense to spout, 'tis time to buy a good millstone, freshly cut withal, to crush my anger.

BDELYCLEON. The cure of a disease, so inveterate and so widespread in Athens, is a difficult task and of too great importance for the scope of Comedy. Nevertheless, my old father . . .

PHILOCLEON. Cease to call me by that name, for, if you do not prove me a slave and that quickly too, you must die by my hand, even if I must be deprived of my share in the sacred feasts.

BDELYCLEON. Listen to me, dear little father, unruffle that frowning brow and reckon, you can do so without trouble, not with pebbles, but on your fingers, what is the sum-total of the tribute paid by the allied towns; besides this we have the direct imposts, a mass of percentage dues, the fees of the courts of justice, the produce from the mines, the markets, the harbours, the public lands and the confiscations. All these together amount to close on two thousand talents. Take from this sum the annual pay of the dicasts; they number six thousand, and there have never been more in this town; so therefore it is one hundred and fifty talents that come to you.

PHILOCLEON. What! our pay is not even a tithe of the State revenue?

BDELYCLEON. Why no, certainly not.

PHILOCLEON. And where does the rest go then?

BDELYCLEON. To those who say: "I shall never betray the interests of the masses; I shall always fight for the people." And 'tis you, father, who let yourself be caught with their fine talk, who

⁷⁴ Athenian poor, having no purse, would put small coins into mouth for safety. We know that the triobolus was the daily of the judges. Its value was about 4-1/2 d.

⁷⁵ A jar of wine, which he had bought with his pay.

⁷⁶ A jar with two long ears or handles, in this way resembling an ass.

give them all power over yourself. They are the men who extort fifty talents at a time by threat and intimidation from the allies. "Pay tribute to me," they say, "or I shall loose the lightning on your town and destroy it." And you, you are content to gnaw the crumbs of your own might. What do the allies do? They see that the Athenian mob lives on the tribunal in niggard and miserable fashion, and they count you for nothing, for not more than the vote of Connus;⁷⁷ 'tis on those wretches that they lavish everything, dishes of salt fish, wine, tapestries, cheese, honey, sesame-fruit, cushions, flagons, rich clothing, chaplets, necklets, drinking-cups, all that yields pleasure and health. And you, their master, to you as a reward for all your toil both on land and sea, nothing is given, not even a clove of garlic to eat with your little fish.

PHILOCLEON. No, undoubtedly not; I have had to send and buy some from Eucharides. But you told me I was a slave. Prove it then, for I am dying with impatience.

BDELYCLEON. Is it not the worst of all slaveries to see all these wretches and their flatterers, whom they gorge with gold, at the head of affairs? As for you, you are content with the three obols they give you and which you have so painfully earned in the galleys, in battles and sieges. But what I stomach least is that you go to sit on the tribunal by order. Some lewd stripling, the son of Chereas, to wit, enters your house balancing his body, rotten with debauchery, on his straddling legs and charges you to come and judge at daybreak, and precisely to the minute. "He who only presents himself after the opening of the Court," says he, "will not get the triobolus." But he himself, though he arrives late, will nevertheless get his drachma as a public advocate. If an accused man makes him some present, he shares it with a colleague and the pair agree to arrange the matter like two sawyers, one of whom pulls and the other pushes. As for you, you have only eyes for the public pay-clerk, and you see nothing.

PHILOCLEON. Can it be I am treated thus? Oh! what is it you are saying? You stir me to the bottom of my heart! I am all ears! I cannot syllable what I feel.

BDELYCLEON. Consider then; you might be rich, both you and all the others; I know not why you let yourself be fooled by these folk who call themselves the people's friends. A myriad of towns obey you, from the Euxine to Sardis. What do you gain thereby? Nothing but this miserable pay, and even that is like the oil with which the flock of wool is impregnated and is doled to you drop by drop, just enough to keep you from dying of hunger. They want you to be poor, and I will tell you why. 'Tis so that you may know only those who nourish you, and so that, if it pleases them to loose you against one of their foes, you shall leap upon him with fury. If they wished to assure the well-being of the people, nothing would be easier for them. We have now a thousand towns that pay us tribute; let them command each of these to feed twenty Athenians; then twenty thousand of our citizens would be eating nothing but hare, would drink nothing but the purest of milk, and always crowned with garlands, would be enjoying the delights to which the great name of their country and the trophies of Marathon give them the right; whereas to-day you are like the hired labourers who gather the olives; you follow him who pays you.

PHILOCLEON. Alas! my hand is benumbed; I can no longer draw my sword.⁷⁸

What has become of my strength?

BDELYCLEON. When they are afraid, they promise to divide Euboea⁷⁹ among you and to give each fifty bushels of wheat, but what have they given you? Nothing excepting, quite recently, five bushels of barley, and even these you have only obtained with great difficulty, on proving you were not aliens, and then choenix by choenix.⁸⁰ That is why I always kept you shut in; I wanted you to be fed by me and no longer at the beck of these blustering braggarts. Even now I am ready to let you have all you want, provided you no longer let yourself be suckled by the pay-clerk.

⁷⁷ A well-known flute-player.

⁷⁸ We have already seen that when accepting his son's challenge he swore to fall upon his sword if defeated in the debate.

⁷⁹ Pericles had first introduced the custom of sending poor citizens, among whom the land was divided, into the conquered countries. The island of Aegina had been mainly divided in this way among Athenian colonists.

⁸⁰ The choenix was a measure corresponding to our quart.

CHORUS. He was right who said, "Decide nothing till you have heard both sides," for it seems to me, that 'tis you who now gain the complete victory. My wrath is appeased, I throw away my sticks. Come, comrade, our contemporary, let yourself be gained over by his words; come, do not be too obstinate or too perverse. Why have I no relation, no ally to speak to me like this? Do not doubt it, 'tis a god who is now protecting you and loading you with his benefits. Accept them.

BDELYCLEON. I will feed him, I will give him everything that is suitable for an old man, oatmeal gruel, a cloak, soft furs and a maid to rub his loins and play with his tool. But he is silent and utters not a word; 'tis a bad sign.

CHORUS. He has thought the thing over and has recognized his folly; he reproaches himself for not having followed your advice always. But there he is, converted by your words, and has no doubt become wiser to alter his ways in future and to believe in none but you.

PHILOCLEON. Alas! alas!

BDELYCLEON. Now why this lamentation?

PHILOCLEON. A truce to your promises! What I love is down there, 'tis down there I want to be, there, where the herald cries, "Who has not yet voted? Let him rise!" I want to be the last to leave the urn of all. Oh, my soul, my soul! where art thou? come! oh! dark shadows, make way for me!⁸¹ By Heracles, may I reach the Court in time to convict Cleon of theft.

BDELYCLEON. Come, father, in the name of the gods, believe me!

PHILOCLEON. Believe you! Ask me anything, anything, except one.

BDELYCLEON. What is it? Let us hear.

PHILOCLEON. Not to judge any more! Before I consent, I shall have appeared before Pluto.

BDELYCLEON. Very well then, since you find so much pleasure in it, go down there no more, but stay here and deal out justice to your slaves.

PHILOCLEON. But what is there to judge? Are you mad?

BDELYCLEON. Everything as in a tribunal. If a servant opens a door secretly, you inflict upon him a simple fine; 'tis what you have repeatedly done down there. Everything can be arranged to suit you. If it is warm in the morning, you can judge in the sunlight; if it is snowing, then seated at your fire; if it rains, you go indoors; and if you only rise at noon, there will be no Thesmothetes⁸² to exclude you from the precincts.

PHILOCLEON. The notion pleases me.

BDELYCLEON. Moreover, if a pleader is long-winded, you will not be fasting and chafing and seeking vengeance on the accused.

PHILOCLEON. But could I judge as well with my mouth full?

BDELYCLEON. Much better. Is it not said, that the dicasts, when deceived by lying witnesses, have need to ruminate well in order to arrive at the truth?

PHILOCLEON. Well said, but you have not told me yet who will pay salary.

BDELYCLEON. I will.

PHILOCLEON. So much the better; in this way I shall be paid by myself. Because that cursed jester, Lysistratus,⁸³ played me an infamous trick the other day. He received a drachma for the two of us⁸⁴ and went on the fish-market to get it changed and then brought me back three mullet scales. I took them for obols and crammed them into my mouth;⁸⁵ but the smell choked me and I quickly spat them out. So I dragged him before the Court.

BDELYCLEON. And what did he say to that?

⁸¹ A verse borrowed from Euripides' 'Bellerophon.'

⁸² i.e. a legislator. The name given in Athens to the last six of the nine Archons, because it was their special duty to see the laws respected.

⁸³ Mentioned both in 'The Acharnians' and 'The Knights.'

⁸⁴ The drachma was worth six obols, or twice the pay of a heliast.

⁸⁵ We have already seen that the Athenians sometimes kept their small money in their mouth.

PHILOCLEON. Well, he pretended I had the stomach of a cock. "You have soon digested the money," he said with a laugh.

BDELYCLEON. You see, that is yet another advantage.

PHILOCLEON. And no small one either. Come, do as you will.

BDELYCLEON. Wait! I will bring everything here.

PHILOCLEON. You see, the oracles are coming true; I have heard it foretold, that one day the Athenians would dispense justice in their own houses, that each citizen would have himself a little tribunal constructed in his porch similar to the altars of Hecaté,⁸⁶ and that there would be such before every door.

BDELYCLEON. Hold! what do you say? I have brought you everything needful and much more into the bargain. See, here is an *article*, should you want to piss; it shall be hung beside you on a nail.

PHILOCLEON. Good idea! Right useful at my age. You have found the true preventive of bladder troubles.

BDELYCLEON. Here is fire, and near to it are lentils, should you want to take a snack.

PHILOCLEON. 'Tis admirably arranged. For thus, even when feverish, I shall nevertheless receive my pay; and besides, I could eat my lentils without quitting my seat. But why this cock?

BDELYCLEON. So that, should you doze during some pleading, he may awaken you by crowing up there.

PHILOCLEON. I want only for one thing more; all the rest is as good as can be.

BDELYCLEON. What is that?

PHILOCLEON. If only they could bring me an image of the hero Lycus.⁸⁷

BDELYCLEON. Here it is! Why, you might think it was the god himself!

PHILOCLEON. Oh! hero, my master! how repulsive you are to look at! 'Tis an exact portrait of Cleonymus!

SOSIAS. That is why, hero though he be, he has no weapon.

BDELYCLEON. The sooner you take your seat, the sooner I shall call a case.

PHILOCLEON. Call it, for I have been seated ever so long.

BDELYCLEON. Let us see. What case shall we bring up first? Is there a slave who has done something wrong? Ah! you Thracian there, who burnt the stew-pot t'other day.

PHILOCLEON. Hold, hold! Here is a fine state of things! you had almost made me judge without a bar,⁸⁸ and that is the thing of all others most sacred among us.

BDELYCLEON. By Zeus! I had forgotten it, but I will run indoors and bring you one immediately. What is this after all, though, but mere force of habit!

XANTHIAS. Plague take the brute! Can anyone keep such a dog?

BDELYCLEON. Hullo! what's the matter?

XANTHIAS. Why, 'tis Labes,⁸⁹ who has just rushed into the kitchen and has seized a whole Sicilian cheese and gobbled it up.

BDELYCLEON. Good! this will be the first offence I shall make my father try. (*To Xanthias.*) Come along and lay your accusation.

XANTHIAS. No, not I; the other dog vows he will be accuser, if the matter is set down for trial.

BDELYCLEON. Well then, bring them both along.

XANTHIAS. I am coming.

PHILOCLEON. What is this?

⁸⁶ Which were placed in the courts; dogs were sacrificed on them.

⁸⁷ As already stated, the statue of Lycus stood close to the place where the tribunals sat.

⁸⁸ The barrier in the Heliæa, which separated the heliasts from the public.

⁸⁹ The whole of this comic trial of the dog Labes is an allusion to the general Laches, already mentioned, who had failed in Sicily. He was accused of taking bribes of money from the Sicilians.

BDELYCLEON. 'Tis the pig-trough⁹⁰ of the swine dedicated to Hestia.

PHILOCLEON. But it's sacrilege to bring it here.

BDELYCLEON. No, no, by addressing Hestia first,⁹¹ I might, thanks to her, crush an adversary.

PHILOCLEON. Put an end to delay by calling up the case. My verdict is already settled.

BDELYCLEON. Wait! I must yet bring out the tablets⁹² and the scrolls.⁹³

PHILOCLEON. Oh! I am boiling, I am dying with impatience at your delays. I could have traced the sentence in the dust.

BDELYCLEON. There you are.

PHILOCLEON. Then call the case.

BDELYCLEON. I am here.

PHILOCLEON. Firstly, who is this?

BDELYCLEON. Ah! my god! why, this is unbearable! I have forgotten the urns.

PHILOCLEON. Well now! where are you off to?

BDELYCLEON. To look for the urns.

PHILOCLEON. Unnecessary, I shall use these vases.⁹⁴

BDELYCLEON. Very well, then we have all we need, except the clepsydra.

PHILOCLEON. Well then! and this? what is it if not a clepsydra?⁹⁵

BDELYCLEON. True again! 'Tis calling things by their right name! Let fire be brought quickly from the house with myrtle boughs and incense, and let us invoke the gods before opening the sitting.

CHORUS. Offer them libations and your vows and we will thank them that a noble agreement has put an end to your bickerings and strife.

BDELYCLEON. And first let there be a sacred silence.

CHORUS. Oh! god of Delphi! oh! Phoebus Apollo! convert into the greatest blessing for us all what is now happening before this house, and cure us of our error, oh, Paean,⁹⁶ our helper!

BDELYCLEON. Oh! Powerful god, Apollo Aguius,⁹⁷ who watchest at the door of my entrance hall, accept this fresh sacrifice; I offer it that you may deign to soften my father's excessive severity; he is as hard as iron, his heart is like sour wine; do thou pour into it a little honey. Let him become gentle like other men, let him take more interest in the accused than in the accusers, may he allow himself to be softened by entreaties; calm his acrid humour and deprive his irritable mind of all sting.

CHORUS. We unite our vows and chants to those of this new magistrate.⁹⁸ His words have won our favour and we are convinced that he loves the people more than any of the young men of the present day.

BDELYCLEON. If there be any judge near at hand, let him enter; once the proceedings have opened, we shall admit him no more.⁹⁹

PHILOCLEON. Who is the defendant? Ha! what a sentence he will get!

⁹⁰ To serve for a bar.

⁹¹ This was a customary formula, [Greek: aph' Estias archou], "begin from Hestia," first adore Vesta, the god of the family hearth. In similar fashion, the Romans said, *ab Jove principium*.

⁹² For conviction and acquittal.

⁹³ On which the sentence was entered.

⁹⁴ No doubt the stew-pot and the wine-jar.

⁹⁵ The *article* Bdelycleon had brought.—The clepsydra was a kind of water-clock; the other vessel is compared to it, because of the liquid in it.

⁹⁶ A title of Apollo, worshipped as the god of healing.

⁹⁷ A title of Apollo, because of the sacrifices, which the Athenians offered him in the streets, from [Greek: aguia], a street.

⁹⁸ Bdelycleon.

⁹⁹ The formula used by the president before declaring the sitting of the Court opened.

XANTHIAS (*Prosecuting Council*). Listen to the indictment. A dog of Cydathenea doth hereby charge Labes of Aexonia with having devoured a Sicilian cheese by himself without accomplices. Penalty demanded, a collar of fig-tree wood.¹⁰⁰

PHILOCLEON. Nay, a dog's death, if convicted.

BDELYCLEON. This is Labes, the defendant.

PHILOCLEON. Oh! what a wretched brute! how entirely he looks the rogue! He thinks to deceive me by keeping his jaws closed. Where is the plaintiff, the dog of Cydathenea?

DOG. Bow wow! bow wow!

BDELYCLEON. Here he is.

PHILOCLEON. Why, 'tis a second Labes, a great barker and a licker of dishes.

SOSIAS (*Herald*). Silence! Keep your seats! (*To Xanthias.*) And you, up on your feet and accuse him.

PHILOCLEON. Go on, and I will help myself and eat these lentils.

XANTHIAS. Men of the jury, listen to this indictment I have drawn up. He has committed the blackest of crimes, both against me and the seamen.¹⁰¹ He sought refuge in a dark corner to glutton on a big Sicilian cheese, with which he sated his hunger.

PHILOCLEON. Why, the crime is clear; the foul brute this very moment belched forth a horrible odour of cheese right under my nose.

XANTHIAS. And he refused to share with me. And yet can anyone style himself your benefactor, when he does not cast a morsel to your poor dog?

PHILOCLEON. Then he has not shared?

XANTHIAS. Not with me, his comrade.

PHILOCLEON. Then his madness is as hot as my lentils.

BDELYCLEON. In the name of the gods, father! No hurried verdict without hearing the other side!

PHILOCLEON. But the evidence is plain; the fact speaks for itself.

XANTHIAS. Then beware of acquitting the most selfish of canine gluttons, who has devoured the whole cheese, rind and all, prowling round the platter.

PHILOCLEON. There is not even enough left for me to fill up the chinks in my pitcher.

XANTHIAS. Besides, you *must* punish him, because the same house cannot keep two thieves. Let me not have barked in vain, else I shall never bark again.

PHILOCLEON. Oh! the black deeds he has just denounced! What a shameless thief! Say, cock, is not that your opinion too? Ha, ha! He thinks as I do. Here, Thesmothetes!¹⁰² where are you? Hand me the vessel.

SOSIAS (*Thesmothetes*). Take it yourself. I go to call the witnesses; these are a plate, a pestle, a cheese knife, a brazier, a stew-pot and other half-burnt utensils. (*To Philocleon.*) But you have not finished? you are piddling away still! Have done and be seated.

PHILOCLEON. Ha, ha! I reckon I know somebody who will shit himself with fright today.

BDELYCLEON. Will you never cease showing yourself hard and intractable, and especially to the accused? You tear them to pieces tooth and nail.

PHILOCLEON. Come forward and defend yourself. What means this silence?

Answer.

SOSIAS. No doubt he has nothing to say.

¹⁰⁰ That is, by way of fine.

¹⁰¹ A reference to the peculations Laches was supposed to have practised in keeping back part of the pay of the Athenian sailors engaged in the Sicilian Expedition.

¹⁰² The [Greek: Thesmothetai] at Athens were the six junior Archons, who judged cases assigned to no special Court, presided at the allotment of magistrates, etc.

BDELYCLEON. Not so, but I think he has got what happened once to Thucydides, when accused;¹⁰³ his jaws suddenly set fast. Get away! I will undertake your defence.—Gentlemen of the jury, 'tis a difficult thing to speak for a dog who has been calumniated, but nevertheless I will try. 'Tis a good dog, and he chivies the wolves finely.

PHILOCLEON. He! that thief and conspirator!

BDELYCLEON. But 'tis the best of all our dogs; he is capable of guarding a whole flock.

PHILOCLEON. And what good is that, if he eats the cheese?

BDELYCLEON. What? he fights for you, he guards your door; 'tis an excellent dog in every respect. Forgive him his larceny; he is wretchedly ignorant, he cannot play the lyre.

PHILOCLEON. I wish he did not know how to write either; then the rascal would not have drawn up his pleadings.

BDELYCLEON. Witnesses, I pray you, listen. Come forward, grafting-knife, and speak up; answer me clearly. You were paymaster at the time. Did you grate out to the soldiers what was given you?—He says he did so.

PHILOCLEON. But, by Zeus! he lies.

BDELYCLEON. Oh! have patience. Take pity on the unfortunate. Labes feeds only on fish-bones and fishes' heads and has not an instant of peace. The other is good only to guard the house; he never moves from here, but demands his share of all that is brought in and bites those who refuse.

PHILOCLEON. Oh! Heaven! have I fallen ill? I feel my anger cooling! Woe to me! I am softening!

BDELYCLEON. Have pity, father, pity, I adjure you; you would not have him dead. Where are his puppies? Come, poor little beasties, yap, up on your haunches, beg and whine!

PHILOCLEON. Descend, descend, descend, descend!¹⁰⁴

BDELYCLEON. I will descend, although that word, "descend," has too often raised false hope. None the less, I will descend.

PHILOCLEON. Plague seize it! Have I then done wrong to eat! What! I to be crying! Ah! I certainly should not be weeping, if I were not blown out with lentils.

BDELYCLEON. Then he is acquitted?

PHILOCLEON. I did not say so.

BDELYCLEON. Ah! my dear father, be good! be humane! Take this voting pebble and rush with your eyes closed to that second urn¹⁰⁵ and, father, acquit him.

PHILOCLEON. No, I know no more how to acquit than to play the lyre.

BDELYCLEON. Come quickly, I will show you the way.

PHILOCLEON. Is this the first urn?

BDELYCLEON. Yes.

PHILOCLEON. Then I have voted.

BDELYCLEON (*aside*). I have fooled him and he has acquitted in spite of himself.

PHILOCLEON. Come, I will turn out the urns. What is the result?

BDELYCLEON. We shall see.—Labes, you stand acquitted.—Eh! father, what's the matter, what is it?

PHILOCLEON. Ah me! ah me! water! water!

BDELYCLEON. Pull yourself together, sir!

PHILOCLEON. Tell me! Is he really acquitted?

¹⁰³ Thucydides, son of Milesias, when accused by Pericles, could not say a word in his own defence. One would have said his tongue was paralysed. He was banished.—He must not be confounded with Thucydides the historian, whose exile took place after the production of 'The Wasps.'

¹⁰⁴ When the judges were touched by the pleading of the orator and were decided on acquittal, they said to the defending advocate, "Cease speaking, descend from the rostrum."

¹⁰⁵ There were two urns, one called that of Conviction, the other of Acquittal.

BDELYCLEON. Yes, certainly.

PHILOCLEON. Then it's all over with me!

BDELYCLEON. Courage, dear father, don't let this afflict you so terribly.

PHILOCLEON. And so I have charged my conscience with the acquittal of an accused being! What will become of me? Sacred gods! forgive me. I did it despite myself; it is not in my character.

BDELYCLEON. Do not vex yourself, father; I will feed you well, will take you everywhere to eat and drink with me; you shall go to every feast; henceforth your life shall be nothing but pleasure, and Hyperbolus shall no longer have you for a tool. But come, let us go in.

PHILOCLEON. So be it; if you will, let us go in.

CHORUS (*Parabasis*). Go where it pleases you and may your happiness be great. You meanwhile, oh! countless myriads, listen to the sound counsels I am going to give you and take care they are not lost upon you. 'Twould be the fate of vulgar spectators, not that of such an audience. Hence, people, lend me your ear, if you love frank speaking. The poet has a reproach to make against his audience; he says you have ill-treated him in return for the many services he has rendered you. At first he kept himself in the background and lent help secretly to other poets,¹⁰⁶ and like the prophetic Genius, who hid himself in the belly of Eurycles,¹⁰⁷ slipped within the spirit of another and whispered to him many a comic hit. Later he ran the risks of the theatre on his own account, with his face uncovered, and dared to guide his Muse unaided. Though overladen with success and honours more than any of your poets, indeed despite all his glory, he does not yet believe he has attained his goal; his heart is not swollen with pride and he does not seek to seduce the young folk in the wrestling school.¹⁰⁸ If any lover runs up to him to complain because he is furious at seeing the object of his passion derided on the stage, he takes no heed of such reproaches, for he is only inspired with honest motives and his Muse is no go-between. From the very outset of his dramatic career he has disdained to assail those who were men, but with a courage worthy of Heracles himself he attacked the most formidable monsters, and at the beginning went straight for that beast¹⁰⁹ with the sharp teeth, with the terrible eyes that flashed lambent fire like those of Cynna,¹¹⁰ surrounded by a hundred lewd flatterers who spittle-licked him to his heart's content; it had a voice like a roaring torrent, the stench of a seal, a foul Lamia's testicles,¹¹¹ and the rump of a camel. Our poet did not tremble at the sight of this horrible monster, nor did he dream of gaining him over; and again this very day he is fighting for your good. Last year besides, he attacked those pale, shivering and feverish beings¹¹² who strangled your fathers in the dark, throttled your grandfathers,¹¹³ and who, lying in the beds of the most inoffensive, piled up against them lawsuits, summonses and witnesses to such an extent, that many of them flew in terror to the Polemarch for refuge.¹¹⁴ Such is the champion you have found to purify your country of all its evil, and last year you betrayed him,¹¹⁵ when he sowed the most novel ideas, which, however, did not strike root, because you did not understand their value; notwithstanding this, he swears by

¹⁰⁶ Meaning, that he had at first produced pieces under the name of other poets, such as Callistrates and Phidonides.

¹⁰⁷ Eurycles, an Athenian diviner, surnamed the Engastromythes ([Greek: muthos], speech, [Greek: en gastri], in the belly), because he was believed to be inspired by a genius within him.—The same name was also given to the priestesses of Apollo, who spoke their oracles without moving their lips.

¹⁰⁸ Some poets misused their renown as a means of seduction among young men.

¹⁰⁹ Cleon, whom he attacked in 'The Knights,' the first Comedy that Aristophanes had produced in his own name.

¹¹⁰ Cynna, like Salabaccha, was a shameless courtesan of the day.

¹¹¹ The lamiae were mysterious monsters, to whom the ancients ascribed the most varied forms. They were depicted most frequently with the face and bosom of a woman and the body of a serpent. Here Aristophanes endows them with organs of virility. It was said that the blood of young men had a special attraction for them. These lines, abusive of Cleon, occur again in the 'Peace,' II. 738-42.

¹¹² Socrates and the sophists, with whom the poet confounds him in his attacks.

¹¹³ He likens them to vampires.

¹¹⁴ The third Archon, whose duty was the protection of strangers. All cases involving the rights of citizenship were tried before him. These were a frequent cause of lawsuit at Athens.

¹¹⁵ 'The Clouds' had not been well received.

Bacchus, the while offering him libations, that none ever heard better comic verses. 'Tis a disgrace to you not to have caught their drift at once; as for the poet, he is none the less appreciated by the enlightened judges. He shivered his oars in rushing boldly forward to board his foe.¹¹⁶ But in future, my dear fellow-citizens, love and honour more those of your poets who seek to imagine and express some new thought. Make their ideas your own, keep them in your caskets like sweet-scented fruit.¹¹⁷ If you do, your clothing will emit an odour of wisdom the whole year through.

Formerly we were untiring, especially in *other* exercises,¹¹⁸ but 'tis over now; our brow is crowned with hair whiter than the swan. We must, however, rekindle a youthful ardour in these remnants of what was, and for myself, I prefer my old age to the curly hair and the finery of all these lewd striplings.

Should any among you spectators look upon me with wonder, because of this wasp waist, or not know the meaning of this sting, I will soon dispel his ignorance. We, who wear this appendage, are the true Attic men, who alone are noble and native to the soil, the bravest of all people. 'Tis we who, weapon in hand, have done so much for the country, when the Barbarian shed torrents of fire and smoke over our city in his relentless desire to seize our nests by force. At once we ran up, armed with lance and buckler, and, drunk with the bitter wine of anger, we gave them battle, man standing to man and rage distorting our lips.¹¹⁹ A hail of arrows hid the sky. However, by the help of the gods, we drove off the foe towards evening. Before the battle an owl had flown over our army.¹²⁰ Then we pursued them with our lance point in their loins as one hunts the tunny-fish; they fled and we stung them in the jaw and in the eyes, so that even now the barbarians tell each other that there is nothing in the world more to be feared than the Attic wasp.

Oh! at that time I was terrible, I feared nothing; forth on my galleys I went in search of my foe and subjected him.¹²¹ Then we never thought of rounding fine phrases, we never dreamt of calumny; 'twas who should prove the strongest rower. And thus we took many a town from the Medes,¹²² and 'tis to us that Athens owes the tributes that our young men thieve to-day.

Look well at us, and you will see that we have all the character and habits of the wasp. Firstly, if roused, no beings are more irascible, more relentless than we are. In all other things, too, we act like wasps. We collect in swarms, in a kind of nests,¹²³ and some go a-judging with the Archon,¹²⁴ some with the Eleven,¹²⁵ others at the Odeon;¹²⁶ there are yet others, who hardly move at all, like the grubs in the cells, but remain glued to the walls¹²⁷ and bent double to the ground. We also pay full attention to the discovery of all sorts of means of existing and sting the first who comes, so as to live at his expense. Finally, we have among us drones,¹²⁸ who have no sting and who, without giving themselves the least trouble, seize on our revenues as they flow past them and devour them. 'Tis this that grieves us most of all, to see men who have never served or held either lance or oar in defence

¹¹⁶ Aristophanes lets it be understood that the refusal to crown him arose from the fact that he had been too bold in his attack.

¹¹⁷ To perfume their caskets, etc., the Ancients placed scented fruit, especially oranges, in them.

¹¹⁸ The pastimes of love.

¹¹⁹ At Marathon, where the Athenians defeated the Persian invaders, 490 B.C. The battle-field is a plain on the north-east coast of Attica, about twenty-seven miles from Athens.

¹²⁰ A favourable omen, of course. The owl was the bird of Athené.

¹²¹ An allusion to Cimon's naval victories.

¹²² The Cyclades islands and many towns on the coast of Asia Minor.

¹²³ The tribunals.

¹²⁴ The six last Archons presided over the civil courts and were styled Thesmothetae (see above).

¹²⁵ Magistrates, who had charge of criminal cases.

¹²⁶ Built by Pericles. Musical contests were held there. Here also took place distributions of flour, and the presence of the magistrates was no doubt necessary to decide on the spot any disputes that might arise regarding this.

¹²⁷ This, says the Scholiast, refers to magistrates appointed for the upkeep of the walls. They were selected by ballot from amongst the general body of Heliasts.

¹²⁸ The demagogues and their flatterers.

of their country, enriching themselves at our expense without ever raising a blister on their hands. In short, I give it as my deliberate opinion that in future every citizen not possessed of a sting shall not receive the triobolus.

PHILOCLEON. As long as I live, I will never give up this cloak; 'tis the one I wore in that battle¹²⁹ when Boreas delivered us from such fierce attacks,

BDELYCLEON. You do not know what is good for you.

PHILOCLEON. Ah! I know not how to use fine clothing! T'other day, when cramming myself with fried fish, I dropped so many grease spots that I had to pay three obols to the cleaner.

BDELYCLEON. At least have a try, since you have once for all handed the care for your well-being over to me.

PHILOCLEON. Very well then! what must I do?

BDELYCLEON. Take off your cloak, and put on this tunic in its stead.

PHILOCLEON. 'Twas well worth while to beget and bring up children, so that this one should now wish to choke me.

BDELYCLEON. Come, take this tunic and put it on without so much talk.

PHILOCLEON. Great gods! what sort of a cursed garment is this?

BDELYCLEON. Some call it a pelisse, others a Persian cloak.¹³⁰

PHILOCLEON. Ah! I thought it was a wraprascal like those made at Thymaetia.¹³¹

BDELYCLEON. Pray, how should you know such garments? 'Tis only at Sardis you could have seen them, and you have never been there.

PHILOCLEON. I' faith, no! but it seems to me exactly like the mantle Morychus¹³² sports.

BDELYCLEON. Not at all; I tell you they are woven at Ecbatana.

PHILOCLEON. What! are there woollen ox-guts¹³³ then at Ecbatana?

BDELYCLEON. Whatever are you talking about? These are woven by the Barbarians at great cost. I am certain this pelisse has consumed more than a talent of wool.¹³⁴

PHILOCLEON. It should be called wool-waster then instead of pelisse.

BDELYCLEON. Come, father, just hold still for a moment and put it on.

PHILOCLEON. Oh! horrors! what a waft of heat the hussy wafts up my nose!

BDELYCLEON. Will you have done with this fooling?

PHILOCLEON. No, by Zeus! if need be, I prefer you should put me in the oven.

BDELYCLEON. Come! I will put it round you. There!

PHILOCLEON. At all events, bring out a crook.

BDELYCLEON. Why, whatever for?

PHILOCLEON. To drag me out of it before I am quite melted.

BDELYCLEON. Now take off those wretched clogs and put on these nice Laconian slippers.

PHILOCLEON. I put on odious slippers made by our foes! Never!

BDELYCLEON. Come! put your foot in and push hard. Quick!

PHILOCLEON. 'Tis ill done of you. You want me to put my foot on Laconian ground.

BDELYCLEON. Now the other.

PHILOCLEON. Ah! no, not that one; one of its toes holds the Laconians in horror.

BDELYCLEON. Positively you must.

¹²⁹ The battle of Artemisium on the Euboean coast; a terrible storm arose and almost destroyed the barbarian fleet, while sparing that of the Athenians.

¹³⁰ A mantle trimmed with fur.

¹³¹ A rural deme of Attica. Rough coats were made there, formed of skins sewn together.

¹³² An effeminate poet.

¹³³ He compares the thick, shaggy stuff of the pelisse to the intestines of a bullock, which have a sort of crimped and curled look.

¹³⁴ An Attic talent was equal to about fifty-seven pounds avoirdupois.

PHILOCLEON. Alas! alas! Then I shall have no chilblains in my old age.¹³⁵

BDELYCLEON. Now, hurry up and get them on; and now imitate the easy effeminate gait of the rich. See, like this.

PHILOCLEON. There!... Look at my get-up and tell me which rich man I most resemble in my walk.

BDELYCLEON. Why, you look like a garlic plaster on a boil.

PHILOCLEON. Ah! I am longing to swagger and sway my rump about.

BDELYCLEON. Now, will you know how to talk gravely with well-informed men of good class?

PHILOCLEON. Undoubtedly.

BDELYCLEON. What will you say to them?

PHILOCLEON. Oh, lots of things. First of all I shall say, that Lamia,¹³⁶ seeing herself caught, let fly a fart; then, that Cardopion and her mother....

BDELYCLEON. Come, no fabulous tales, pray! talk of realities, of domestic facts, as is usually done.

PHILOCLEON. Ah! I know something that is indeed most domestic. Once upon a time there was a rat and a cat....

BDELYCLEON. "Oh, you ignorant fool," as Theagenes said¹³⁷ to the scavenger in a rage. Are you going to talk of cats and rats among high-class people?

PHILOCLEON. Then what should I talk about?

BDELYCLEON. Tell some dignified story. Relate how you were sent on a solemn mission with Androcles and Clisthenes.

PHILOCLEON. On a mission! never in my life, except once to Paros,¹³⁸ a job which brought me in two obols a day.

BDELYCLEON. At least say, that you have just seen Ephudion making good play in the pancratium¹³⁹ with Ascondas and, that despite his age and his white hair, he is still robust in loin and arm and flank and that his chest is a very breastplate.

PHILOCLEON. Stop! stop! what nonsense! Who ever contested at the pancratium with a breast-plate on?

BDELYCLEON. That is how well-behaved folk like to talk. But another thing. When at wine, it would be fitting to relate some good story of your youthful days. What is your most brilliant feat?

PHILOCLEON. My best feat? Ah! 'twas when I stole Ergasion's vine-props.

BDELYCLEON. You and your vine-props! you'll be the death of me! Tell of one of your boar-hunts or of when you coursed the hare. Talk about some torch-race you were in; tell of some deed of daring.

PHILOCLEON. Ah! my most daring deed was when, quite a young man still, I prosecuted Phayllus, the runner, for defamation, and he was condemned by a majority of two votes.

BDELYCLEON. Enough of that! Now recline there, and practise the bearing that is fitting at table in society.

PHILOCLEON. How must I recline? Tell me quick!

BDELYCLEON. In an elegant style.

¹³⁵ He grumbles over his own good fortune, as old men will.

¹³⁶ Lamia, the daughter of Belus and Libya, was loved by Zeus. Heré deprived her of her beauty and instilled her with a passion for blood; she is said to have plucked babes from their mothers' breast to devour them. Weary of her crimes, the gods turned her into a beast of prey.

¹³⁷ Theagenes, of the Acharnian deme, was afflicted with a weakness which caused him to be constantly letting off loud, stinking farts, even in public—the cause of many gibes on the part of the Comic poets and his contemporaries.

¹³⁸ He had been sent on a mission as an armed ambassador, i.e. as a common soldier, whose pay was two obols.

¹³⁹ The [Greek: pankration] was a combined exercise, including both wrestling and boxing.

PHILOCLEON. Like this?

BDELYCLEON. Not at all.

PHILOCLEON. How then?

BDELYCLEON. Spread your knees on the tapestries and give your body the most easy curves, like those taught in the gymnasium. Then praise some bronze vase, survey the ceiling, admire the awning stretched over the court. Water is poured over our hands; the tables are spread; we sup and, after ablution, we now offer libations to the gods.

PHILOCLEON. But, by Zeus! this supper is but a dream, it appears!

BDELYCLEON. The flute-player has finished the prelude. The guests are Theorus, Aeschines, Phanus, Cleon, Acestor;¹⁴⁰ and beside this last, I don't know who else. You are with them. Shall you know exactly how to take up the songs that are started?

PHILOCLEON. Better than any born mountaineer of Attica.

BDELYCLEON. That we shall see. Suppose me to be Cleon. I am the first to begin the song of Harmodius, and you take it up: "There never was yet seen in Athens ...

PHILOCLEON. ... such a rogue or such a thief."¹⁴¹

BDELYCLEON. Why, you wretched man, 'twill be the end of you if you sing that. He will vow your ruin, your destruction, to chase you out of the country.

PHILOCLEON. Well! then I shall answer his threats with another song: "With your madness for supreme power, you will end by overthrowing the city, which even now totters towards ruin."

BDELYCLEON. And when Theorus, prone at Cleon's feet, takes his hand and sings, "Like Admetus, love those who are brave,"¹⁴² what reply will you make him?

PHILOCLEON. I shall sing, "I know not how to play the fox, nor call myself the friend of both parties."

BDELYCLEON. Then comes the turn of Aeschines, the son of Sellus, and a well-trained and clever musician, who will sing, "Good things and riches for Clitagoras and me and eke for the Thessalians!"

PHILOCLEON. "The two of us have squandered a deal between us."

BDELYCLEON. At this game you seem at home. But come, we will go and dine with Philoctemon.—Slave! slave! place our dinner in a basket, and let us go for a good long drinking bout.

PHILOCLEON. By no means, it is too dangerous; for after drinking, one breaks in doors, one comes to blows, one batters everything. Anon, when the wine is slept off, one is forced to pay.

BDELYCLEON. Not if you are with decent people. Either they undertake to appease the offended person or, better still, you say something witty, you tell some comic story, perhaps one of those you have yourself heard at table, either in Aesop's style or in that of Sybaris; all laugh and the trouble is ended.

PHILOCLEON. Faith! 'tis worth while learning many stories then, if you are thus not punished for the ill you do. But come, no more delay!

CHORUS. More than once have I given proof of cunning and never of stupidity, but how much more clever is Amynias, the son of Sellus and of the race of forelock-wearers; him we saw one day coming to dine with Leogaras,¹⁴³ bringing as his share one apple and a pomegranate, and bear in mind he was as hungry as Antiphon.¹⁴⁴ He went on an embassy to Pharsalus,¹⁴⁵ and there he lived solely among the Thessalian mercenaries;¹⁴⁶ indeed, is he not the vilest of mercenaries himself?

¹⁴⁰ All these names have been already mentioned.

¹⁴¹ Each time Philocleon takes up the song with words that are a satire on the guest who begins the strain.

¹⁴² King Admetus (Euripides' 'Alcestis') had suffered his devoted wife Alcestis to die to save his life when ill to death. Heracles, however, to repay former benefits received, descended into Hades and rescued Alcestis from Pluto's clutches.

¹⁴³ A famous epicure, the Lucullus of Athens (see 'The Acharnians').

¹⁴⁴ A parasite renowned for his gluttony.

¹⁴⁵ A town in Thessaly.

Oh! blessed, oh! fortunate Automenes, how enviable is your fortune! You have three sons, the most industrious in the world; one is the friend of all, a very able man, the first among the lyre-players, the favourite of the Graces. The second is an actor, and his talent is beyond all praise. As for Ariphrades, he is by far the most gifted; his father would swear to me, that without any master whatever and solely through the spontaneous effort of his happy nature, he taught himself the use of his tongue in the lewd places¹⁴⁷ where he spends the whole of his time.

Some have said that I and Cleon were reconciled. This is the truth of the matter: Cleon was harassing me, persecuting and belabouring me in every way; and, when I was being fleeced, the public laughed at seeing me uttering such loud cries; not that they cared about me, but simply curious to know whether, when trodden down by my enemy, I would not hurl at him some taunt. Noticing this, I have played the wheedler a bit; but now, look! the prop is deceiving the vine!¹⁴⁸

XANTHIAS. Oh! tortoises! happy to have so hard a skin, thrice happy to carry this roof that protects your backs! Oh! creatures full of sense! what a happy thought to cover your bodies with this shell, which shields it from blows! As for me, I can no longer move; the stick has so belaboured my body.

CHORUS. Eh, what's the matter, child? for, old as he may be, one has the right to call anyone a child who has let himself be beaten.

XANTHIAS. Alas! my master is really the worst of all plagues. He was the most drunk of all the guests, and yet among them were Hippyllus, Antiphon, Lycon, Lysistratus, Theophrastus and Phrynichus. But he was a hundred times more insolent than any. As soon as he had stuffed himself with a host of good dishes, he began to leap and spring, to laugh and to let wind like a little ass well blown out with barley. Then he set to a-beating me with all his heart, shouting, "Slave! slave!" Lysistratus, as soon as he saw him, let fly this comparison at him. "Old fellow," said he, "you resemble one of the scum assuming the airs of a rich man or a stupid ass that has broken loose from its stable." "As for you," bawled the other at the top of his voice, "you are like a grasshopper,¹⁴⁹ whose cloak is worn to the thread, or like Sthenelus¹⁵⁰ after his clothes had been sold." All applauded excepting Theophrastus, who made a grimace as behoved a well-bred man like him. The old man called to him, "Hi! tell me then what you have to be proud of? Not so much mouthing, you, who so well know how to play the buffoon and to lick-spittle the rich!" 'Twas thus he insulted each in turn with the grossest of jests, and he reeled off a thousand of the most absurd and ridiculous speeches. At last, when he was thoroughly drunk, he started towards here, striking everyone he met. Hold, here he comes reeling along. I will be off for fear of his blows.

PHILOCLEON.¹⁵¹ Halt! and let everyone begone, or I shall do an evil turn to some of those who insist on following me. Clear off, rascals, or I shall roast you with this torch!

BDELYCLEON. We shall all make you smart to-morrow for your youthful pranks. We shall come in a body to summon you to justice.

PHILOCLEON. Ho! ho! summon me! what old women's babble! Know that I can no longer bear to hear even the name of suits. Ha! ha! ha! this is what pleases *me*, "Down with the urns!" Won't you begone? Down with the dicasts! away with them, away with them! (*To the flute-girl.*) Mount up there, my little gilded cock-chafer; seize hold of this rope's end in your hand.¹⁵² Hold it tight, but have a care; the rope's a bit old and worn, but it loves a nice rubbing still. Do you see how opportunely I got you away from the solicitations of those fellows, who wanted to make you work their tools in

¹⁴⁶ Because of his poverty.

¹⁴⁷ Four lines in 'The Knights' describe the infamous habits of Ariphrades in detail.

¹⁴⁸ That is, it ceases to support it; Aristophanes does the same to Cleon.

¹⁴⁹ Referring to Lysistratus' leanness.

¹⁵⁰ A tragic actor, whose wardrobe had been sold up, so the story went, by his creditors.

¹⁵¹ He enters, followed closely by the persons he has ill-used, and leading a flute-girl by the hand.

¹⁵² Meaning his penis.

your mouth? You therefore owe me this return to gratify mine by masturbating it. But will you pay the debt? Oh! I know well you will not even try; you will play with me, you will laugh heartily at my poor old weapon as you have done at many another man's. And yet, if you would not be a naughty girl, I would redeem you, when my son is dead, and you should be my concubine, my little cuntling. At present I am not my own master; I am very young and am watched very closely. My dear son never lets me out of his sight; 'tis an unbearable creature, who would quarter a thread and skin a flint; he is afraid I should get lost, for I am his only father. But here he comes running towards us. But be quick, don't stir, hold these torches. I am going to play him a young man's trick, the same as he played me before I was initiated into the mysteries.

BDELYCLEON. Oh! oh! you debauched old dotard! you desire and, meseems, you love pretty baggages; but, by Apollo, it shall not be with impunity!

PHILOCLEON. Ah! you would be very glad to eat a lawsuit in vinegar, you would.

BDELYCLEON. 'Tis a rascally trick to steal the flute-girl away from the other guests.

PHILOCLEON. What flute-girl? Are you distraught, as if you had just returned from Pluto?

BDELYCLEON. By Zeus! But here is the Dardanian wench in person.¹⁵³

PHILOCLEON. Nonsense. This is a torch that I have lit in the public square in honour of the gods.

BDELYCLEON. Is this a torch?

PHILOCLEON. A torch? Certainly. Do you not see it is of several different colours?

BDELYCLEON. And what is that black part in the middle?¹⁵⁴

PHILOCLEON. 'Tis the pitch running out while it burns.

BDELYCLEON. And there, on the other side, surely that is a girl's bottom?

PHILOCLEON. No. 'Tis a small bit of the torch, that projects.

BDELYCLEON. What do you mean? what bit? Hi! you woman! come here!

PHILOCLEON. Ah! ah! What do you want to do?

BDELYCLEON. To take her from you and lead her away. You are too much worn out and can do nothing.

PHILOCLEON. Hear me! One day, at Olympia, I saw Euphudion boxing bravely against Ascondas;¹⁵⁵ he was already aged, and yet with a blow from his fist he knocked down his young opponent. So beware lest I blacken *your* eyes.

BDELYCLEON. By Zeus! you have Olympia at your finger-ends!

A BAKER'S WIFE (*to Bdelycleon*). Come to my help, I beg you, in the name of the gods! This cursed man, when striking out right and left with his torch, knocked over ten loaves worth an obolus apiece, and then, to cap the deal, four others.

BDELYCLEON. Do you see what lawsuits you are drawing upon yourself with your drunkenness? You will have to plead.

PHILOCLEON. Oh, no, no! a little pretty talk and pleasant tales will soon settle the matter and reconcile her with me.

BAKER'S WIFE. Not so, by the goddesses twain! It shall not be said that you have with impunity spoilt the wares of Myrtia,¹⁵⁶ the daughter of Ancyliion and Sostraté.

PHILOCLEON. Listen, woman, I wish to tell you a lovely anecdote.

BAKER'S WIFE. Oh! friend, no anecdotes for me, thank you.

¹⁵³ Dardanus, a district of Asia Minor, north of the Troad, supplied many flute-girls to the cities of Greece.

¹⁵⁴ Pointing to the flute-girl's *motte*.

¹⁵⁵ He tells his son the very story the latter had taught him.

¹⁵⁶ The name of the baker's wife.

PHILOCLEON. One night Aesop was going out to supper. A drunken bitch had the impudence to bark near him. Aesop said to her, "Oh, bitch, bitch! you would do well to sell your wicked tongue and buy some wheat."

BAKER'S WIFE. You make a mock of me! Very well! Be you who you like, I shall summons you before the market inspectors¹⁵⁷ for damage done to my business. Chaerephon¹⁵⁸ here shall be my witness.

PHILOCLEON. But just listen, here's another will perhaps please you better. Lasus and Simonides¹⁵⁹ were contesting against each other for the singing prize. Lasus said, "Damn me if I care."

BAKER'S WIFE. Ah! really, did he now!

PHILOCLEON. As for you, Chaerephon, *can* you be witness to this woman, who looks as pale and tragic as Ino when she throws herself from her rock¹⁶⁰ ... at the feet of Euripides?

BDELYCLEON. Here, methinks, comes another to summons you; *he* has his witness too. Ah! unhappy indeed we are!

ACCUSER. I summons you, old man, for outrage.

BDELYCLEON. For outrage? Oh! in the name of the gods, do not summons him! I will be answerable for him; name the penalty and I will be more grateful still.

PHILOCLEON. I ask for nothing better than to be reconciled with him; for I admit I struck him and threw stones at him. So, first come here. Will you leave it in my hands to name the indemnity I must pay, if I promise you my friendship as well, or will you fix it yourself?

ACCUSER. Fix it; I like neither lawsuits nor disputes.

PHILOCLEON. A man of Sybaris¹⁶¹ fell from his chariot and wounded his head most severely; he was a very poor driver. One of his friends came up to him and said, "Every man to his trade." Well then, go you to Pittalus¹⁶² to get mended.

BDELYCLEON. You are incorrigible.

ACCUSER (*to his witness*). At all events, make a note of his reply.

PHILOCLEON. Listen, instead of going off so abruptly. A woman at Sybaris broke a box.

ACCUSER (*to his witness*). I again ask you to witness this.

PHILOCLEON. The box therefore had the fact attested, but the woman said, "Never worry about witnessing the matter, but hurry off to buy a cord to tie it together with; 'twill be the more sensible course."

ACCUSER. Oh! go on with your ribaldry until the Archon calls the case.

BDELYCLEON (*to Philocleon*). No, by Demeter! you stay here no longer! I take you and carry you off.

PHILOCLEON. And what for?

BDELYCLEON. What for? I shall carry you to the house; else there would not be enough witnesses for the accusers.

PHILOCLEON. One day at Delphi, Aesop ...

BDELYCLEON. I don't care a fig for that.

¹⁵⁷ Or Agoranomi, who numbered ten at Athens.

¹⁵⁸ The disciple of Socrates.

¹⁵⁹ Lasus, a musician and dithyrambic poet, born about 500 B.C. in Argolis, was the rival of Simonides and thought himself his superior.

¹⁶⁰ Ino, the daughter of Cadmus and Harmonia. Being pursued by her husband, Athamas, whom the Fury Tisiphoné had driven mad, she threw herself into the sea with Melicerta, whereupon they were both changed into sea-goddesses.—This is the subject of one of Euripides' tragedies.

¹⁶¹ A famous town in Magna Graecia, south coast of Italy.

¹⁶² A celebrated physician.—Philocleon means, "Instead of starting an action, go and have yourself cared for; that is better worth your while."

PHILOCLEON. ... was accused of having stolen a sacred vase. But he replied, that the horn beetle ... (*Philocleon goes on with his fable while Bdelycleon is carrying him off the scene by main force.*)

BDELYCLEON. Oh, dear, dear! You drive me crazy with your horn-beetle.

CHORUS. I envy you your happiness, old man. What a contrast to his former frugal habits and his very hard life! Taught now in quite another school, he will know nothing but the pleasures of ease. Perhaps he will jibe at it, for indeed 'tis difficult to renounce what has become one's second nature. However, many have done it, and adopting the ideas of others, have changed their use and wont. As for Philocleon's son, I, like all wise and judicious men, cannot sufficiently praise his filial tenderness and his tact. Never have I met a more amiable nature, and I have conceived the greatest fondness for him. How he triumphed on every point in his discussion with his father, when he wanted to bring him back to more worthy and honourable tastes!

XANTHIAS. By Bacchus! 'Tis some Evil Genius has brought this unbearable disorder into our house. The old man, full up with wine and excited by the sound of the flute, is so delighted, so enraptured, that he spends the night executing the old dances that Thespis first produced on the stage,¹⁶³ and just now he offered to prove to the modern tragedians, by disputing with them for the dancing prize, that they are nothing but a lot of old dotards.

PHILOCLEON. "Who loiters at the door of the vestibule?"¹⁶⁴

XANTHIAS. Here comes our pest, our plague!

PHILOCLEON. Let down the barriers.¹⁶⁵ The dance is now to begin.

XANTHIAS. Or rather the madness.

PHILOCLEON. Impetuous movement already twists and racks my sides. How my nostrils wheeze! how my back cracks!

XANTHIAS. Go and fill yourself with hellebore.¹⁶⁶

PHILOCLEON. Phrynichus is as bold as a cock and terrifies his rivals.

XANTHIAS. Oh! oh! have a care he does not kick you.

PHILOCLEON. His leg kicks out sky-high, and his arse gapes open.¹⁶⁷

XANTHIAS. Do have a care.

PHILOCLEON. Look how easily my leg-joints move.

BDELYCLEON. Great gods! What does all this mean? Is it actual, downright madness?

PHILOCLEON. And now I summon and challenge my rivals. If there be a tragic poet who pretends to be a skilful dancer, let him come and contest the matter with me. Is there one? Is there *not* one?

BDELYCLEON. Here comes one, and one only.

PHILOCLEON. Who is the wretch?

BDELYCLEON. 'Tis the younger son of Carcinus.¹⁶⁸

PHILOCLEON. I will crush him to nothing; in point of keeping time, I will knock him out, for he knows nothing of rhythm.

BDELYCLEON. Ah! ah! here comes his brother too, another tragedian, and another son of Carcinus.

PHILOCLEON. Him I will devour for my dinner.

BDELYCLEON. Oh! ye gods! I see nothing but crabs.¹⁶⁹ Here is yet another son of Carcinus.

¹⁶³ The dances that Thespis, the originator of Tragedy, interspersed with the speaking parts of his plays.

¹⁶⁴ A verse borrowed from an unknown Tragedy.

¹⁶⁵ As was done in the stadia when the races were to be started.

¹⁶⁶ The ancients considered it a specific against madness.

¹⁶⁷ Phrynichus, like all the ancient tragic writers, mingled many dances with his pieces.

¹⁶⁸ Tragic poet. His three sons had also written tragedies and were dancers into the bargain.

¹⁶⁹ Carcinus, by a mere transposition of the accent ([Greek: karkívos]), means *crab* in Greek; hence the pun.

PHILOCLEON. What is't comes here? A shrimp or a spider?¹⁷⁰

BDELYCLEON. 'Tis a crab,¹⁷¹—a crabkin, the smallest of its kind; he writes tragedies.

PHILOCLEON. Oh! Carcinus, how proud you should be of your brood! What a crowd of kinglets have come swooping down here!

BDELYCLEON. Come, come, my poor father, you will have to measure yourself against them.

PHILOCLEON. Have pickle prepared for seasoning them, if I am bound to prove the victor.

CHORUS. Let us stand out of the way a little, so that they may twirl at their ease. Come, illustrious children of this inhabitant of the briny, brothers of the shrimps, skip on the sand and the shore of the barren sea; show us the lightning whirls and twirls of your nimble limbs. Glorious offspring of Phrynichus,¹⁷² let fly your kicks, so that the spectators may be overjoyed at seeing your legs so high in air. Twist, twirl, tap your bellies, kick your legs to the sky. Here comes your famous father, the ruler of the sea,¹⁷³ delighted to see his three lecherous kinglets.¹⁷⁴ Go on with your dancing, if it pleases you, but as for us, we shall not join you. Lead us promptly off the stage, for never a Comedy yet was seen where the Chorus finished off with a dance.

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FINIS OF "THE WASPS"

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¹⁷⁰ Carcinus' sons were small and thin.

¹⁷¹ The third son of Carcinus.

¹⁷² Meaning, the three sons of Carcinus, the dancers, because, as mentioned before, Phrynichus often introduced a chorus of dancers into his Tragedies.

¹⁷³ Carcinus himself.

¹⁷⁴ The Greek word is [Greek: triorchoi]—possessed of three testicles, of three-testicle power, inordinately lecherous; with the change of a letter ([Greek: triarchoi]) it means 'three rulers,' 'three kinglets.'

THE BIRDS

INTRODUCTION

The *Birds* differs markedly from all the other Comedies of Aristophanes which have come down to us in subject and general conception. It is just an extravaganza pure and simple—a graceful, whimsical theme chosen expressly for the sake of the opportunities it afforded of bright, amusing dialogue, pleasing lyrical interludes, and charming displays of brilliant stage effects and pretty dresses. Unlike other plays of the same Author, there is here apparently no serious political *motif* underlying the surface burlesque and buffoonery.

Some critics, it is true, profess to find in it a reference to the unfortunate Sicilian Expedition, then in progress, and a prophecy of its failure and the political downfall of Alcibiades. But as a matter of fact, the whole thing seems rather an attempt on the dramatist's part to relieve the overwrought minds of his fellow-citizens, anxious and discouraged at the unsatisfactory reports from before Syracuse, by a work conceived in a lighter vein than usual and mainly unconnected with contemporary realities.

The play was produced in the year 414 B.C., just when success or failure in Sicily hung in the balance, though already the outlook was gloomy, and many circumstances pointed to impending disaster. Moreover, the public conscience was still shocked and perturbed over the mysterious affair of the mutilation of the *Hermae*, which had occurred immediately before the sailing of the fleet, and strongly suspicious of Alcibiades' participation in the outrage. In spite of the inherent charm of the subject, the splendid outbursts of lyrical poetry in some of the choruses and the beauty of the scenery and costumes, *The Birds* failed to win the first prize. This was acclaimed to a play of Aristophanes' rival, Amipsias, the title of which, *The Comastae*, or *Revellers*, "seems to imply that the chief interest was derived from direct allusions to the outrage above mentioned and to the individuals suspected to have been engaged in it."

For this reason, which militated against its immediate success, viz. the absence of direct allusion to contemporary politics—there are, of course, incidental references here and there to topics and personages of the day—the play appeals perhaps more than any other of our Author's productions to the modern reader. Sparkling wit, whimsical fancy, poetic charm, are of all ages, and can be appreciated as readily by ourselves as by an Athenian audience of two thousand years ago, though, of course, much is inevitably lost "without the important adjuncts of music, scenery, dresses and what we may call 'spectacle' generally, which we know in this instance to have been on the most magnificent scale."

"The plot is this. Euelpides and Pisthetaerus, two old Athenians, disgusted with the litigiousness, wrangling and sycophancy of their countrymen, resolve upon quitting Attica. Having heard of the fame of Epops (the hoopoe), sometime called Tereus, and now King of the Birds, they determine, under the direction of a raven and a jackdaw, to seek from him and his subject birds a city free from all care and strife." Arrived at the Palace of Epops, they knock, and Trochilus (the wren), in a state of great flutter, as he mistakes them for fowlers, opens the door and informs them that his Majesty is asleep. When he awakes, the strangers appear before him, and after listening to a long and eloquent harangue on the superior attractions of a residence among the birds, they propose a notable scheme of their own to further enhance its advantages and definitely secure the sovereignty of the universe now exercised by the gods of Olympus.

The birds are summoned to meet in general council. They come flying up from all quarters of the heavens, and after a brief misunderstanding, during which they come near tearing the two human envoys to pieces, they listen to the exposition of the latter's plan. This is nothing less than the building

of a new city, to be called Nephelococcygia, or 'Cloud-cuckoo-town,' between earth and heaven, to be garrisoned and guarded by the birds in such a way as to intercept all communication of the gods with their worshippers on earth. All steam of sacrifice will be prevented from rising to Olympus, and the Immortals will very soon be starved into an acceptance of any terms proposed.

The new Utopia is duly constructed, and the daring plan to secure the sovereignty is in a fair way to succeed. Meantime various quacks and charlatans, each with a special scheme for improving things, arrive from earth, and are one after the other exposed and dismissed. Presently arrives Prometheus, who informs Epops of the desperate straits to which the gods are by this time reduced, and advises him to push his claims and demand the hand of Basileia (Dominion), the handmaid of Zeus. Next an embassy from the Olympians appears on the scene, consisting of Heracles, Posidon and a god from the savage regions of the Triballians. After some disputation, it is agreed that all reasonable demands of the birds are to be granted, while Pisthetaerus is to have Basileia as his bride. The comedy winds up with the epithalamium in honour of the nuptials.

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THE BIRDS

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

EUELPIDES.
PISTHETAERUS.
EPOPS (the Hoopoe).
TROCHILUS, Servant to Epopos.
PHOENICOPTERUS.
HERALDS.
A PRIEST.
A POET.
A PROPHET.
METON, a Geometrician.
A COMMISSIONER.
A DEALER IN DECREES.
IRIS.
A PARRICIDE.
CINESIAS, a Dithyrambic Bard.
AN INFORMER.
PROMETHEUS.
POSIDON.
TRIBALLUS.
HERACLES.
SERVANT of PISTHETAERUS.
MESSENGERS.
CHORUS OF BIRDS.

SCENE: A wild, desolate tract of open country; broken rocks and brushwood occupy the centre of the stage.

* * * * *

THE BIRDS

EUELPIDES (*to his jay*).¹⁷⁵ Do you think I should walk straight for yon tree?

PISTHETAERUS (*to his crow*). Cursed beast, what are you croaking to me?... to retrace my steps?

EUELPIDES. Why, you wretch, we are wandering at random, we are exerting ourselves only to return to the same spot; 'tis labour lost.

PISTHETAERUS. To think that I should trust to this crow, which has made me cover more than a thousand furlongs!

EUELPIDES. And I to this jay, who has torn every nail from my fingers!

PISTHETAERUS. If only I knew where we were. . . .

¹⁷⁵ Euelpides is holding a jay and Pisthetaerus a crow; they are the guides who are to lead them to the kingdom of the birds.

EUELPIDES. Could you find your country again from here?

PISTHETAERUS. No, I feel quite sure I could not, any more than could Execestides¹⁷⁶ find his.

EUELPIDES. Oh dear! oh dear!

PISTHETAERUS. Aye, aye, my friend, 'tis indeed the road of "oh dears" we are following.

EUELPIDES. That Philocrates, the bird-seller, played us a scurvy trick, when he pretended these two guides could help us to find Tereus,¹⁷⁷ the Epops, who is a bird, without being born of one. He has indeed sold us this jay, a true son of Tharelides,¹⁷⁸ for an obolus, and this crow for three, but what can they do? Why, nothing whatever but bite and scratch!—What's the matter with you then, that you keep opening your beak? Do you want us to fling ourselves headlong down these rocks? There is no road that way.

PISTHETAERUS. Not even the vestige of a track in any direction.

EUELPIDES. And what does the crow say about the road to follow?

PISTHETAERUS. By Zeus, it no longer croaks the same thing it did.

EUELPIDES. And which way does it tell us to go now?

PISTHETAERUS. It says that, by dint of gnawing, it will devour my fingers.

EUELPIDES. What misfortune is ours! we strain every nerve to get to the birds,¹⁷⁹ do everything we can to that end, and we cannot find our way! Yes, spectators, our madness is quite different to that of Sacas. He is not a citizen, and would fain be one at any cost; we, on the contrary, born of an honourable tribe and family and living in the midst of our fellow-citizens, we have fled from our country as hard as ever we could go. 'Tis not that we hate it; we recognize it to be great and rich, likewise that everyone has the right to ruin himself; but the crickets only chirrup among the fig-trees for a month or two, whereas the Athenians spend their whole lives in chanting forth judgments from their law courts.¹⁸⁰ That is why we started off with a basket, a stew-pot and some myrtle boughs¹⁸¹ and have come to seek a quiet country in which to settle. We are going to Tereus, the Epops, to learn from him, whether, in his aerial flights, he has noticed some town of this kind.

PISTHETAERUS. Here! look!

EUELPIDES. What's the matter?

PISTHETAERUS. Why, the crow has been pointing me to something up there for some time now.

EUELPIDES. And the jay is also opening its beak and craning its neck to show me I know not what. Clearly, there are some birds about here. We shall soon know, if we kick up a noise to start them.

PISTHETAERUS. Do you know what to do? Knock your leg against this rock.

EUELPIDES. And you your head to double the noise.

PISTHETAERUS. Well then use a stone instead; take one and hammer with it.

EUELPIDES. Good idea! Ho there, within! Slave! slave!

PISTHETAERUS. What's that, friend! You say, "slave," to summon Epops!

¹⁷⁶ A stranger, who wanted to pass as an Athenian, although coming originally from a far-away barbarian country.

¹⁷⁷ A king of Thrace, a son of Ares, who married Procné, the daughter of Pandion, King of Athens, whom he had assisted against the Megarians. He violated his sister-in-law, Philomela, and then cut out her tongue; she nevertheless managed to convey to her sister how she had been treated. They both agreed to kill Itys, whom Procné had born to Tereus, and dished up the limbs of his own son to the father; at the end of the meal Philomela appeared and threw the child's head upon the table. Tereus rushed with drawn sword upon the princesses, but all the actors in this terrible scene were metamorphosed. Tereus became an Epops (hoopoe), Procné a swallow, Philomela a nightingale, and Itys a goldfinch. According to Anacreon and Apollodorus it was Procné who became the nightingale and Philomela the swallow, and this is the version of the tradition followed by Aristophanes.

¹⁷⁸ An Athenian who had some resemblance to a jay—so says the Scholiast, at any rate.

¹⁷⁹ Literally, *to go to the crows*, a proverbial expression equivalent to our *going to the devil*.

¹⁸⁰ They leave Athens because of their hatred of lawsuits and informers; this is the especial failing of the Athenians satirized in 'The Wasps.'

¹⁸¹ Myrtle boughs were used in sacrifices, and the founding of every colony was started by a sacrifice.

'Twould be much better to shout, "Epops, Epops!"

EUELPIDES. Well then, Epops! Must I knock again? Epops!

TROCHILUS. Who's there? Who calls my master?

EUELPIDES. Apollo the Deliverer! what an enormous beak!¹⁸²

TROCHILUS. Good god! they are bird-catchers.

EUELPIDES. The mere sight of him petrifies me with terror. What a horrible monster!

TROCHILUS. Woe to you!

EUELPIDES. But we are not men.

TROCHILUS. What are you, then?

EUELPIDES. I am the Fearling, an African bird.

TROCHILUS. You talk nonsense.

EUELPIDES. Well, then, just ask it of my feet.¹⁸³

TROCHILUS. And this other one, what bird is it?

PISTHETAERUS. I? I am a Cackling,¹⁸⁴ from the land of the pheasants.

EUELPIDES. But you yourself, in the name of the gods! what animal are you?

TROCHILUS. Why, I am a slave-bird.

EUELPIDES. Why, have you been conquered by a cock?

TROCHILUS. No, but when my master was turned into a peewit, he begged me to become a bird too, to follow and to serve him.

EUELPIDES. Does a bird need a servant, then?

TROCHILUS. 'Tis no doubt because he was a man. At times he wants to eat a dish of loach from Phalerum; I seize my dish and fly to fetch him some. Again he wants some pea-soup; I seize a ladle and a pot and run to get it.

EUELPIDES. This is, then, truly a running-bird.¹⁸⁵ Come, Trochilus, do us the kindness to call your master.

TROCHILUS. Why, he has just fallen asleep after a feed of myrtle-berries and a few grubs.

EUELPIDES. Never mind; wake him up.

TROCHILUS. I am certain he will be angry. However, I will wake him to please you.

PISTHETAERUS. You cursed brute! why, I am almost dead with terror!

EUELPIDES. Oh! my god! 'twas sheer fear that made me lose my jay.

PISTHETAERUS. Ah! you great coward! were you so frightened that you let go your jay?

EUELPIDES. And did you not lose your crow, when you fell sprawling on the ground? Pray tell me that.

PISTHETAERUS. No, no.

EUELPIDES. Where is it, then?

PISTHETAERUS. It has flown away.

EUELPIDES. Then you did not let it go! Oh! you brave fellow!

EPOPS. Open the forest,¹⁸⁶ that I may go out!

EUELPIDES. By Heracles! what a creature! what plumage! What means this triple crest?

EPOPS. Who wants me?

EUELPIDES. The twelve great gods have used you ill, meseems.

EPOPS. Are you chaffing me about my feathers? I have been a man, strangers.

EUELPIDES. 'Tis not you we are jeering at.

¹⁸² The actors wore masks made to resemble the birds they were supposed to represent.

¹⁸³ Fear had had disastrous effects upon Euelpides' internal economy, this his feet evidenced.

¹⁸⁴ The same mishap had occurred to Pisthetaerus.

¹⁸⁵ The Greek word for a wren, [Greek: trochilos], is derived from the same root as [Greek: trechein], to run.

¹⁸⁶ No doubt there was some scenery to represent a forest. Besides, there is a pun intended. The words answering for *forest* and *door* ([Greek: hul_e and thura]) in Greek only differ slightly in sound.

EPOPS. At what, then?
 EUELPIDES. Why, 'tis your beak that looks so odd to us.
 EPOPS. This is how Sophocles outrages me in his tragedies. Know, I once was Tereus.¹⁸⁷
 EUELPIDES. You were Tereus, and what are you now? a bird or a peacock?¹⁸⁸
 EPOPS. I am a bird.
 EUELPIDES. Then where are your feathers? For I don't see them.
 EPOPS. They have fallen off.
 EUELPIDES. Through illness.
 EPOPS. No. All birds moult their feathers, you know, every winter, and others grow in their place. But tell me, who are you?
 EUELPIDES. We? We are mortals.
 EPOPS. From what country?
 EUELPIDES. From the land of the beautiful galleys.¹⁸⁹
 EPOPS. Are you dicasts?¹⁹⁰
 EUELPIDES. No, if anything, we are anti-dicasts.
 EPOPS. Is that kind of seed sown among you?¹⁹¹
 EUELPIDES. You have to look hard to find even a little in our fields.
 EPOPS. What brings you here?
 EUELPIDES. We wish to pay you a visit.
 EPOPS. What for?
 EUELPIDES. Because you formerly were a man, like we are, formerly you had debts, as we have, formerly you did not want to pay them, like ourselves; furthermore, being turned into a bird, you have when flying seen all lands and seas. Thus you have all human knowledge as well as that of birds. And hence we have come to you to beg you to direct us to some cosy town, in which one can repose as if on thick coverlets.
 EPOPS. And are you looking for a greater city than Athens?
 EUELPIDES. No, not a greater, but one more pleasant to dwell in.
 EPOPS. Then you are looking for an aristocratic country.
 EUELPIDES. I? Not at all! I hold the son of Scellias in horror.¹⁹²
 EPOPS. But, after all, what sort of city would please you best?
 EUELPIDES. A place where the following would be the most important business transacted.—Some friend would come knocking at the door quite early in the morning saying, "By Olympian Zeus, be at my house early, as soon as you have bathed, and bring your children too. I am giving a nuptial feast, so don't fail, or else don't cross my threshold when I am in distress."
 EPOPS. Ah! that's what may be called being fond of hardships. And what say you?
 PISTHETAERUS. My tastes are similar.
 EPOPS. And they are?
 PISTHETAERUS. I want a town where the father of a handsome lad will stop in the street and say to me reproachfully as if I had failed him, "Ah! Is this well done, Stilbonides! You met my son coming from the bath after the gymnasium and you neither spoke to him, nor embraced him, nor took him with you, nor ever once twitched his testicles. Would anyone call you an old friend of mine?"

¹⁸⁷ Sophocles had written a tragedy about Tereus, in which, no doubt, the king finally appears as a hoopoe.

¹⁸⁸ A [Greek: para prosdokian]; one would expect the question to be "bird or man."—Are you a peacock? The hoopoe resembles the peacock inasmuch as both have crests.

¹⁸⁹ Athens.

¹⁹⁰ The Athenians were madly addicted to lawsuits. (*Vide* 'The Wasps'.)

¹⁹¹ As much as to say, *Then you have such things as anti-dicasts?* And Euelpides practically replies, *Very few.*

¹⁹² His name was Aristocrates; he was a general and commanded a fleet sent in aid of Corcyra.

EPOPS. Ah! wag, I see you are fond of suffering. But there is a city of delights, such as you want. 'Tis on the Red Sea.

EUELPIDES. Oh, no. Not a sea-port, where some fine morning the Salaminian¹⁹³ galley can appear, bringing a writ-server along. Have you no Greek town you can propose to us?

EPOPS. Why not choose Lepreum in Elis for your settlement?

EUELPIDES. By Zeus! I could not look at Lepreum without disgust, because of Melanthius.¹⁹⁴

EPOPS. Then, again, there is the Opuntian, where you could live.

EUELPIDES. I would not be Opuntian¹⁹⁵ for a talent. But come, what is it like to live with the birds? You should know pretty well.

EPOPS. Why, 'tis not a disagreeable life. In the first place, one has no purse.

EUELPIDES. That does away with much roguery.

EPOPS. For food the gardens yield us white sesame, myrtle-berries, poppies and mint.

EUELPIDES. Why, 'tis the life of the newly-wed indeed.¹⁹⁶

PISTHETAERUS. Ha! I am beginning to see a great plan, which will transfer the supreme power to the birds, if you will but take my advice.

EPOPS. Take your advice? In what way?

PISTHETAERUS. In what way? Well, firstly, do not fly in all directions with open beak; it is not dignified. Among us, when we see a thoughtless man, we ask, "What sort of bird is this?" and Teas answers, "'Tis a man who has no brain, a bird that has lost his head, a creature you cannot catch, for it never remains in any one place."

EPOPS. By Zeus himself! your jest hits the mark. What then is to be done?

PISTHETAERUS. Found a city.

EPOPS. We birds? But what sort of city should we build?

PISTHETAERUS. Oh, really, really! 'tis spoken like a fool! Look down.

EPOPS. I am looking.

PISTHETAERUS. Now look upwards.

EPOPS. I am looking.

PISTHETAERUS. Turn your head round.

EPOPS. Ah! 'twill be pleasant for me, if I end in twisting my neck!

PISTHETAERUS. What have you seen?

EPOPS. The clouds and the sky.

PISTHETAERUS. Very well! is not this the pole of the birds then?

EPOPS. How their pole?

PISTHETAERUS. Or, if you like it, the land. And since it turns and passes through the whole universe, it is called, 'pole.'¹⁹⁷ If you build and fortify it, you will turn your pole into a fortified city.¹⁹⁸ In this way you will reign over mankind as you do over the grasshoppers and cause the gods to die of rabid hunger.

EPOPS. How so?

PISTHETAERUS. The air is 'twixt earth and heaven. When we want to go to Delphi, we ask the Boeotians¹⁹⁹ for leave of passage; in the same way, when men sacrifice to the gods, unless the

¹⁹³ The State galley, which carried the officials of the Athenian republic to their several departments and brought back those whose time had expired; it was this galley that was sent to Sicily to fetch back Alcibiades, who was accused of sacrilege.

¹⁹⁴ A tragic poet, who was a leper; there is a play, of course, on the Lepreum.

¹⁹⁵ An allusion to Opuntius, who was one-eyed.

¹⁹⁶ The newly-married ate a sesame cake, decorated with garlands of myrtle, poppies, and mint.

¹⁹⁷ From [Greek: polein], to turn.

¹⁹⁸ The Greek words for *pole* and *city* ([Greek: polos] and [Greek: polis]) only differ by a single letter.

¹⁹⁹ Boeotia separated Attica from Phocis.

latter pay you tribute, you exercise the right of every nation towards strangers and don't allow the smoke of the sacrifices to pass through your city and territory.

EPOPS. By earth! by snares! by network!²⁰⁰ I never heard of anything more cleverly conceived; and, if the other birds approve, I am going to build the city along with you.

PISTHETAERUS. Who will explain the matter to them?

EPOPS. You must yourself. Before I came they were quite ignorant, but since I have lived with them I have taught them to speak.

PISTHETAERUS. But how can they be gathered together?

EPOPS. Easily. I will hasten down to the coppice to waken my dear Procné;²⁰¹ as soon as they hear our voices, they will come to us hot wing.

PISTHETAERUS. My dear bird, lose no time, I beg. Fly at once into the coppice and awaken Procné.

EPOPS. Chase off drowsy sleep, dear companion. Let the sacred hymn gush from thy divine throat in melodious strains; roll forth in soft cadence your refreshing melodies to bewail the fate of Itys,²⁰² which has been the cause of so many tears to us both. Your pure notes rise through the thick leaves of the yew-tree right up to the throne of Zeus, where Phoebus listens to you, Phoebus with his golden hair. And his ivory lyre responds to your plaintive accents; he gathers the choir of the gods and from their immortal lips rushes a sacred chant of blessed voices. (*The flute is played behind the scene.*)

PISTHETAERUS. Oh! by Zeus! what a throat that little bird possesses. He has filled the whole coppice with honey-sweet melody!

EUELPIDES. Hush!

PISTHETAERUS. What's the matter?

EUELPIDES. Will you keep silence?

PISTHETAERUS. What for?

EUELPIDES. Epops is going to sing again.

EPOPS (*in the coppice*). Epopoi, poi, popoi, epopoi, popoi, here, here, quick, quick, quick, my comrades in the air; all you, who pillage the fertile lands of the husbandmen, the numberless tribes who gather and devour the barley seeds, the swift flying race who sing so sweetly. And you whose gentle twitter resounds through the fields with the little cry of tio, tio, tio, tio, tio, tio, tio, tio; and you who hop about the branches of the ivy in the gardens; the mountain birds, who feed on the wild olive berries or the arbutus, hurry to come at my call, trioto, trioto, totobrix; you also, who snap up the sharp-stinging gnats in the marshy vales, and you who dwell in the fine plain of Marathon, all damp with dew, and you, the francolin with speckled wings; you too, the halcyons, who flit over the swelling waves of the sea, come hither to hear the tidings; let all the tribes of long-necked birds assemble here; know that a clever old man has come to us, bringing an entirely new idea and proposing great reforms. Let all come to the debate here, here, here, here. Torotorotorotorotix, kikkobau, kikkobau, torotorotorotorolililix.

PISTHETAERUS. Can you see any bird?

EUELPIDES. By Phoebus, no! and yet I am straining my eyesight to scan the sky.

PISTHETAERUS. 'Twas really not worth Epops' while to go and bury himself in the thicket like a plover when a-hatching.

PHOENICOPTERUS. Torotina, torotina.

PISTHETAERUS. Hold, friend, here is another bird.

EUELPIDES. I' faith, yes! 'tis a bird, but of what kind? Isn't it a peacock?

PISTHETAERUS. Epops will tell us. What is this bird?

²⁰⁰ He swears by the powers that are to him dreadful.

²⁰¹ As already stated, according to the legend, accepted by Aristophanes, it was Procné who was turned into the nightingale.

²⁰² The son of Tereus and Procné.

EPOPS. 'Tis not one of those you are used to seeing; 'tis a bird from the marshes.

PISTHETAERUS. Oh! oh! but he is very handsome with his wings as crimson as flame.

EPOPS. Undoubtedly; indeed he is called flamingo.²⁰³

EUELPIDES. Hi! I say! You!

PISTHETAERUS. What are you shouting for?

EUELPIDES. Why, here's another bird.

PISTHETAERUS. Aye, indeed; 'tis a foreign bird too. What is this bird from beyond the mountains with a look as solemn as it is stupid?

EPOPS. He is called the Mede.²⁰⁴

PISTHETAERUS. The Mede! But, by Heracles! how, if a Mede, has he flown here without a camel?

EUELPIDES. Here's another bird with a crest.

PISTHETAERUS. Ah! that's curious. I say, Epops, you are not the only one of your kind then?

EPOPS. This bird is the son of Philocles, who is the son of Epops;²⁰⁵ so that, you see, I am his grandfather; just as one might say, Hipponicus,²⁰⁶ the son of Callias, who is the son of Hipponicus.

PISTHETAERUS. Then this bird is Callias! Why, what a lot of his feathers he has lost!²⁰⁷

EPOPS. That's because he is honest; so the informers set upon him and the women too pluck out his feathers.

PISTHETAERUS. By Posidon, do you see that many-coloured bird? What is his name?

EPOPS. This one? 'Tis the glutton.

PISTHETAERUS. Is there another glutton besides Cleonymus? But why, if he is Cleonymus, has he not thrown away his crest?²⁰⁸ But what is the meaning of all these crests? Have these birds come to contend for the double stadium prize?²⁰⁹

EPOPS. They are like the Carians, who cling to the crests of their mountains for greater safety.²¹⁰

PISTHETAERUS. Oh, Posidon! do you see what swarms of birds are gathering here?

EUELPIDES. By Phoebus! what a cloud! The entrance to the stage is no longer visible, so closely do they fly together.

PISTHETAERUS. Here is the partridge.

EUELPIDES. Faith! there is the francolin.

PISTHETAERUS. There is the poachard.

EUELPIDES. Here is the kingfisher. And over yonder?

EPOPS. 'Tis the barber.

EUELPIDES. What? a bird a barber?

PISTHETAERUS. Why, Sporgilus is one.²¹¹ Here comes the owl.

EUELPIDES. And who is it brings an owl to Athens?²¹²

²⁰³ An African bird, that comes to the southern countries of Europe, to Greece, Italy, and Spain; it is even seen in Provence.

²⁰⁴ Aristophanes amusingly mixes up real birds with people and individuals, whom he represents in the form of birds; he is personifying the Medians here.

²⁰⁵ Philocles, a tragic poet, had written a tragedy on Tereus, which was simply a plagiarism of the play of the same name by Sophocles. Philocles is the son of Epops, because he got his inspiration from Sophocles' Tereus, and at the same time is father to Epops, since he himself produced another Tereus.

²⁰⁶ This Hipponicus is probably the orator whose ears Alcibiades boxed to gain a bet; he was a descendant of Callias, who was famous for his hatred of Pisistratus.

²⁰⁷ This Callias, who must not be confounded with the foe of Pisistratus, had ruined himself.

²⁰⁸ Cleonymus had cast away his shield; he was as great a glutton as he was a coward.

²⁰⁹ A race in which the track had to be circled twice.

²¹⁰ A people of Asia Minor; when pursued by the Ionians they took refuge in the mountains.

²¹¹ An Athenian barber.

²¹² The owl was dedicated to Athené, and being respected at Athens, it had greatly multiplied. Hence the proverb, *taking owls to*

PISTHETAERUS. Here is the magpie, the turtle-dove, the swallow, the horned owl, the buzzard, the pigeon, the falcon, the ring-dove, the cuckoo, the red-foot, the red-cap, the purple-cap, the kestrel, the diver, the ousel, the osprey, the wood-pecker.

EUELPIDES. Oh! oh! what a lot of birds! what a quantity of blackbirds! how they scold, how they come rushing up! What a noise! what a noise! Can they be bearing us ill-will? Oh! there! there! they are opening their beaks and staring at us.

PISTHETAERUS. Why, so they are.

CHORUS. Popopopopopoi. Where is he who called me? Where am I to find him?

EPOPS. I have been waiting for you this long while; I never fail in my word to my friends.

CHORUS. Tititititititi. What good thing have you to tell me?

EPOPS. Something that concerns our common safety, and that is just as pleasant as it is to the purpose. Two men, who are subtle reasoners, have come here to seek me.

CHORUS. Where? What? What are you saying?

EPOPS. I say, two old men have come from the abode of men to propose a vast and splendid scheme to us.

CHORUS. Oh! 'tis a horrible, unheard-of crime! What are you saying?

EPOPS. Nay! never let my words scare you.

CHORUS. What have you done then?

EPOPS. I have welcomed two men, who wish to live with us.

CHORUS. And you have dared to do that!

EPOPS. Aye, and am delighted at having done so.

CHORUS. Where are they?

EPOPS. In your midst, as I am.

CHORUS. Ah! ah! we are betrayed; 'tis sacrilege! Our friend, he who picked up corn-seeds in the same plains as ourselves, has violated our ancient laws; he has broken the oaths that bind all birds; he has laid a snare for me, he has handed us over to the attacks of that impious race which, throughout all time, has never ceased to war against us. As for this traitorous bird, we will decide his case later, but the two old men shall be punished forthwith; we are going to tear them to pieces.

PISTHETAERUS. 'Tis all over with us.

EUELPIDES. You are the sole cause of all our trouble. Why did you bring me from down yonder?

PISTHETAERUS. To have you with me.

EUELPIDES. Say rather to have me melt into tears.

PISTHETAERUS. Go to! you are talking nonsense.

EUELPIDES. How so?

PISTHETAERUS. How will you be able to cry when once your eyes are pecked out?

CHORUS. Io! io! forward to the attack, throw yourselves upon the foe, spill his blood; take to your wings and surround them on all sides. Woe to them! let us get to work with our beaks, let us devour them. Nothing can save them from our wrath, neither the mountain forests, nor the clouds that float in the sky, nor the foaming deep. Come, peck, tear to ribbons. Where is the chief of the cohort? Let him engage the right wing.

EUELPIDES. This is the fatal moment. Where shall I fly to, unfortunate wretch that I am?

PISTHETAERUS. Stay! stop here!

EUELPIDES. That they may tear me to pieces?

PISTHETAERUS. And how do you think to escape them?

EUELPIDES. I don't know at all.

PISTHETAERUS. Come, I will tell you. We must stop and fight them. Let us arm ourselves with these stew-pots.

EUELPIDES. Why with the stew-pots?

PISTHETAERUS. The owl will not attack us.²¹³

EUELPIDES. But do you see all those hooked claws?

PISTHETAERUS. Seize the spit and pierce the foe on your side.

EUELPIDES. And how about my eyes?

PISTHETAERUS. Protect them with this dish or this vinegar-pot.

EUELPIDES. Oh! what cleverness! what inventive genius! You are a great general, even greater than Nicias,²¹⁴ where stratagem is concerned.

CHORUS. Forward, forward, charge with your beaks! Come, no delay. Tear, pluck, strike, flay them, and first of all smash the stew-pot.

EPOPS. Oh, most cruel of all animals, why tear these two men to pieces, why kill them? What have they done to you? They belong to the same tribe, to the same family as my wife.²¹⁵

CHORUS. Are wolves to be spared? Are they not our most mortal foes? So let us punish them.

EPOPS. If they are your foes by nature, they are your friends in heart, and they come here to give you useful advice.

CHORUS. Advice or a useful word from their lips, from them, the enemies of my forbears!

EPOPS. The wise can often profit by the lessons of a foe, for caution is the mother of safety. 'Tis just such a thing as one will not learn from a friend and which an enemy compels you to know. To begin with, 'tis the foe and not the friend that taught cities to build high walls, to equip long vessels of war; and 'tis this knowledge that protects our children, our slaves and our wealth.

CHORUS. Well then, I agree, let us first hear them, for 'tis best; one can even learn something in an enemy's school.

PISTHETAERUS. Their wrath seems to cool. Draw back a little.

EPOPS. 'Tis only justice, and you will thank me later.

CHORUS. Never have we opposed your advice up to now.

PISTHETAERUS. They are in a more peaceful mood; put down your stew-pot and your two dishes; spit in hand, doing duty for a spear, let us mount guard inside the camp close to the pot and watch in our arsenal closely; for we must not fly.

EUELPIDES. You are right. But where shall we be buried, if we die?

PISTHETAERUS. In the Ceramicus;²¹⁶ for, to get a public funeral, we shall tell the Strategoi that we fell at Orneae,²¹⁷ fighting the country's foes.

CHORUS. Return to your ranks and lay down your courage beside your wrath as the Hoplites do. Then let us ask these men who they are, whence they come, and with what intent. Here, Epopos, answer me.

EPOPS. Are you calling me? What do you want of me?

CHORUS. Who are they? From what country?

EPOPS. Strangers, who have come from Greece, the land of the wise.

CHORUS. And what fate has led them hither to the land of the birds?

²¹³ An allusion to the Feast of Pots; it was kept at Athens on the third day of the Anthesteria, when all sorts of vegetables were stewed together and offered for the dead to Bacchus and Athené. This Feast was peculiar to Athens.—Hence Pisthetaerus thinks that the owl will recognize they are Athenians by seeing the stew-pots, and as he is an Athenian bird, he will not attack them.

²¹⁴ Nicias, the famous Athenian general.—The siege of Melos in 417 B.C., or two years previous to the production of 'The Birds,' had especially done him great credit. He was joint commander of the Sicilian expedition.

²¹⁵ Procné, the daughter of Pandion, King of Athens.

²¹⁶ A space beyond the walls of Athens which contained the gardens of the Academy and the graves of citizens who had died for their country.

²¹⁷ A town in Western Argolis, where the Athenians had been recently defeated. The somewhat similar word in Greek, [Greek: ornithes], signifies *birds*.

EPOPS. Their love for you and their wish to share your kind of life; to dwell and remain with you always.

CHORUS. Indeed, and what are their plans?

EPOPS. They are wonderful, incredible, unheard of.

CHORUS. Why, do they think to see some advantage that determines them to settle here? Are they hoping with our help to triumph over their foes or to be useful to their friends?

EPOPS. They speak of benefits so great it is impossible either to describe or conceive them; all shall be yours, all that we see here, there, above and below us; this they vouch for.

CHORUS. Are they mad?

EPOPS. They are the sanest people in the world.

CHORUS. Clever men?

EPOPS. The slyest of foxes, cleverness its very self, men of the world, cunning, the cream of knowing folk.

CHORUS. Tell them to speak and speak quickly; why, as I listen to you, I am beside myself with delight.

EPOPS. Here, you there, take all these weapons and hang them up inside close to the fire, near the figure of the god who presides there and under his protection;²¹⁸ as for you, address the birds, tell them why I have gathered them together.

PISTHETAERUS. Not I, by Apollo, unless they agree with me as the little ape of an armourer agreed with his wife, not to bite me, nor pull me by the testicles, nor shove things up my....

CHORUS. You mean the.... (*Puts finger to bottom.*) Oh! be quite at ease.

PISTHETAERUS. No, I mean my eyes.

CHORUS. Agreed.

PISTHETAERUS. Swear it.

CHORUS. I swear it and, if I keep my promise, let judges and spectators give me the victory unanimously.

PISTHETAERUS. It is a bargain.

CHORUS. And if I break my word, may I succeed by one vote only.

HERALD. Hearken, ye people! Hoplites, pick up your weapons and return to your firesides; do not fail to read the decrees of dismissal we have posted.

CHORUS. Man is a truly cunning creature, but nevertheless explain. Perhaps you are going to show me some good way to extend my power, some way that I have not had the wit to find out and which you have discovered. Speak! 'tis to your own interest as well as to mine, for if you secure me some advantage, I will surely share it with you. But what object can have induced you to come among us? Speak boldly, for I shall not break the truce,—until you have told us all.

PISTHETAERUS. I am bursting with desire to speak; I have already mixed the dough of my address and nothing prevents me from kneading it.... Slave! bring the chaplet and water, which you must pour over my hands. Be quick!²¹⁹

EUELPIDES. Is it a question of feasting? What does it all mean?

PISTHETAERUS. By Zeus, no! but I am hunting for fine, tasty words to break down the hardness of their hearts.—I grieve so much for you, who at one time were kings....

CHORUS. We kings! Over whom?

PISTHETAERUS. ... of all that exists, firstly of me and of this man, even of Zeus himself. Your race is older than Saturn, the Titans and the Earth.

CHORUS. What, older than the Earth!

²¹⁸ Epopis is addressing the two slaves, no doubt Xanthias and Manes, who are mentioned later on.

²¹⁹ It was customary, when speaking in public and also at feasts, to wear a chaplet; hence the question Euelpides puts. The guests wore chaplets of flowers, herbs, and leaves, which had the property of being refreshing.

PISTHETAERUS. By Phoebus, yes.

CHORUS. By Zeus, but I never knew that before!

PISTHETAERUS. 'Tis because you are ignorant and heedless, and have never read your Aesop. 'Tis he who tells us that the lark was born before all other creatures, indeed before the Earth; his father died of sickness, but the Earth did not exist then; he remained unburied for five days, when the bird in its dilemma decided, for want of a better place, to entomb its father in its own head.

EUELPIDES. So that the lark's father is buried at Cephalae.²²⁰

EPOPS. Hence, if we existed before the Earth, before the gods, the kingship belongs to us by right of priority.

EUELPIDES. Undoubtedly, but sharpen your beak well; Zeus won't be in a hurry to hand over his sceptre to the woodpecker.

PISTHETAERUS. It was not the gods, but the birds, who were formerly the masters and kings over men; of this I have a thousand proofs. First of all, I will point you to the cock, who governed the Persians before all other monarchs, before Darius and Megabyzus.²²¹ 'Tis in memory of his reign that he is called the Persian bird.

EUELPIDES. For this reason also, even to-day, he alone of all the birds wears his tiara straight on his head, like the Great King.²²²

PISTHETAERUS. He was so strong, so great, so feared, that even now, on account of his ancient power, everyone jumps out of bed as soon as ever he crows at daybreak. Blacksmiths, potters, tanners, shoemakers, bathmen, corn-dealers, lyre-makers and armourers, all put on their shoes and go to work before it is daylight.

EUELPIDES. I can tell you something anent that. 'Twas the cock's fault that I lost a splendid tunic of Phrygian wool. I was at a feast in town, given to celebrate the birth of a child; I had drunk pretty freely and had just fallen asleep, when a cock, I suppose in a greater hurry than the rest, began to crow. I thought it was dawn and set out for Alimos.²²³ I had hardly got beyond the walls, when a footpad struck me in the back with his bludgeon; down I went and wanted to shout, but he had already made off with my mantle.

PISTHETAERUS. Formerly also the kite was ruler and king over the Greeks.

EPOPS. The Greeks?

PISTHETAERUS. And when he was king, 'twas he who first taught them to fall on their knees before the kites.²²⁴

EUELPIDES. By Zeus! 'tis what I did myself one day on seeing a kite; but at the moment I was on my knees, and leaning backwards²²⁵ with mouth agape, I bolted an obolus and was forced to carry my bag home empty.²²⁶

PISTHETAERUS. The cuckoo was king of Egypt and of the whole of Phoenicia. When he called out "cuckoo," all the Phoenicians hurried to the fields to reap their wheat and their barley.²²⁷

²²⁰ A deme of Attica. In Greek the word ([Greek: kephalai]) also means *heads*, and hence the pun.

²²¹ One of Darius' best generals. After his expedition against the Scythians, this prince gave him the command of the army which he left in Europe. Megabyzus took Perinthos (afterwards called Heraclea) and conquered Thrace.

²²² All Persians wore the tiara, but always on one side; the Great King alone wore it straight on his head.

²²³ Noted as the birthplace of Thucydides, a deme of Attica of the tribe of Leontis. Demosthenes tells us it was thirty-five stadia from Athens.

²²⁴ The appearance of the kite in Greece betokened the return of springtime; it was therefore worshipped as a symbol of that season.

²²⁵ To look at the kite, who no doubt was flying high in the sky.

²²⁶ As already shown, the Athenians were addicted to carrying small coins in their mouths.—This obolus was for the purpose of buying flour to fill the bag he was carrying.

²²⁷ In Phoenicia and Egypt the cuckoo makes its appearance about harvest-time.

EUELPIDES. Hence no doubt the proverb, "Cuckoo! cuckoo! go to the fields, ye circumcised."²²⁸

PISTHETAERUS. So powerful were the birds, that the kings of Grecian cities, Agamemnon, Menelaus, for instance, carried a bird on the tip of their sceptres, who had his share of all presents.²²⁹

EUELPIDES. That I didn't know and was much astonished when I saw Priam come upon the stage in the tragedies with a bird, which kept watching Lysicrates²³⁰ to see if he got any present.

PISTHETAERUS. But the strongest proof of all is, that Zeus, who now reigns, is represented as standing with an eagle on his head as a symbol of his royalty;²³¹ his daughter has an owl, and Phoebus, as his servant, has a hawk.

EUELPIDES. By Demeter, 'tis well spoken. But what are all these birds doing in heaven?

PISTHETAERUS. When anyone sacrifices and, according to the rite, offers the entrails to the gods, these birds take their share before Zeus. Formerly the men always swore by birds and never by the gods; even now Lampon²³² swears by the goose, when he wants to lie. . . . Thus 'tis clear that you were great and sacred, but now you are looked upon as slaves, as fools, as Helots; stones are thrown at you as at raving madmen, even in holy places. A crowd of bird-catchers sets snares, traps, limer-twigs and nets of all sorts for you; you are caught, you are sold in heaps and the buyers finger you over to be certain you are fat. Again, if they would but serve you up simply roasted; but they rasp cheese into a mixture of oil, vinegar and laserwort, to which another sweet and greasy sauce is added, and the whole is poured scalding hot over your back, for all the world as if you were diseased meat.

CHORUS. Man, your words have made my heart bleed; I have groaned over the treachery of our fathers, who knew not how to transmit to us the high rank they held from their forefathers. But 'tis a benevolent Genius, a happy Fate, that sends you to us; you shall be our deliverer and I place the destiny of my little ones and my own in your hands with every confidence. But hasten to tell me what must be done; we should not be worthy to live, if we did not seek to regain our royalty by every possible means,

PISTHETAERUS. First I advise that the birds gather together in one city and that they build a wall of great bricks, like that at Babylon, round the plains of the air and the whole region of space that divides earth from heaven.

EPOPS. Oh, Cebriones! oh, Porphyron!²³³ what a terribly strong place!

PISTHETAERUS. This, this being well done and completed, you demand back the empire from Zeus; if he will not agree, if he refuses and does not at once confess himself beaten, you declare a sacred war against him and forbid the gods henceforward to pass through your country with standing organ, as hitherto, for the purpose of fondling their Alcmenas, their Alopés, or their Semelés;²³⁴ if they try to pass through, you infibulate them with rings so that they can fuck no longer. You send another messenger to mankind, who will proclaim to them that the birds are kings, that for the future they must first of all sacrifice to them, and only afterwards to the gods; that it is fitting to appoint to

²²⁸ This was an Egyptian proverb, meaning, *When the cuckoo sings we go harvesting*. Both the Phoenicians and the Egyptians practised circumcision.

²²⁹ The staff, called a sceptre, generally terminated in a piece of carved work, representing a flower, a fruit, and most often a bird.

²³⁰ A general accused of treachery. The bird watches Lysicrates, because, according to Pisthetaerus, he had a right to a share of the presents.

²³¹ It is thus that Phidias represents his Olympian Zeus.

²³² One of the diviners sent to Sybaris (in Magna Graecia, S. Italy) with the Athenian colonists, who rebuilt the town under the new name of Thurium.

²³³ As if he were saying, "Oh, gods!" Like Lampon, he swears by the birds, instead of swearing by the gods.—The names of these birds are those of two of the Titans.

²³⁴ Alcmena, wife of Amphitryon, King of Thebes and mother of Heracles.—Semelé, the daughter of Cadmus and Hermioné and mother of Bacchus; both seduced by Zeus.—Alopé, daughter of Cercyon, a robber, who reigned at Eleusis and was conquered by Perseus. Alopé was honoured with Posidon's caresses; by him she had a son named Hippothous, at first brought up by shepherds but who afterwards was restored to the throne of his grandfather by Theseus.

each deity the bird that has most in common with it. For instance, are they sacrificing to Aphrodité, let them at the same time offer barley to the coot;²³⁵ are they immolating a sheep to Posidon, let them consecrate wheat in honour of the duck;²³⁶ is a steer being offered to Heracles, let honey-cakes be dedicated to the gull;²³⁷ is a goat being slain for King Zeus, there is a King-Bird, the wren,²³⁸ to whom the sacrifice of a male gnat is due before Zeus himself even.

EUELPIDES. This notion of an immolated gnat delights me! And now let the great Zeus thunder!

EPOPS. But how will mankind recognize us as gods and not as jays? Us, who have wings and fly?

PISTHETAERUS. You talk rubbish! Hermes is a god and has wings and flies, and so do many other gods. First of all, Victory flies with golden wings, Eros is undoubtedly winged too, and Iris is compared by Homer to a timorous dove.²³⁹ If men in their blindness do not recognize you as gods and continue to worship the dwellers in Olympus, then a cloud of sparrows greedy for corn must descend upon their fields and eat up all their seeds; we shall see then if Demeter will mete them out any wheat.

EUELPIDES. By Zeus, she'll take good care she does not, and you will see her inventing a thousand excuses.

PISTHETAERUS. The crows too will prove your divinity to them by pecking out the eyes of their flocks and of their draught-oxen; and then let Apollo cure them, since he is a physician and is paid for the purpose.²⁴⁰

EUELPIDES. Oh! don't do that! Wait first until I have sold my two young bullocks.

PISTHETAERUS. If on the other hand they recognize that you are God, the principle of life, that you are Earth, Saturn, Posidon, they shall be loaded with benefits.

EPOPS Name me one of these then.

PISTHETAERUS. Firstly, the locusts shall not eat up their vine-blossoms; a legion of owls and kestrels will devour them. Moreover, the gnats and the gall-bugs shall no longer ravage the figs; a flock of thrushes shall swallow the whole host down to the very last.

EPOPS. And how shall we give wealth to mankind? This is their strongest passion.

PISTHETAERUS. When they consult the omens, you will point them to the richest mines, you will reveal the paying ventures to the diviner, and not another shipwreck will happen or sailor perish.

EPOPS. No more shall perish? How is that?

PISTHETAERUS. When the auguries are examined before starting on a voyage, some bird will not fail to say, "Don't start! there will be a storm," or else, "Go! you will make a most profitable venture."

EUELPIDES. I shall buy a trading-vessel and go to sea. I will not stay with you.

PISTHETAERUS. You will discover treasures to them, which were buried in former times, for you know them. Do not all men say, "None know where my treasure lies, unless perchance it be some bird."²⁴¹

EUELPIDES. I shall sell my boat and buy a spade to unearth the vessels.

EPOPS. And how are we to give them health, which belongs to the gods?

²³⁵ Because the bald patch on the coot's head resembles the shaven and depilated 'motte.'

²³⁶ Because water is the duck's domain, as it is that of Posidon.

²³⁷ Because the gull, like Heracles, is voracious.

²³⁸ The Germans still call it *Zaunkönig* and the French *roitelet*, both names thus containing the idea of *king*.

²³⁹ The Scholiast draws our attention to the fact that Homer says this of Heré and not of Iris (Iliad, V. 778); it is only another proof that the text of Homer has reached us in a corrupted form, or it may be that Aristophanes was liable, like other people, to occasional mistakes of quotation.

²⁴⁰ In sacrifices.

²⁴¹ An Athenian proverb.

PISTHETAERUS. If they are happy, is not that the chief thing towards health? The miserable man is never well.

EPOPS. Old Age also dwells in Olympus. How will they get at it? Must they die in early youth?

PISTHETAERUS. Why, the birds, by Zeus, will add three hundred years to their life.

EPOPS. From whom will they take them?

PISTHETAERUS. From whom? Why, from themselves. Don't you know the cawing crow lives five times as long as a man?

EUELPIDES. Ah! ah! these are far better kings for us than Zeus!

PISTHETAERUS. Far better, are they not? And firstly, we shall not have to build them temples of hewn stone, closed with gates of gold; they will dwell amongst the bushes and in the thickets of green oak; the most venerated of birds will have no other temple than the foliage of the olive tree; we shall not go to Delphi or to Ammon to sacrifice;²⁴² but standing erect in the midst of arbutus and wild olives and holding forth our hands filled with wheat and barley, we shall pray them to admit us to a share of the blessings they enjoy and shall at once obtain them for a few grains of wheat.

CHORUS. Old man, whom I detested, you are now to me the dearest of all; never shall I, if I can help it, fail to follow your advice. Inspired by your words, I threaten my rivals the gods, and I swear that if you march in alliance with me against the gods and are faithful to our just, loyal and sacred bond, we shall soon have shattered their sceptre. 'Tis our part to undertake the toil, 'tis yours to advise.

EPOPS. By Zeus! 'tis no longer the time to delay and loiter like Nicias;²⁴³ let us act as promptly as possible.... In the first place, come, enter my nest built of brushwood and blades of straw, and tell me your names.

PISTHETAERUS. That is soon done; my name is Pisthetaerus.

EPOPS. And his?

PISTHETAERUS. Euelpides, of the deme of Thria.

EPOPS. Good! and good luck to you.

PISTHETAERUS. We accept the omen.

EPOPS. Come in here.

PISTHETAERUS. Very well, 'tis you who lead us and must introduce us.

EPOPS. Come then.

PISTHETAERUS. Oh! my god! do come back here. Hi! tell us how we are to follow you. You can fly, but we cannot.

EPOPS. Well, well.

PISTHETAERUS. Remember Aesop's fables. It is told there, that the fox fared very ill, because he had made an alliance with the eagle.

EPOPS. Be at ease. You shall eat a certain root and wings will grow on your shoulders.

PISTHETAERUS. Then let us enter. Xanthias and Manes,²⁴⁴ pick up our baggage.

CHORUS. Hi! Epop! do you hear me?

EPOPS. What's the matter?

CHORUS. Take them off to dine well and call your mate, the melodious Procné, whose songs are worthy of the Muses; she will delight our leisure moments.

PISTHETAERUS. Oh! I conjure you, accede to their wish; for this delightful bird will leave her rushes at the sound of your voice; for the sake of the gods, let her come here, so that we may contemplate the nightingale.²⁴⁵

²⁴² A celebrated temple to Zeus in an oasis of Libya.

²⁴³ Nicias was commander, along with Demosthenes, and later on Alcibiades, of the Athenian forces before Syracuse, in the ill-fated Sicilian Expedition, 415-413 B.C. He was much blamed for dilatoriness and indecision.

²⁴⁴ Servants of Pisthetaerus and Euelpides.

²⁴⁵ It has already been mentioned that, according to the legend followed by Aristophanes, Procné had been changed into a nightingale and Philomela into a swallow.

EPOPS. Let it be as you desire. Come forth, Procné, show yourself to these strangers.

PISTHETAERUS. Oh! great Zeus! what a beautiful little bird! what a dainty form! what brilliant plumage!²⁴⁶

EUELPIDES. Do you know how dearly I should like to split her legs for her?

PISTHETAERUS. She is dazzling all over with gold, like a young girl.²⁴⁷

EUELPIDES. Oh! how I should like to kiss her!

PISTHETAERUS. Why, wretched man, she has two little sharp points on her beak.

EUELPIDES. I would treat her like an egg, the shell of which we remove before eating it; I would take off her mask and then kiss her pretty face.

EPOPS. Let us go in.

PISTHETAERUS. Lead the way, and may success attend us.

CHORUS. Lovable golden bird, whom I cherish above all others, you, whom I associate with all my songs, nightingale, you have come, you have come, to show yourself to me and to charm me with your notes. Come, you, who play spring melodies upon the harmonious flute,²⁴⁸ lead off our anapaests.²⁴⁹

Weak mortals, chained to the earth, creatures of clay as frail as the foliage of the woods, you unfortunate race, whose life is but darkness, as unreal as a shadow, the illusion of a dream, hearken to us, who are immortal beings, ethereal, ever young and occupied with eternal thoughts, for we shall teach you about all celestial matters; you shall know thoroughly what is the nature of the birds, what the origin of the gods, of the rivers, of Erebus, and Chaos; thanks to us, Prodicus²⁵⁰ will envy you your knowledge.

At the beginning there was only Chaos, Night, dark Erebus, and deep Tartarus. Earth, the air and heaven had no existence. Firstly, black-winged Night laid a germless egg in the bosom of the infinite deeps of Erebus, and from this, after the revolution of long ages, sprang the graceful Eros with his glittering golden wings, swift as the whirlwinds of the tempest. He mated in deep Tartarus with dark Chaos, winged like himself, and thus hatched forth our race, which was the first to see the light. That of the Immortals did not exist until Eros had brought together all the ingredients of the world, and from their marriage Heaven, Ocean, Earth and the imperishable race of blessed gods sprang into being. Thus our origin is very much older than that of the dwellers in Olympus. We are the offspring of Eros; there are a thousand proofs to show it. We have wings and we lend assistance to lovers. How many handsome youths, who had sworn to remain insensible, have not been vanquished by our power and have yielded themselves to their lovers when almost at the end of their youth, being led away by the gift of a quail, a waterfowl, a goose, or a cock.²⁵¹

And what important services do not the birds render to mortals! First of all, they mark the seasons for them, springtime, winter, and autumn. Does the screaming crane migrate to Libya,—it warns the husbandman to sow, the pilot to take his ease beside his tiller hung up in his dwelling,²⁵² and Orestes²⁵³ to weave a tunic, so that the rigorous cold may not drive him any more to strip other folk. When the kite reappears, he tells of the return of spring and of the period when the fleece of the sheep must be clipped. Is the swallow in sight? All hasten to sell their warm tunic and to buy some

²⁴⁶ The actor, representing Procné, was dressed out as a courtesan, but wore the mask of a bird.

²⁴⁷ Young unmarried girls wore golden ornaments; the apparel of married women was much simpler.

²⁴⁸ The actor, representing Procné, was a flute-player.

²⁴⁹ The parabasis.

²⁵⁰ A sophist of the island of Ceos, a disciple of Protagoras, as celebrated for his knowledge as for his eloquence. The Athenians condemned him to death as a corrupter of youth in 396 B.C.

²⁵¹ Lovers were wont to make each other presents of birds. The cock and the goose are mentioned, of course, in jest.

²⁵² i.e. that it gave notice of the approach of winter, during which season the Ancients did not venture to sea.

²⁵³ A notorious robber.

light clothing. We are your Ammon, Delphi, Dodona, your Phoebus Apollo.²⁵⁴ Before undertaking anything, whether a business transaction, a marriage, or the purchase of food, you consult the birds by reading the omens, and you give this name of omen²⁵⁵ to all signs that tell of the future. With you a word is an omen, you call a sneeze an omen, a meeting an omen, an unknown sound an omen, a slave or an ass an omen.²⁵⁶ Is it not clear that we are a prophetic Apollo to you? If you recognize us as gods, we shall be your divining Muses, through us you will know the winds and the seasons, summer, winter, and the temperate months. We shall not withdraw ourselves to the highest clouds like Zeus, but shall be among you and shall give to you and to your children and the children of your children, health and wealth, long life, peace, youth, laughter, songs and feasts; in short, you will all be so well off, that you will be weary and satiated with enjoyment.

Oh, rustic Muse of such varied note, tio, tio, tio, tiotinx, I sing with you in the groves and on the mountain tops, tio, tio, tio, tio, tiotinx.²⁵⁷ I pour forth sacred strains from my golden throat in honour of the god Pan,²⁵⁸ tio, tio, tio, tiotinx, from the top of the thickly leaved ash, and my voice mingles with the mighty choirs who extol Cybelé on the mountain tops,²⁵⁹ totototototototinx. 'Tis to our concerts that Phrynicus comes to pillage like a bee the ambrosia of his songs, the sweetness of which so charms the ear, tio, tio, tio, tio, tinx.

If there be one of you spectators who wishes to spend the rest of his life quietly among the birds, let him come to us. All that is disgraceful and forbidden by law on earth is on the contrary honourable among us, the birds. For instance, among you 'tis a crime to beat your father, but with us 'tis an estimable deed; it's considered fine to run straight at your father and hit him, saying, "Come, lift your spur if you want to fight."²⁶⁰ The runaway slave, whom you brand, is only a spotted francolin with us.²⁶¹ Are you Phrygian like Spintharus?²⁶² Among us you would be the Phrygian bird, the goldfinch, of the race of Philemon.²⁶³ Are you a slave and a Carian like Execestides? Among us you can create yourself forefathers;²⁶⁴ you can always find relations. Does the son of Piasias want to betray the gates of the city to the foe? Let him become a partridge, the fitting offspring of his father; among us there is no shame in escaping as cleverly as a partridge.

So the swans on the banks of the Hebrus, tio, tio, tio, tio, tiotinx, mingle their voices to serenade Apollo, tio, tio, tio, tio, tiotinx, flapping their wings the while, tio, tio, tio, tio, tiotinx; their notes reach beyond the clouds of heaven; all the dwellers in the forests stand still with astonishment and delight; a calm rests upon the waters, and the Graces and the choirs in Olympus catch up the strain, tio, tio, tio, tio, tiotinx.

There is nothing more useful nor more pleasant than to have wings. To begin with, just let us suppose a spectator to be dying with hunger and to be weary of the choruses of the tragic poets; if he were winged, he would fly off, go home to dine and come back with his stomach filled. Some Patroclides in urgent need would not have to soil his cloak, but could fly off, satisfy his requirements, and, having recovered his breath, return. If one of you, it matters not who, had adulterous relations

²⁵⁴ Meaning, "*We are your oracles.*"—Dodona was an oracle in Epirus.—The temple of Zeus there was surrounded by a dense forest, all the trees of which were endowed with the gift of prophecy; both the sacred oaks and the pigeons that lived in them answered the questions of those who came to consult the oracle in pure Greek.

²⁵⁵ The Greek word for *omen* is the same as that for *bird*—[Greek: ornis].

²⁵⁶ A satire on the passion of the Greeks for seeing an omen in everything.

²⁵⁷ An imitation of the nightingale's song.

²⁵⁸ God of the groves and wilds.

²⁵⁹ The 'Mother of the Gods'; roaming the mountains, she held dances, always attended by Pan and his accompanying rout of Fauns and Satyrs.

²⁶⁰ An allusion to cock-fighting; the birds are armed with brazen spurs.

²⁶¹ An allusion to the spots on this bird, which resemble the scars left by a branding iron.

²⁶² He was of Asiatic origin, but wished to pass for an Athenian.

²⁶³ Or Philammon, King of Thrace; the Scholiast remarks that the Phrygians and the Thracians had a common origin.

²⁶⁴ The Greek word here, [Greek: pappos], is also the name of a little bird.

and saw the husband of his mistress in the seats of the senators, he might stretch his wings, fly thither, and, having appeased his craving, resume his place. Is it not the most priceless gift of all, to be winged? Look at Diitrephes!²⁶⁵ His wings were only wicker-work ones, and yet he got himself chosen Phylarch and then Hipparch; from being nobody, he has risen to be famous; 'tis now the finest gilded cock of his tribe.²⁶⁶

PISTHETAERUS. Halloa! What's this? By Zeus! I never saw anything so funny in all my life.²⁶⁷

EUELPIDES. What makes you laugh?

PISTHETAERUS. 'Tis your bits of wings. D'you know what you look like? Like a goose painted by some dauber-fellow.

EUELPIDES. And you look like a close-shaven blackbird.

PISTHETAERUS. 'Tis ourselves asked for this transformation, and, as Aeschylus has it, "These are no borrowed feathers, but truly our own."²⁶⁸

EPOPS. Come now, what must be done?

PISTHETAERUS. First give our city a great and famous name, then sacrifice to the gods.

EUELPIDES. I think so too.

EPOPS. Let's see. What shall our city be called?

PISTHETAERUS. Will you have a high-sounding Laconian name? Shall we call it Sparta?

EUELPIDES. What! call my town Sparta? Why, I would not use esparto for my bed,²⁶⁹ even though I had nothing but bands of rushes.

PISTHETAERUS. Well then, what name can you suggest?

EUELPIDES. Some name borrowed from the clouds, from these lofty regions in which we dwell—in short, some well-known name.

PISTHETAERUS. Do you like Nephelococcygia?²⁷⁰

EPOPS. Oh! capital! truly 'tis a brilliant thought!

EUELPIDES. Is it in Nephelococcygia that all the wealth of Theogenes²⁷¹ and most of Aeschines²⁷² is?

PISTHETAERUS. No, 'tis rather the plain of Phlegra,²⁷³ where the gods withered the pride of the sons of the Earth with their shafts.

EUELPIDES. Oh! what a splendid city! But what god shall be its patron? for whom shall we weave the peplus?²⁷⁴

PISTHETAERUS. Why not choose Athené Polias?²⁷⁵

EUELPIDES. Oh! what a well-ordered town 'twould be to have a female deity armed from head to foot, while Clisthenes²⁷⁶ was spinning!

²⁶⁵ A basket-maker who had become rich.—The Phylarchs were the headmen of the tribes, [Greek: Phulai]. They presided at the private assemblies and were charged with the management of the treasury.—The Hipparchs, as the name implies, were the leaders of the cavalry; there were only two of these in the Athenian army.

²⁶⁶ He had now become a senator, member of the [Greek: Boul_e].

²⁶⁷ Pisthetaerus and Euelpides now both return with wings.

²⁶⁸ Meaning, 'tis we who wanted to have these wings.—The verse from Aeschylus, quoted here, is taken from 'The Myrmidons,' a tragedy of which only a few fragments remain.

²⁶⁹ The Greek word signified the city of Sparta, and also a kind of broom used for weaving rough matting, which served for the beds of the very poor.

²⁷⁰ A fanciful name constructed from [Greek: nephel_e], a cloud, and [Greek: kokkux], a cuckoo; thus a city of clouds and cuckoos.—*Wolkenkuckelheim* [Transcriber's note: So in original. The correct German word is *Wolkenkuckucksheim*] is a clever approximation in German. Cloud-cuckoo-town, perhaps, is the best English equivalent.

²⁷¹ He was a boaster nicknamed [Greek: Kapnos], *smoke*, because he promised a great deal and never kept his word.

²⁷² Also mentioned in 'The Wasps.'

²⁷³ Because the war of the Titans against the gods was only a fiction of the poets.

²⁷⁴ A sacred cloth, with which the statue of Athené in the Acropolis was draped.

²⁷⁵ Meaning, to be patron-goddess of the city. Athené had a temple of this name.

²⁷⁶ An Athenian effeminate, frequently ridiculed by Aristophanes.

PISTHETAERUS. Who then shall guard the Pelargicon?²⁷⁷

EPOPS. One of ourselves, a bird of Persian strain, who is everywhere proclaimed to be the bravest of all, a true chick of Ares.²⁷⁸

EUELPIDES. Oh! noble chick! what a well-chosen god for a rocky home!

PISTHETAERUS. Come! into the air with you to help the workers, who are building the wall; carry up rubble, strip yourself to mix the mortar, take up the hod, tumble down the ladder, an you like, post sentinels, keep the fire smouldering beneath the ashes, go round the walls, bell in hand,²⁷⁹ and go to sleep up there yourself; then despatch two heralds, one to the gods above, the other to mankind on earth and come back here.

EUELPIDES. As for yourself, remain here, and may the plague take you for a troublesome fellow!

PISTHETAERUS. Go, friend, go where I send you, for without you my orders cannot be obeyed. For myself, I want to sacrifice to the new god, and I am going to summon the priest who must preside at the ceremony. Slaves! slaves! bring forward the basket and the lustral water.

CHORUS. I do as you do, and I wish as you wish, and I implore you to address powerful and solemn prayers to the gods, and in addition to immolate a sheep as a token of our gratitude. Let us sing the Pythian chant in honour of the god, and let Chaeris accompany our voices.

PISTHETAERUS (*to the flute-player*). Enough! but, by Heracles! what is this? Great gods! I have seen many prodigious things, but I never saw a muzzled raven.²⁸⁰

EPOPS. Priest! 'tis high time! Sacrifice to the new gods.

PRIEST. I begin, but where is he with the basket? Pray to the Vesta of the birds, to the kite, who presides over the hearth, and to all the god and goddess-birds who dwell in Olympus.

CHORUS. Oh! Hawk, the sacred guardian of Sunium, oh, god of the storks!

PRIEST. Pray to the swan of Delos, to Latona the mother of the quails, and to Artemis, the goldfinch.

PISTHETAERUS. 'Tis no longer Artemis Colaenis, but Artemis the goldfinch.²⁸¹

PRIEST. And to Bacchus, the finch and Cybelé, the ostrich and mother of the gods and mankind.

CHORUS. Oh! sovereign ostrich, Cybelé, the mother of Cleocritus,²⁸² grant health and safety to the Nephelococcygians as well as to the dwellers in Chios. . . .

PISTHETAERUS. The dwellers in Chios! Ah! I am delighted they should be thus mentioned on all occasions.²⁸³

CHORUS. . . . to the heroes, the birds, to the sons of heroes, to the porphyrion, the pelican, the spoon-bill, the redbreast, the grouse, the peacock, the horned-owl, the teal, the bittern, the heron, the stormy petrel, the fig-pecker, the titmouse. . . .

PISTHETAERUS. Stop! stop! you drive me crazy with your endless list. Why, wretch, to what sacred feast are you inviting the vultures and the sea-eagles? Don't you see that a single kite could easily carry off the lot at once? Begone, you and your fillets and all; I shall know how to complete the sacrifice by myself.

²⁷⁷ This was the name of the wall surrounding the Acropolis.

²⁷⁸ i.e. the fighting-cock.

²⁷⁹ To waken the sentinels, who might else have fallen asleep.—There are several merry contradictions in the various parts of this list of injunctions.

²⁸⁰ In allusion to the leather strap which flute-players wore to constrict the cheeks and add to the power of the breath. The performer here no doubt wore a raven's mask.

²⁸¹ Hellanicus, the Mitylenian historian, tells that this surname of Artemis is derived from Colaenus, King of Athens before Cecrops and a descendant of Hermes. In obedience to an oracle he erected a temple to the goddess, invoking her as Artemis Colaenis (the Artemis of Colaenus).

²⁸² This Cleocritus, says the Scholiast, was long-necked and strutted like an ostrich.

²⁸³ The Chians were the most faithful allies of Athens, and hence their name was always mentioned in prayers, decrees, etc.

PRIEST. It is imperative that I sing another sacred chant for the rite of the lustral water, and that I invoke the immortals, or at least one of them, provided always that you have some suitable food to offer him; from what I see here, in the shape of gifts, there is naught whatever but horn and hair.

PISTHETAERUS. Let us address our sacrifices and our prayers to the winged gods.

A POET. Oh, Muse! celebrate happy Nephelococcygia in your hymns.

PISTHETAERUS. What have we here? Where do you come from, tell me? Who are you?

POET. I am he whose language is sweeter than honey, the zealous slave of the Muses, as Homer has it.

PISTHETAERUS. You a slave! and yet you wear your hair long?

POET. No, but the fact is all we poets are the assiduous slaves of the Muses according to Homer.

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