The Birds

by Aristophanes

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THE BIRDS

By Aristophanes

(Translator uncredited. Footnotes have been retained because they provide the meanings of Greek names, terms and ceremonies and explain puns and references

otherwise lost in translation. Occasional Greek words in the footnotes have not been included. Footnote numbers, in brackets, start anew at (1) for each piece of dialogue, and each footnote follows immediately the dialogue to which it refers, labeled thus: f(1).

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 Comastoe,' 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 mis-understanding, during which they come near tearing the two human envoys to pieces, they listen to the exposition of the latters' 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.

THE BIRDS

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

EUELPIDES PISTHETAERUS EPOPS (the Hoopoe) TROCHILUS, Servant to Epops 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 SLAVES OF PISTHETAERUS MESSENGERS CHORUS OF BIRDS

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

EUELPIDES (TO HIS JAY)(1) Do you think I should walk straight for yon tree?

f(1) Euelpides is holding a jay and Pisthetaerus a crow; they are the guides who are to lead them to the kingdom of the birds.

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 that I to this jay, which has torn every nail from my fingers!

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

EUELPIDES Could you find your country again from here?

PISTHETAERUS No, I feel quite sure I could not, any more than could Execestides(1) find his.

f(1) A stranger who wanted to pass as an Athenian, although coming originally for a far-away barbarian country.

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,(1) the Epops, who is a bird, without being born of one. He has indeed sold us this jay, a true son of Tharelides,(2) 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.

f(1) A king of Thrace, a son of Ares, who married Procne, 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 Procne had borne 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 metamorph(o)sed. Tereus became an Epops (hoopoe), Procne a swallow, Philomela a nightingale, and Itys a goldfinch. According to Anacreon and Apollodorus it was Procne who became the nightingale and Philomela the swallow, and this is the version of the tradition followed by Aristophanes.

f(2) An Athenian who had some resemblance to a jay—so says the scholiast, at any rate.

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,(1) do everything we can to that end, and we cannot find our way! Yes, spectators, our madness is quite different from 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.(2) That is why we started off with a basket, a stew-pot and some myrtle boughs(3) 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.

f(1) Literally, 'to go to the crows,' a proverbial expression equivalent to our 'going to the devil.'

f(2) They leave Athens because of their hatred of lawsuits and informers; this is the especial failing of the Athenians satirized in 'The Wasps.'

f(3) Myrtle boughs were used in sacrifices, and the founding of every colony was started by a sacrifice.

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! It would be much better to shout, "Epops, Epops!"

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

TROCHILUS Who's there? Who calls my master?

PISTHETAERUS Apollo the Deliverer! what an enormous beak!(1)

f(1) The actors wore masks made to resemble the birds they were supposed to represent.

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.(1)

f(1) Fear had had disastrous effects upon Euelpides' internal economy, and this his feet evidenced.

TROCHILUS And this other one, what bird is it?

PISTHETAERUS I? I am a Cackling,(1) from the land of the pheasants.

f(1) The same mishap had occurred to Pisthetaerus.

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.(1) Come, Trochilus, do us the kindness to call your master.

f(1) The Greek word for a wren is derived from the same root as 'to run.'

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 an 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,(1) that I may go out!

f(1) No doubt there was some scenery to represent a forest. Besides, there is a pun intended. The words answering for 'forests' and 'door' in Greek only differ slightly in sound.

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.

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.(1)

f(1) Sophocles had written a tragedy about Tereus, in which, no doubt, the king finally appears as a hoopoe.

EUELPIDES You were Tereus, and what are you now? a bird or a peacock?(1)

f(1) (O)ne would expect the question to be "bird or man."—Are you a peacock? The hoopoe resembles the peacock inasmuch as both have crests.

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.(1)

f(1) Athens.

EPOPS Are you dicasts?(1)

f(1) The Athenians were madly addicted to lawsuits. (See 'The Wasps.')

EUELPIDES No, if anything, we are anti-dicasts.

EPOPS Is that kind of seed sown among you?(1)

f(1) As much as to say, 'Then you have such things as anti-dicasts?' And Euelpides practically replaces, 'Very few.'

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.(1)

f(1) His name was Aristocrates; he was a general and commanded a fleet sent in aid of Corcyra.

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 parts. Would anyone call you an old friend of mine?"

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 Salaminian(1) galley can appear, bringing a writ-server along. Have you no Greek town you can propose to us?

f(1) 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.

EPOPS Why not choose Lepreum in Elis for your settlement?

EUELPIDES By Zeus! I could not look at Lepreum without disgust, because of Melanthius.(1)

f(1) A tragic poet, who was a leper; there is a play, of course, on the word Lepreum.

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

EUELPIDES I would not be Opuntian(1) for a talent. But come, what is it like to live with the birds? You should know pretty well.

f(1) An allusion to Opuntius, who was one-eyed.

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.(1)

f(1) The newly-married ate a sesame-cake, decorated with garlands of myrtle, poppies and mint.

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 Teleas 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.'(1) If you build and fortify it, you will turn your pole into a fortified city.(2) In this way you will reign over mankind as you do over the grasshoppers and cause the gods to die of rabid hunger.

f(1) From (the word meaning) 'to turn.'

f(2) The Greek words for 'pole' and 'city' only differ by a single letter.

EPOPS How so?

PISTHETAERUS The air is 'twixt earth and heaven. When we want to go to Delphi, we ask the Boeotians(1) for leave of passage; in the same way, when men sacrifice to the gods, unless the 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.

f(1) Boeotia separated Attica from Phocis.

EPOPS By earth! by snares! by network!(1) I never heard of anything more cleverly conceived; and, if the other birds approve, I am going to build the city along with you.

f(1) He swears by the powers that are to him dreadful.

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 Procne!(1) as soon as they hear our voices, they will come to us hot wing.

f(1) As already stated, according to the legend accepted by Aristophanes, it was Procne who was turned into the nightengale.

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

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,(1) 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.)

f(1) The son of Tereus and Procne.

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?

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.(1)

f(1) An African bird, that comes to the southern countries of Europe, to Greece, Italy, and Spain; it is even seen in Provence.

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.(1)

f(1) Aristophanes amusingly mixes up real birds with people and individuals, whom he represents in the form of birds; he is personifying the Medians here.

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;(1) so that, you see, I am his grandfather; just as one might say, Hipponicus,(2) the son of Callias, who is the son of Hipponicus.

f(1) 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.

f(2) 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.

PISTHETAERUS Then this bird is Callias! Why, what a lot of his feathers he has lost!(1)

f(1) This Callias, who must not be confounded with the foe of Pisistratus, had ruined himself.

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?(1) But what is the meaning of all these crests? Have these birds come to contend for the double stadium prize?(2)

f(1) Cleonymus had cast away his shield; he was as great a glutton as he was a coward.

f(2) A race in which the track had to be circled twice.

EPOPS They are like the Carians, who cling to the crests of their mountains for greater safety.(1)

f(1) A people of Asia Minor; when pursued by the Ionians they took refuge in the mountains.

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.(1) Here comes the owl.

f(1) An Athenian barber.

EUELPIDES And who is it brings an owl to Athens?(1)

f(1) The owl was dedicated to Athene, and being respected at Athens, it had greatly multiplied. Hence the proverb, 'taking owls to Athens,' similar to our English 'taking coals to Newcastle.'

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 woodpecker.

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 Popopopopopopopoi. 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 Titititititititi. 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.(1)

f(1) 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 Athene. 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.

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,(1) where stratagem is concerned.

f(1) 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.

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.(1)

f(1) Procne, the daughter of Pandion, King of Athens.

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 forebears!

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;(1) for, to get a public funeral, we shall tell the Strategi that we fell at Orneae,(2) fighting the country's foes.

f(1) 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.

f(2) A town in Western Argolis, where the Athenians had been recently defeated. The somewhat similar work in Greek signifies 'birds.'

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, Epops, 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?

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;(1) as for you, address the birds, tell them why I have gathered them together.

f(1) Epops is addressing the two slaves, no doubt Xanthias and Manes, who are mentioned later on.

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 parts, 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!(1)

f(1) 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.

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!

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.(1)

f(1) A deme of Attica. In Greek the word also means 'heads,' and hence the pun.

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.(1) 'Tis in memory of his reign that he is called the Persian bird.

f(1) 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.

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.(1)

f(1) All Persians wore the tiara, but always on one side; the Great King alone wore it straight on his head.

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 about 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.(1) 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.

f(1) 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.

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.(1)

f(1) The appearance of the kite in Greece betokened the return of springtime; it was therefore worshipped as a symbol of that season.

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 backwards(1) with mouth agape, I bolted an obolus and was forced to carry my bag home empty.(2)

f(1) To look at the kite, who no doubt was flying high in the sky.

f(2) 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

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.(1)

f(1) 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."(1)

f(1) This was an Egyptian proverb, meaning, 'When the cuckoo sings we go harvesting.' Both the Phoenicians and the Egyptians practised circumcision.

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.(1)

f(1) The staff, called a sceptre, generally terminated in a piece of carved work, representing a flower, a fruit, and most often a bird.

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 Lysicrates(1) to see if he got any present.

f(1) A general accused of treachery. The bird watches Lysicrates, because, according to Pisthetaerus, he had a right to a share of the presents.

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;(1) his

daughter has an owl, and Phoebus, as his servant, has a hawk.

f(1) It is thus that Phidias represents his Olympian Zeus.

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 men always swore by the birds and never by the gods; even now Lampon(1) 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, limed-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.

f(1) 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.

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, Porphyrion!(1) what a terribly strong place!

f(1) 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.

PISTHETAERUS Th(en), 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 lust, as hitherto, for the purpose of fondling their Alcmenas, their Alopes, or their Semeles!(1) if they try to pass through, you infibulate them with rings so that they can work 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 each deity the bird that has most in common with it. For instance, are they sacrificing to Aphrodite, let them at the same time offer barley to the coot; are they immolating a sheep to Posidon, let them consecrate wheat in honour of the duck;(2) is a steer being offered to Heracles, let honey-cakes be dedicated to the gull;(3) is a goat being slain for King Zeus, there is a King-Bird, the wren,(4) to whom the sacrifice of a male gnat is due before Zeus himself even.

f(1) Alcmena, wife of Amphitryon, King of Thebes and mother of Heracles.—Semele, the daughter of Cadmus and Hermione and mother of Bacchus; both seduced by Zeus.—Alope, daughter of Cercyon, a robber, who reigned at Eleusis and was conquered by Perseus. Alope 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.

f(2) Because water is the duck's domain, as it is that of Posidon.

f(3) Because the gull, like Heracles, is voracious.

f(4) The Germans still call it 'Zaunkonig' and the French 'roitelet,' both names thus containing the idea of 'king.'

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.(1) 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.

f(1) The scholiast draws our attention to the fact that Homer says this of Here 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.

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.(1)

f(1) In sacrifices.

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 knows where my treasure lies, unless perchance it be some bird."(1)

f(1) An Athenian proverb.

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?

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;(1) 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.

f(1) A celebrated temple to Zeus in an oasis of Libya.

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. Inspirited 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;(1) 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.

f(1) 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.

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,(1) pick up our baggage.

f(1) Servants of Pisthetaerus and Euelpides.

CHORUS Hi! Epops! do you hear me?

EPOPS What's the matter?

CHORUS Take them off to dine well and call your mate, the melodious Procne, 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.(1)

f(1) It has already been mentioned that, according to the legend followed by Aristophanes, Procne had been changed into a nightingale and Philomela into a swallow.

EPOPS Let it be as you desire. Come forth, Procne, show yourself to these strangers.

PISTHETAERUS Oh! great Zeus! what a beautiful little bird! what a dainty form! what brilliant plumage!(1)

f(1) The actor, representing Procne, was dressed out as a courtesan, but wore a mask of a bird.

EUELPIDES Do you know how dearly I should like to splint her legs for her?

PISTHETAERUS She is dazzling all over with gold, like a young girl.(1)

f(1) Young unmarried girls wore golden ornaments; the apparel of married women was much simpler.

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,(1) lead off our anapaests.(2)

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, even Prodicus(3) 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.(4)

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,(5) and Orestes(6) 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 light clothing. We are your Ammon, Delphi, Dodona, your Phoebus Apollo.(7) 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 omen(8) 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.(9) 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.(10) I poured forth sacred strains from my golden throat in honour of the god Pan,(11) tio, tio, tio, tiotinx, from the top of the thickly leaved ash, and my voice mingles with the mighty choirs who extol Cybele on the mountain tops,(12) totototototototototinx. 'Tis to our concerts that Phrynichus 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."(13) The runaway slave, whom you brand, is only a spotted francolin with us.(14) Are you Phrygian like Spintharus?(15) Among us you would be the Phrygian bird, the goldfinch, of the race of Philemon.(16) Are you a slave and a Carian like Execestides? Among us you can create yourself fore-fathers;(17) you can always find relations. Does the son of Pisias 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 forest 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 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!(18) 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.(19)

f(1) The actor, representing Procne, was a flute-player.

f(2) The parabasis.

f(3) 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.

f(4) Lovers were wont to make each other presents of birds. The cock and the goose are mentioned, of course, in jest.

f(5) i.e. that it gave notice of the approach of winter, during which season the Ancients did not venture to sea.

f(6) A notorious robber.

f(7) 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.

f(8) The Greek word for 'omen' is the same as that for 'bird.'

f(9) A satire on the passion of the Greeks for seeing an omen in everything.

f(10) An imitation of the nightingale's song.

f(11) God of the groves and wilds.

f(12) The 'Mother of the Gods'; roaming the mountains, she held dances, always attended by Pan and his accompanying rout of Fauns and Satyrs.

f(13) An allusion to cock-fighting; the birds are armed with brazen spurs.

f(14) An allusion to the spots on this bird, which resemble the scars left by a branding iron.

f(15) He was of Asiatic origin, but wished to pass for an Athenian.

f(16) Or Philamnon, King of Thrace; the scholiast remarks that the Phrygians and the Thracians had a common origin.

f(17) The Greek word here is also the name of a little bird.

f(18) A basket-maker who had become rich.—The Phylarchs were the headmen of the tribes. 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.

f(19) He had become a senator.

PISTHETAERUS Halloa! What's this? By Zeus! I never saw anything so funny in all my life.(1)

f(1) Pisthetaerus and Euelpides now both return with wings.

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."(1)

f(1) 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.

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,(1) even though I had nothing but bands of rushes.

f(1) 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.

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?(1)

f(1) A fanciful name constructed from (the word for) a cloud, and (the word for) a cuckoo; thus a city of clouds and cuckoos.—'Wolkenkukelheim' is a clever approximation in German. Cloud-cuckoo-town, perhaps, is the best English equivalent.

EPOPS Oh! capital! truly 'tis a brilliant thought!

EUELPIDES Is it in Nephelococcygia that all the wealth of Theovenes(1) and most

of Aeschines'(2) is?

f(1) He was a boaster nicknamed 'smoke,' because he promised a great deal and never kept his word.

f(2) Also mentioned in 'The Wasps.'

PISTHETAERUS No, 'tis rather the plain of Phlegra,(1) where the gods withered the pride of the sons of the Earth with their shafts.

f(1) Because the war of the Titans against the gods was only a fiction of the poets.

EUELPIDES Oh! what a splendid city! But what god shall be its patron? for whom shall we weave the peplus?(1)

f(1) A sacred cloth, with which the statue of Athene in the Acropolis was draped.

PISTHETAERUS Why not choose Athene Polias?(1)

f(1) Meaning, to be patron-goddess of the city. Athene had a temple of this name.

EUELPIDES Oh! what a well-ordered town 'twould be to have a female deity armed from head to foot, while Clisthenes(1) was spinning!

f(1) An Athenian effeminate, frequently ridiculed by Aristophanes.

PISTHETAERUS Who then shall guard the Pelargicon?(1)

f(1) This was the name of the wall surrounding the Acropolis.

EPOPS One of us, a bird of Persian strain, who is everywhere proclaimed to be the bravest of all, a true chick of Ares.(1)

f(1) i.e. the fighting cock.

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,(1) and go to sleep up there yourself; then

d(i)spatch two heralds, one to the gods above, the other to mankind on earth and come back here.

f(1) To waken the sentinels, who might else have fallen asleep.—There are several merry contradictions in the various parts of this list of injunctions.

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.(1)

f(1) 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.

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.(1)

f(1) 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).

PRIEST And to Bacchus, the finch and Cybele, the ostrich and mother of the gods and mankind.

CHORUS Oh! sovereign ostrich, Cybele, The mother of Cleocritus,(1) grant health and safety to the Nephelococcygians as well as to the dwellers in Chios...

f(1) This Cleocritus, says the scholiast, was long-necked and strutted like an ostrich.

PISTHETAERUS The dwellers in Chios! Ah! I am delighted they should be thus mentioned on all occasions.(1)

f(1) The Chians were the most faithful allies of Athens, and hence their name was always mentioned in prayers, decrees, etc.

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.

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 did 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.

PISTHETAERUS In truth your little cloak is quite holy too through zeal! But, poet, what ill wind drove you here?

POET I have composed verses in honour of your Nephelococcygia, a host of splendid dithyrambs and parthenians(1) worthy of Simonides himself.

f(1) Verses sung by maidens.

PISTHETAERUS And when did you compose them? How long since?

POET Oh! 'tis long, aye, very long, that I have sung in honour of this city.

PISTHETAERUS But I am only celebrating its foundation with this sacrifice;(1) I have only just named it, as is done with little babies.

f(1) This ceremony took place on the tenth day after birth, and may be styled the pagan baptism.

POET "Just as the chargers fly with the speed of the wind, so does the voice of the Muses take its flight. Oh! thou noble founder of the town of Aetna,(1) thou, whose name recalls the holy sacrifices,(2) make us such gift as thy generous heart shall suggest."

f(1) Hiero, tyrant of Syracuse.—This passage is borrowed from Pindar.

f(2) (Hiero) in Greek means 'sacrifice.'

PISTHETAERUS He will drive us silly if we do not get rid of him by some present. Here! you, who have a fur as well as your tunic, take it off and give it to this clever poet. Come, take this fur; you look to me to be shivering with cold.

POET My Muse will gladly accept this gift; but engrave these verses of Pindar's on your mind.

PISTHETAERUS Oh! what a pest! 'Tis impossible then to be rid of him!

POET "Straton wanders among the Scythian nomads, but has no linen garment. He is sad at only wearing an animal's pelt and no tunic." Do you conceive my bent?

PISTHETAERUS I understand that you want me to offer you a tunic. Hi! you (TO EUELPIDES), take off yours; we must help the poet.... Come, you, take it and begone.

POET I am going, and these are the verses that I address to this city: "Phoebus of the golden throne, celebrate this shivery, freezing city; I have travelled through fruitful and snow-covered plains. Tralala! Tralala!"(1)

f(1) A parody of poetic pathos, not to say bathos.

PISTHETAERUS What are you chanting us about frosts? Thanks to the tunic, you no longer fear them. Ah! by Zeus! I could not have believed this cursed fellow could so soon have learnt the way to our city. Come, priest, take the lustral water and circle the altar.

PRIEST Let all keep silence!

A PROPHET Let not the goat be sacrificed.(1)

f(1) Which the priest was preparing to sacrifice.

PISTHETAERUS Who are you?

PROPHET Who am I? A prophet.

PISTHETAERUS Get you gone.

PROPHET Wretched man, insult not sacred things. For there is an oracle of Bacis, which exactly applies to Nephelococcygia.

PISTHETAERUS Why did you not reveal it to me before I founded my city?

PROPHET The divine spirit was against it.

PISTHETAERUS Well, 'tis best to know the terms of the oracle.

PROPHET "But when the wolves and the white crows shall dwell together between Corinth and Sicyon..."

PISTHETAERUS But how do the Corinthians concern me?

PROPHET 'Tis the regions of the air that Bacis indicated in this manner. "They must first sacrifice a white-fleeced goat to Pandora, and give the prophet, who first reveals my words, a good cloak and new sandals."

PISTHETAERUS Are the sandals there?

PROPHET Read. "And besides this a goblet of wine and a good share of the entrails of the victim."

PISTHETAERUS Of the entrails—is it so written?

PROPHET Read. "If you do as I command, divine youth, you shall be an eagle among the clouds; if not, you shall be neither turtle-dove, nor eagle, nor woodpecker."

PISTHETAERUS Is all that there?

PROPHET Read.

PISTHETAERUS This oracle in no sort of way resembles the one Apollo dictated to me: "If an impostor comes without invitation to annoy you during the sacrifice and to demand a share of the victim, apply a stout stick to his ribs."

PROPHET You are drivelling.

PISTHETAERUS "And don't spare him, were he an eagle from out of the clouds,

were it Lampon(1) himself or the great Diopithes."(2)

f(1) Noted Athenian diviner, who, when the power was still shared between Thucydides and Pericles, predicted that it would soon be centred in the hands of the latter; his ground for this prophecy was the sight of a ram with a single horn.

f(2) No doubt another Athenian diviner, and possibly the same person whom Aristophanes names in 'The Knights' and 'The Wasps' as being a thief.

PROPHET Is all that there?

PISTHETAERUS Here, read it yourself, and go and hang yourself.

PROPHET Oh! unfortunate wretch that I am.

PISTHETAERUS Away with you, and take your prophecies elsewhere.

METON(1) I have come to you.

f(1) A celebrated geometrician and astronomer.

PISTHETAERUS Yet another pest! What have you come to do? What's your plan? What's the purpose of your journey? Why these splendid buskins?

METON I want to survey the plains of the air for you and to parcel them into lots.

PISTHETAERUS In the name of the gods, who are you?

METON Who am I? Meton, known throughout Greece and at Colonus.(1)

f(1) A deme contiguous to Athens. It is as though he said, "Well known throughout all England and at Croydon.

PISTHETAERUS What are these things?

METON Tools for measuring the air. In truth, the spaces in the air have precisely the form of a furnace. With this bent ruler I draw a line from top to bottom; from one of its points I describe a circle with the compass. Do you understand?

PISTHETAERUS Not the very least.

METON With the straight ruler I set to work to inscribe a square within this circle;

in its centre will be the market-place, into which all the straight streets will lead, converging to this centre like a star, which, although only orbicular, sends forth its rays in a straight line from all sides.

PISTHETAERUS Meton, you new Thales...(1)

f(1) Thales was no less famous as a geometrician than he was as a sage.

METON What d'you want with me?

PISTHETAERUS I want to give you a proof of my friendship. Use your legs.

METON Why, what have I to fear?

PISTHETAERUS 'Tis the same here as in Sparta. Strangers are driven away, and blows rain down as thick as hail.

METON Is there sedition in your city?

PISTHETAERUS No, certainly not.

METON What's wrong then?

PISTHETAERUS We are agreed to sweep all quacks and impostors far from our borders.

METON Then I'm off.

PISTHETAERUS I fear 'tis too late. The thunder growls already. (BEATS HIM.)

METON Oh, woe! oh, woe!

PISTHETAERUS I warned you. Now, be off, and do your surveying somewhere else. (METON TAKES TO HIS HEELS.)

AN INSPECTOR Where are the Proxeni?(1)

f(1) Officers of Athens, whose duty was to protect strangers who came on political or other business, and see to their interests generally.

PISTHETAERUS Who is this Sardanapalus?(1)

f(1) He addresses the inspector thus because of the royal and magnificent manners

he assumes.

INSPECTOR I have been appointed by lot to come to Nephelococcygia as inspector.(1)

f(1) Magistrates appointed to inspect the tributary towns.

PISTHETAERUS An inspector! and who sends you here, you rascal?

INSPECTOR A decree of T(e)leas.(1)

f(1) A much-despised citizen, already mentioned. He ironically supposes him invested with the powers of an Archon, which ordinarily were entrusted only to men of good repute.

PISTHETAERUS Will you just pocket your salary, do nothing, and be off?

INSPECTOR I' faith! that I will; I am urgently needed to be at Athens to attend the assembly; for I am charged with the interests of Pharnaces.(1)

f(1) A Persian satrap.—An allusion to certain orators, who, bribed with Asiatic gold, had often defended the interests of the foe in the Public Assembly.

PISTHETAERUS Take it then, and be off. See, here is your salary. (BEATS HIM.)

INSPECTOR What does this mean?

PISTHETAERUS 'Tis the assembly where you have to defend Pharnaces.

INSPECTOR You shall testify that they dare to strike me, the inspector.

PISTHETAERUS Are you not going to clear out with your urns? 'Tis not to be believed; they send us inspectors before we have so much as paid sacrifice to the gods.

A DEALER IN DECREES "If the Nephelococcygian does wrong to the Athenian..."

PISTHETAERUS Now whatever are these cursed parchments?

DEALER IN DECREES I am a dealer in decrees, and I have come here to sell you the new laws.

PISTHETAERUS Which?

DEALER IN DECREES "The Nephelococcygians shall adopt the same weights, measures and decrees as the Olophyxians."(1)

f(1) A Macedonian people in the peninsula of Chalcidice. This name is chosen because of its similarity to the Greek word (for) 'to groan.' It is from another verb, meaning the same thing, that Pisthetaerus coins the name of Ototyxians, i.e. groaners, because he is about to beat the dealer.—The mother-country had the right to impose any law it chose upon its colonies.

PISTHETAERUS And you shall soon be imitating the Ototyxians. (BEATS HIM.)

DEALER IN DECREES Hullo! what are you doing?

PISTHETAERUS Now will you be off with your decrees? For I am going to let YOU see some severe ones.

INSPECTOR (RETURNING) I summon Pisthetaerus for outrage for the month of Munychion.(1)

f(1) Corresponding to our month of April.

PISTHETAERUS Ha! my friend! are you still there?

DEALER IN DECREES "Should anyone drive away the magistrates and not receive them, according to the decree duly posted..."

PISTHETAERUS What! rascal! you are there too?

INSPECTOR Woe to you! I'll have you condemned to a fine of ten thousand drachmae.

PISTHETAERUS And I'll smash your urns.(1)

f(1) Which the inspector had brought with him for the purpose of inaugurating the assemblies of the people or some tribunal.

INSPECTOR Do you recall that evening when you stooled against the column where the decrees are posted?

PISTHETAERUS Here! here! let him be seized. (THE INSPECTOR RUNS OFF.) Well! don't you want to stop any longer?

PRIEST Let us get indoors as quick as possible; we will sacrifice the goat inside.(1)

f(1) So that the sacrifices might no longer be interrupted.

CHORUS Henceforth it is to me that mortals must address their sacrifices and their prayers. Nothing escapes my sight nor my might. My glance embraces the universe, I preserve the fruit in the flower by destroying the thousand kinds of voracious insects the soil produces, which attack the trees and feed on the germ when it has scarcely formed in the calyx; I destroy those who ravage the balmy terrace gardens like a deadly plague; all these gnawing crawling creatures perish beneath the lash of my wing. I hear it proclaimed everywhere: "A talent for him who shall kill Diagoras of Melos,(1) and a talent for him who destroys one of the dead tyrants."(2) We likewise wish to make our proclamation: "A talent to him among you who shall kill Philocrates, the Struthian;(3) four, if he brings him to us alive. For this Philocrates skewers the finches together and sells them at the rate of an obolus for seven. He tortures the thrushes by blowing them out, so that they may look bigger, sticks their own feathers into the nostrils of blackbirds, and collects pigeons, which he shuts up and forces them, fastened in a net, to decoy others." That is what we wish to proclaim. And if anyone is keeping birds shut up in his yard, let him hasten to let them loose; those who disobey shall be seized by the birds and we shall put them in chains, so that in their turn they may decoy other men.

Happy indeed is the race of winged birds who need no cloak in winter! Neither do I fear the relentless rays of the fiery dog-days; when the divine grasshopper, intoxicated with the sunlight, when noon is burning the ground, is breaking out into shrill melody; my home is beneath the foliage in the flowery meadows. I winter in deep caverns, where I frolic with the mountain nymphs, while in spring I despoil the gardens of the Graces and gather the white, virgin berry on the myrtle bushes.

I want now to speak to the judges about the prize they are going to award; if they are favourable to us, we will load them with benefits far greater than those Paris(4) received. Firstly, the owls of Laurium,(5) which every judge desires above all things, shall never be wanting to you; you shall see them homing with you, building their nests in your money-bags and laying coins. Besides, you shall be housed like the gods, for we shall erect gables(6) over your dwellings; if you hold some public post and want to do a little pilfering, we will give you the sharp claws of a hawk. Are you dining in town, we will provide you with crops.(7) But, if your award is against us, don't fail to have metal covers fashioned for yourselves, like those they place over statues;(8) else, look out! for the day you wear a white tunic all the birds will soil it with their droppings.

f(1) A disciple of Democrites; he passed over from superstition to atheism. The injustice and perversity of mankind led him to deny the existence of the gods, to lay bare the mysteries and to break the idols. The Athenians had put a price on his head, so he left Greece and perished soon afterwards in a storm at sea.

f(2) By this jest Aristophanes means to imply that tyranny is dead, and that no one aspires to despotic power, though this silly accusation was constantly being raised by the demagogues and always favourably received by the populace.

f(3) A poulterer.—Strouthian, used in joke to designate him, as if from the name of his 'deme,' is derived from (the Greek for) 'a sparrow.' The birds' foe is thus grotesquely furnished with an ornithological surname.

f(4) From Aphrodite (Venus), to whom he had awarded the apple, prize of beauty, in the contest of the "goddesses three."

f(5) Laurium was an Athenian deme at the extremity of the Attic peninsula containing valuable silver mines, the revenues of which were largely employed in the maintenance of the fleet and payment of the crews. The "owls of Laurium," of course, mean pieces of money; the Athenian coinage was stamped with a

representation of an owl, the bird of Athene.

f(6) A pun, impossible to keep in English, on the two meanings of (the Greek) word which signifies both an eagle and the gable of a house or pediment of a temple.

f(7) That is, birds' crops, into which they could stow away plenty of good things.

f(8) The Ancients appear to have placed metal discs over statues standing in the open air, to save them from injury from the weather, etc.

PISTHETAERUS Birds! the sacrifice is propitious. But I see no messenger coming from the wall to tell us what is happening. Ah! here comes one running himself out of breath as though he were running the Olympic stadium.

MESSENGER Where, where is he? Where, where, where is he? Where, where, where is he? Where is Pisthetaerus, our leader?

PISTHETAERUS Here am I.

MESSENGER The wall is finished.

PISTHETAERUS That's good news.

MESSENGER 'Tis a most beautiful, a most magnificent work of art. The wall is so broad that Proxenides, the Braggartian, and Theogenes could pass each other in their chariots, even if they were drawn by steeds as big as the Trojan horse.

PISTHETAERUS 'Tis wonderful!

MESSENGER Its length is one hundred stadia; I measured it myself.

PISTHETAERUS A decent length, by Posidon! And who built such a wall?

MESSENGER Birds—birds only; they had neither Egyptian brickmaker, nor stone-mason, nor carpenter; the birds did it all themselves; I could hardly believe my eyes. Thirty thousand cranes came from Libya with a supply of stones,(1) intended for the foundations. The water-rails chiselled them with their beaks. Ten thousand storks were busy making bricks; plovers and other water fowl carried water into the air.

f(1) So as not to be carried away by the wind when crossing the sea, cranes are popularly supposed to ballast themselves with stones, which they carry in their beaks.

PISTHETAERUS And who carried the mortar?

MESSENGER Herons, in hods.

PISTHETAERUS But how could they put the mortar into hods?

MESSENGER Oh! 'twas a truly clever invention; the geese used their feet like spades; they buried them in the pile of mortar and then emptied them into the hods.

PISTHETAERUS Ah! to what use cannot feet be put?(1)

f(1) Pisthetaerus modifies the Greek proverbial saying, "To what use cannot hands be put?"

MESSENGER You should have seen how eagerly the ducks carried bricks. To complete the tale, the swallows came flying to the work, their beaks full of mortar and their trowel on their back, just the way little children are carried.

PISTHETAERUS Who would want paid servants after this? But tell me, who did the woodwork?

MESSENGER Birds again, and clever carpenters too, the pelicans, for they squared up the gates with their beaks in such a fashion that one would have thought they were using axes; the noise was just like a dockyard. Now the whole wall is tight everywhere, securely bolted and well guarded; it is patrolled, bell in hand; the sentinels stand everywhere and beacons burn on the towers. But I must run off to clean myself; the rest is your business.

CHORUS Well! what do you say to it? Are you not astonished at the wall being completed so quickly?

PISTHETAERUS By the gods, yes, and with good reason. 'Tis really not to be believed. But here comes another messenger from the wall to bring us some further

news! What a fighting look he has!

SECOND MESSENGER Oh! oh! oh! oh! oh! oh!

PISTHETAERUS What's the matter?

SECOND MESSENGER A horrible outrage has occurred; a god sent by Zeus has passed through our gates and has penetrated the realms of the air without the knowledge of the jays, who are on guard in the daytime.

PISTHETAERUS 'Tis an unworthy and criminal deed. What god was it?

SECOND MESSENGER We don't know that. All we know is, that he has got wings.

PISTHETAERUS Why were not guards sent against him at once?

SECOND MESSENGER We have d(i)spatched thirty thousand hawks of the legion of Mounted Archers.(1) All the hook-clawed birds are moving against him, the kestrel, the buzzard, the vulture, the great-horned owl; they cleave the air, so that it resounds with the flapping of their wings; they are looking everywhere for the god, who cannot be far away; indeed, if I mistake not, he is coming from yonder side.

f(1) A corps of Athenian cavalry was so named.

PISTHETAERUS All arm themselves with slings and bows! This way, all our soldiers; shoot and strike! Some one give me a sling!

CHORUS War, a terrible war is breaking out between us and the gods! Come, let each one guard Air, the son of Erebus,(1) in which the clouds float. Take care no immortal enters it without your knowledge. Scan all sides with your glance. Hark! methinks I can hear the rustle of the swift wings of a god from heaven.

f(1) Chaos, Night, Tartarus, and Erebus alone existed in the beginning; Eros was born from Night and Erebus, and he wedded Chaos and begot Earth, Air, and Heaven; so runs the fable.

PISTHETAERUS Hi! you woman! where are you flying to? Halt, don't stir! keep

motionless! not a beat of your wing!—Who are you and from what country? You must say whence you come.(1)

f(1) Iris appears from the top of the stage and arrests her flight in mid-career.

IRIS I come from the abode of the Olympian gods.

PISTHETAERUS What's your name, ship or cap?(1)

f(1) Ship, because of her wings, which resemble oars; cap, because she no doubt wore the head-dress (as a messenger of the gods) with which Hermes is generally depicted.

IRIS I am swift Iris.

PISTHETAERUS Paralus or Salaminia?(1)

f(1) The names of the two sacred galleys which carried Athenian officials on State business.

IRIS What do you mean?

PISTHETAERUS Let a buzzard rush at her and seize her.(1)

f(1) A buzzard is named in order to raise a laugh, the Greek name also meaning, etymologically, provided with three testicles, vigorous in love.

IRIS Seize me! But what do all these insults mean?

PISTHETAERUS Woe to you!

IRIS 'Tis incomprehensible.

PISTHETAERUS By which gate did you pass through the wall, wretched woman?

IRIS By which gate? Why, great gods, I don't know.

PISTHETAERUS You hear how she holds us in derision. Did you present yourself to the officers in command of the jays? You don't answer. Have you a permit, bearing the seal of the storks?

IRIS Am I awake?

PISTHETAERUS Did you get one?

IRIS Are you mad?

PISTHETAERUS No head-bird gave you a safe-conduct?

IRIS A safe-conduct to me, you poor fool!

PISTHETAERUS Ah! and so you slipped into this city on the sly and into these realms of air-land that don't belong to you.

IRIS And what other roads can the gods travel?

PISTHETAERUS By Zeus! I know nothing about that, not I. But they won't pass this way. And you still dare to complain! Why, if you were treated according to your deserts, no Iris would ever have more justly suffered death.

IRIS I am immortal.

PISTHETAERUS You would have died nevertheless.—Oh! 'twould be truly intolerable! What! should the universe obey us and the gods alone continue their insolence and not understand that they must submit to the law of the strongest in their due turn? But tell me, where are you flying to?

IRIS I? The messenger of Zeus to mankind, I am going to tell them to sacrifice sheep and oxen on the altars and to fill their streets with the rich smoke of burning fat.

PISTHETAERUS Of which gods are you speaking?

IRIS Of which? Why, of ourselves, the gods of heaven.

PISTHETAERUS You, gods?

IRIS Are there others then?

PISTHETAERUS Men now adore the birds as gods, and 'tis to them, by Zeus, that they must offer sacrifices, and not to Zeus at all!

IRIS Oh! fool! fool! Rouse not the wrath of the gods, for 'tis terrible indeed. Armed

with the brand of Zeus, Justice would annihilate your race; the lightning would strike you as it did Licymnius and consume both your body and the porticos of your palace.(1)

f(1) Iris' reply is a parody of the tragic style.—'Lycimnius' is, according to the scholiast, the title of a tragedy by Euripides, which is about a ship that is struck by lightning.

PISTHETAERUS Here! that's enough tall talk. Just you listen and keep quiet! Do you take me for a Lydian or a Phrygian(1) and think to frighten me with your big words? Know, that if Zeus worries me again, I shall go at the head of my eagles, who are armed with lightning, and reduce his dwelling and that of Amphion to cinders.(2) I shall send more than six hundred porphyrions clothed in leopards' skins(3) up to heaven against him; and formerly a single Porphyrion gave him enough to do. As for you, his messenger, if you annoy me, I shall begin by stretching your legs asunder, and so conduct myself, Iris though you be, that despite my age, you will be astonished. I will show you something that will make you three times over.

f(1) i.e. for a poltroon, like the slaves, most of whom came to Athens from these countries.

f(2) A parody of a passage in the lost tragedy of 'Niobe' of Aeschylus.

f(3) Because this bird has a spotted plumage.—Porphyrion is also the name of one of the Titans who tried to storm heave.

IRIS May you perish, you wretch, you and your infamous words!

PISTHETAERUS Won't you be off quickly? Come, stretch your wings or look out for squalls!

IRIS If my father does not punish you for your insults...

PISTHETAERUS Ha!... but just you be off elsewhere to roast younger folk than us

with your lightning.

CHORUS We forbid the gods, the sons of Zeus, to pass through our city and the mortals to send them the smoke of their sacrifices by this road.

PISTHETAERUS 'Tis odd that the messenger we sent to the mortals has never returned.

HERALD Oh! blessed Pisthetaerus, very wise, very illustrious, very gracious, thrice happy, very... Come, prompt me, somebody, do.

PISTHETAERUS Get to your story!

HERALD All peoples are filled with admiration for your wisdom, and they award you this golden crown.

PISTHETAERUS I accept it. But tell me, why do the people admire me?

HERALD Oh you, who have founded so illustrious a city in the air, you know not in what esteem men hold you and how many there are who burn with desire to dwell in it. Before your city was built, all men had a mania for Sparta; long hair and fasting were held in honour, men went dirty like Socrates and carried staves. Now all is changed. Firstly, as soon as 'tis dawn, they all spring out of bed together to go and seek their food, the same as you do; then they fly off towards the notices and finally devour the decrees. The bird-madness is so clear, that many actually bear the names of birds. There is a halting victualler, who styles himself the partridge; Menippus calls himself the swallow; Opuntius the one-eyed crow; Philocles the lark; Theogenes the fox-goose; Lycurgus the ibis; Chaerephon the bat; Syracosius the magpie; Midias the quail;(1) indeed he looks like a quail that has been hit hard over the head. Out of love for the birds they repeat all the songs which concern the swallow, the teal, the goose or the pigeon; in each verse you see wings, or at all events a few feathers. This is what is happening down there. Finally, there are more than ten thousand folk who are coming here from earth to ask you for feathers and hooked claws; so, mind you supply yourself with wings for the immigrants.

f(1) All these surnames bore some relation to the character or the build of the individual to whom the poet applies them.—Chaerephon, Socrates' disciple, was of white and ashen hue.—Opuntius was one-eyed.—Syracosius was a braggart.—Midias had a passion for quail-fights, and, besides, resembled that bird physically.

PISTHETAERUS Ah! by Zeus, 'tis not the time for idling. Go as quick as possible and fill every hamper, every basket you can find with wings. Manes(1) will bring them to me outside the walls, where I will welcome those who present themselves.

f(1) Pisthetaerus' servant, already mentioned.

CHORUS This town will soon be inhabited by a crowd of men.

PISTHETAERUS If fortune favours us.

CHORUS Folk are more and more delighted with it.

PISTHETAERUS Come, hurry up and bring them along.

CHORUS Will not man find here everything that can please him—wisdom, love, the divine Graces, the sweet face of gentle peace?

PISTHETAERUS Oh! you lazy servant! won't you hurry yourself?

CHORUS Let a basket of wings be brought speedily. Come, beat him as I do, and put some life into him; he is as lazy as an ass.

PISTHETAERUS Aye, Manes is a great craven.

CHORUS Begin by putting this heap of wings in order; divide them in three parts according to the birds from whom they came; the singing, the prophetic(1) and the aquatic birds; then you must take care to distribute them to the men according to their character.

f(1) From the inspection of which auguries were taken, e.g. the eagles, the vultures, the crows.

PISTHETAERUS (TO MANES) Oh! by the kestrels! I can keep my hands off you

no longer; you are too slow and lazy altogether.

A PARRICIDE(1) Oh! might I but become an eagle, who soars in the skies! Oh! might I fly above the azure waves of the barren sea!(2)

f(1) Or rather, a young man who contemplated parricide.

f(2) A parody of verses in Sophocles 'Oenomaus.'

PISTHETAERUS Ha! 'twould seem the news was true; I hear someone coming who talks of wings.

PARRICIDE Nothing is more charming than to fly; I burn with desire to live under the same laws as the birds; I am bird-mad and fly towards you, for I want to live with you and to obey your laws.

PISTHETAERUS Which laws? The birds have many laws.

PARRICIDE All of them; but the one that pleases me most is, that among the birds it is considered a fine thing to peck and strangle one's father.

PISTHETAERUS Aye, by Zeus! according to us, he who dares to strike his father, while still a chick, is a brave fellow.

PARRICIDE And therefore I want to dwell here, for I want to strangle my father and inherit his wealth.

PISTHETAERUS But we have also an ancient law written in the code of the storks, which runs thus, "When the stork father has reared his young and has taught them to fly, the young must in their turn support the father."

PARRICIDE 'Tis hardly worth while coming all this distance to be compelled to keep my father!

PISTHETAERUS No, no, young friend, since you have come to us with such willingness, I am going to give you these black wings, as though you were an orphan bird; furthermore, some good advice, that I received myself in infancy. Don't strike your father, but take these wings in one hand and these spurs in the other;

imagine you have a cock's crest on your head and go and mount guard and fight; live on your pay and respect your father's life. You're a gallant fellow! Very well, then! Fly to Thrace and fight.(1)

f(1) The Athenians were then besieging Amphipolis in the Thracian Chalcidice.

PARRICIDE By Bacchus! 'Tis well spoken; I will follow your counsel.

PISTHETAERUS 'Tis acting wisely, by Zeus.

CINESIAS(1) "On my light pinions I soar off to Olympus; in its capricious flight my Muse flutters along the thousand paths of poetry in turn..."

f(1) There was a real Cinesias—a dythyrambic poet born at Thebes.

PISTHETAERUS This is a fellow will need a whole shipload of wings.

CINESIAS (singing) "...and being fearless and vigorous, it is seeking fresh outlet."

PISTHETAERUS Welcome, Cinesias, you lime-wood man!(1) Why have you come here a-twisting your game leg in circles?

f(1) The scholiast thinks that Cinesias, who was tall and slight of build, wore a kind of corset of lime-wood to support his waist—surely rather a far-fetched interpretation!

CINESIAS "I want to become a bird, a tuneful nightingale."

PISTHETAERUS Enough of that sort of ditty. Tell me what you want.

CINESIAS Give me wings and I will fly into the topmost airs to gather fresh songs in the clouds, in the midst of the vapours and the fleecy snow.

PISTHETAERUS Gather songs in the clouds?

CINESIAS 'Tis on them the whole of our latter-day art depends. The most brilliant dithyrambs are those that flap their wings in void space and are clothed in mist and dense obscurity. To appreciate this, just listen.

PISTHETAERUS Oh! no, no, no!

CINESIAS By Hermes! but indeed you shall. "I shall travel through thine ethereal empire like a winged bird, who cleaveth space with his long neck..."

PISTHETAERUS Stop! easy all, I say!(1)

f(1) The Greek word used here was the word of command employed to stop the rowers.

CINESIAS "...as I soar over the seas, carried by the breath of the winds..."

PISTHETAERUS By Zeus! but I'll cut your breath short.

CINESIAS "...now rushing along the tracks of Notus, now nearing Boreas across the infinite wastes of the ether." (PISTHETAERUS BEATS HIM.) Ah! old man, that's a pretty and clever idea truly!

PISTHETAERUS What! are you not delighted to be cleaving the air?(1)

f(1) Cinesias makes a bound each time that Pisthetaerus strikes him.

CINESIAS To treat a dithyrambic poet, for whom the tribes dispute with each other, in this style!(1)

f(1) The tribes of Athens, or rather the rich citizens belonging to them, were wont on feast-days to give representations of dithyrambic choruses as well as of tragedies and comedies.

PISTHETAERUS Will you stay with us and form a chorus of winged birds as slender as Leotrophides(1) for the Cecropid tribe?

f(1) Another dithyrambic poet, a man of extreme leanness.

CINESIAS You are making game of me, 'tis clear; but know that I shall never leave you in peace if I do not have wings wherewith to traverse the air.

AN INFORMER What are these birds with downy feathers, who look so pitiable to me? Tell me, oh swallow with the long dappled wings.(1)

f(1) A parody of a hemistich from 'Alcaeus.'—The informer is dissatisfied at only seeing birds of sombre plumage and poor appearance. He would have preferred to

denounce the rich.

PISTHETAERUS Oh! but 'tis a regular invasion that threatens us. Here comes another of them, humming along.

INFORMER Swallow with the long dappled wings, once more I summon you.

PISTHETAERUS It's his cloak I believe he's addressing; 'faith, it stands in great need of the swallows' return.(1)

f(1) The informer, says the scholiast, was clothed with a ragged cloak, the tatters of which hung down like wings, in fact, a cloak that could not protect him from the cold and must have made him long for the swallows' return, i.e. the spring.

INFORMER Where is he who gives out wings to all comers?

PISTHETAERUS 'Tis I, but you must tell me for what purpose you want them.

INFORMER Ask no questions. I want wings, and wings I must have.

PISTHETAERUS Do you want to fly straight to Pellene?(1)

f(1) A town in Achaia, where woollen cloaks were made.

INFORMER I? Why, I am an accuser of the islands,(1) an informer...

f(1) His trade was to accuse the rich citizens of the subject islands, and drag them before the Athenian court; he explains later the special advantages of this branch of the informer's business.

PISTHETAERUS A fine trade, truly!

INFORMER ...a hatcher of lawsuits. Hence I have great need of wings to prowl round the cities and drag them before justice.

PISTHETAERUS Would you do this better if you had wings?

INFORMER No, but I should no longer fear the pirates; I should return with the cranes, loaded with a supply of lawsuits by way of ballast.

PISTHETAERUS So it seems, despite all your youthful vigour, you make it your

trade to denounce strangers?

INFORMER Well, and why not? I don't know how to dig.

PISTHETAERUS But, by Zeus! there are honest ways of gaining a living at your age without all this infamous trickery.

INFORMER My friend, I am asking you for wings, not for words.

PISTHETAERUS 'Tis just my words that give you wings.

INFORMER And how can you give a man wings with your words?

PISTHETAERUS 'Tis thus that all first start.

INFORMER All?

PISTHETAERUS Have you not often heard the father say to young men in the barbers' shops, "It's astonishing how Diitrephes' advice has made my son fly to horse-riding."—"Mine," says another, "has flown towards tragic poetry on the wings of his imagination."

INFORMER So that words give wings?

PISTHETAERUS Undoubtedly; words give wings to the mind and make a man soar to heaven. Thus I hope that my wise words will give you wings to fly to some less degrading trade.

INFORMER But I do not want to.

PISTHETAERUS What do you reckon on doing then?

INFORMER I won't belie my breeding; from generation to generation we have lived by informing. Quick, therefore, give me quickly some light, swift hawk or kestrel wings, so that I may summon the islanders, sustain the accusation here, and haste back there again on flying pinions.

PISTHETAERUS I see. In this way the stranger will be condemned even before he appears.

INFORMER That's just it.

PISTHETAERUS And while he is on his way here by sea, you will be flying to the islands to despoil him of his property.

INFORMER You've hit it, precisely; I must whirl hither and thither like a perfect humming-top.

PISTHETAERUS I catch the idea. Wait, i' faith, I've got some fine Corcyraean wings.(1) How do you like them?

f(1) That is, whips—Corcyra being famous for these articles.

INFORMER Oh! woe is me! Why, 'tis a whip!

PISTHETAERUS No, no; these are the wings, I tell you, that set the top a-spinning.

INFORMER Oh! oh! oh!

PISTHETAERUS Take your flight, clear off, you miserable cur, or you will soon see what comes of quibbling and lying. Come, let us gather up our wings and withdraw.

CHORUS In my ethereal flights I have seen many things new and strange and wondrous beyond belief. There is a tree called Cleonymus belonging to an unknown species; it has no heart, is good for nothing and is as tall as it is cowardly. In springtime it shoots forth calumnies instead of buds and in autumn it strews the ground with bucklers in place of leaves.(1)

Far away in the regions of darkness, where no ray of light ever enters, there is a country, where men sit at the table of the heroes and dwell with them always—save always in the evening. Should any mortal meet the hero Orestes at night, he would soon be stripped and covered with blows from head to foot.(2)

f(1) Cleonymous is a standing butt of Aristophanes' wit, both as an informer and a notorious poltroon.

f(2) In allusion to the cave of the bandit Orestes; the poet terms him a hero only

because of his heroic name Orestes.

PROMETHEUS Ah! by the gods! if only Zeus does not espy me! Where is Pisthetaerus?

PISTHETAERUS Ha! what is this? A masked man!

PROMETHEUS Can you see any god behind me?

PISTHETAERUS No, none. But who are you, pray?

PROMETHEUS What's the time, please?

PISTHETAERUS The time? Why, it's past noon. Who are you?

PROMETHEUS Is it the fall of day? Is it no later than that?(1)

f(1) Prometheus wants night to come and so reduce the risk of being seen from Olympus.

PISTHETAERUS Oh! 'pon my word! but you grow tiresome.

PROMETHEUS What is Zeus doing? Is he dispersing the clouds or gathering them?(1)

f(1) The clouds would prevent Zeus seeing what was happening below him.

PISTHETAERUS Take care, lest I lose all patience.

PROMETHEUS Come, I will raise my mask.

PISTHETAERUS Ah! my dear Prometheus!

PROMETHEUS Stop! stop! speak lower!

PISTHETAERUS Why, what's the matter, Prometheus?

PROMETHEUS H'sh! h'sh! Don't call me by my name; you will be my ruin, if Zeus should see me here. But, if you want me to tell you how things are going in heaven, take this umbrella and shield me, so that the gods don't see me.

PISTHETAERUS I can recognize Prometheus in this cunning trick. Come, quick then, and fear nothing; speak on.

PROMETHEUS Then listen.

PISTHETAERUS I am listening, proceed!

PROMETHEUS It's all over with Zeus.

PISTHETAERUS Ah! and since when, pray?

PROMETHEUS Since you founded this city in the air. There is not a man who now sacrifices to the gods; the smoke of the victims no longer reaches us. Not the smallest offering comes! We fast as though it were the festival of Demeter.(1) The barbarian gods, who are dying of hunger, are bawling like Illyrians(2) and threaten to make an armed descent upon Zeus, if he does not open markets where joints of the victims are sold.

f(1) The third day of the festival of Demeter was a fast.

f(2) A semi-savage people, addicted to violence and brigandage.

PISTHETAERUS What! there are other gods besides you, barbarian gods who dwell above Olympus?

PROMETHEUS If there were no barbarian gods, who would be the patron of Execestides?(1)

f(1) Who, being reputed a stranger despite his pretension to the title of a citizen, could only have a strange god for his patron or tutelary deity.

PISTHETAERUS And what is the name of these gods?

PROMETHEUS Their name? Why, the Triballi.(1)

f(1) The Triballi were a Thracian people; it was a term commonly used in Athens to describe coarse men, obscene debauchees and greedy parasites.

PISTHETAERUS Ah, indeed! 'tis from that no doubt that we derive the word 'tribulation.'(1)

f(1) There is a similar pun in the Greek.

PROMETHEUS Most likely. But one thing I can tell you for certain, namely, that Zeus and the celestial Triballi are going to send deputies here to sue for peace. Now don't you treat, unless Zeus restores the sceptre to the birds and gives you Basileia(1) in marriage.

f(1) i.e. the 'supremacy' of Greece, the real object of the war.

PISTHETAERUS Who is this Basileia?

PROMETHEUS A very fine young damsel, who makes the lightning for Zeus; all things come from her, wisdom, good laws, virtue, the fleet, calumnies, the public paymaster and the triobolus.

PISTHETAERUS Ah! then she is a sort of general manageress to the god.

PROMETHEUS Yes, precisely. If he gives you her for your wife, yours will be the almighty power. That is what I have come to tell you; for you know my constant and habitual goodwill towards men.

PISTHETAERUS Oh, yes! 'tis thanks to you that we roast our meat.(1)

f(1) Prometheus had stolen the fire from the gods to gratify mankind.

PROMETHEUS I hate the gods, as you know.

PISTHETAERUS Aye, by Zeus, you have always detested them.

PROMETHEUS Towards them I am a veritable Timon;(1) but I must return in all haste, so give me the umbrella; if Zeus should see me from up there, he would think I was escorting one of the Canephori.(2)

f(1) A celebrated misanthrope, contemporary to Aristophanes. Hating the society of men, he had only a single friend, Apimantus, to whom he was attached, because of their similarity of character; he also liked Alcibiades, because he foresaw that this young man would be the ruin of his country.

f(2) The Canephori were young maidens, chosen from the first families of the city, who carried baskets wreathed with myrtle at the feast of Athene, while at those of

Bacchus and Demeter they appeared with gilded baskets.—The daughters of 'Metics,' or resident aliens, walked behind them, carrying an umbrella and a stool.

PISTHETAERUS Wait, take this stool as well.

CHORUS Near by the land of the Sciapodes(1) there is a marsh, from the borders whereof the odious Socrates evokes the souls of men. Pisander(2) came one day to see his soul, which he had left there when still alive. He offered a little victim, a camel,(3) slit his throat and, following the example of Ulysses, stepped one pace backwards.(4) Then that bat of a Chaerephon(5) came up from hell to drink the camel's blood.

f(1) According to Ctesias, the Sciapodes were a people who dwelt on the borders of the Atlantic. Their feet were larger than the rest of their bodies, and to shield themselves from the sun's rays they held up one of their feet as an umbrella.—By giving the Socratic philosophers the name of Sciapodes here Aristophanes wishes to convey that they are walking in the dark and busying themselves with the greatest nonsense.

f(2) This Pisander was a notorious coward; for this reason the poet jestingly supposes that he had lost his soul, the seat of courage.

f(3) Considering the shape and height of the camel, (it) can certainly not be included in the list of SMALL victims, e.g. the sheep and the goat.

f(4) In the evocation of the dead, Book XI of the Odyssey.

f(5) Chaerephon was given this same title by the Herald earlier in this comedy.—Aristophanes supposes him to have come from hell because he is lean and pallid.

POSIDON(1) This is the city of Nephelococcygia, Cloud-cuckoo-town, whither we come as ambassadors. (TO TRIBALLUS) Hi! what are you up to? you are throwing your cloak over the left shoulder. Come, fling it quick over the right! And why, pray, does it draggle in this fashion? Have you ulcers to hide like Laespodias?(2)

Oh! democracy!(3) whither, oh! whither are you leading us? Is it possible that the gods have chosen such an envoy?

f(1) Posidon appears on the stage accompanied by Heracles and a Triballian god.

f(2) An Athenian general.—Neptune is trying to give Triballus some notions of elegance and good behaviour.

f(3) Aristophanes supposes that democracy is in the ascendant in Olympus as it is in Athens.

TRIBALLUS Leave me alone.

POSIDON Ugh! the cursed savage! you are by far the most barbarous of all the gods.—Tell me, Heracles, what are we going to do?

HERACLES I have already told you that I want to strangle the fellow who has dared to block us in.

POSIDON But, my friend, we are envoys of peace.

HERACLES All the more reason why I wish to strangle him.

PISTHETAERUS Hand me the cheese-grater; bring me the silphium for sauce; pass me the cheese and watch the coals.(1)

f(1) He is addressing his servant, Manes.

HERACLES Mortal! we who greet you are three gods.

PISTHETAERUS Wait a bit till I have prepared my silphium pickle.

HERACLES What are these meats?(1)

f(1) Heracles softens at sight of the food.—Heracles is the glutton of the comic poets.

PISTHETAERUS These are birds that have been punished with death for attacking the people's friends.

HERACLES And you are seasoning them before answering us?

PISTHETAERUS Ah! Heracles! welcome, welcome! What's the matter?(1)

f(1) He pretends not to have seen them at first, being so much engaged with his cookery.

HERACLES The gods have sent us here as ambassadors to treat for peace.

A SERVANT There's no more oil in the flask.

PISTHETAERUS And yet the birds must be thoroughly basted with it.(1)

f(1) He pretends to forget the presence of the ambassadors.

HERACLES We have no interest to serve in fighting you; as for you, be friends and we promise that you shall always have rain-water in your pools and the warmest of warm weather. So far as these points go we are armed with plenary authority.

PISTHETAERUS We have never been the aggressors, and even now we are as well disposed for peace as yourselves, provided you agree to one equitable condition, namely, that Zeus yield his sceptre to the birds. If only this is agreed to, I invite the ambassadors to dinner.

HERACLES That's good enough for me. I vote for peace.

POSIDON You wretch! you are nothing but a fool and a glutton. Do you want to dethrone your own father?

PISTHETAERUS What an error! Why, the gods will be much more powerful if the birds govern the earth. At present the mortals are hidden beneath the clouds, escape your observation, and commit perjury in your name; but if you had the birds for your allies, and a man, after having sworn by the crow and Zeus, should fail to keep his oath, the crow would dive down upon him unawares and pluck out his eye.

POSIDON Well thought of, by Posidon!(1)

f(1) Posidon jestingly swears by himself.

HERACLES My notion too.

PISTHETAERUS (TO THE TRIBALLIAN) And you, what's your opinion?

TRIBALLUS Nabaisatreu.(1)

f(1) The barbarian god utters some gibberish which Pisthetaerus interprets into consent.

PISTHETAERUS D'you see? he also approves. But hear another thing in which we can serve you. If a man vows to offer a sacrifice to some god, and then procrastinates, pretending that the gods can wait, and thus does not keep his word, we shall punish his stinginess.

POSIDON Ah! ah! and how?

PISTHETAERUS While he is counting his money or is in the bath, a kite will relieve him, before he knows it, either in coin or in clothes, of the value of a couple of sheep, and carry it to the god.

HERACLES I vote for restoring them the sceptre.

POSIDON Ask the Triballian.

HERACLES Hi Triballian, do you want a thrashing?

TRIBALLUS Saunaka baktarikrousa.

HERACLES He says, "Right willingly."

POSIDON If that be the opinion of both of you, why, I consent too.

HERACLES Very well! we accord the sceptre.

PISTHETAERUS Ah! I was nearly forgetting another condition. I will leave Here to Zeus, but only if the young Basileia is given me in marriage.

POSIDON Then you don't want peace. Let us withdraw.

PISTHETAERUS It matters mighty little to me. Cook, look to the gravy.

HERACLES What an odd fellow this Posidon is! Where are you off to? Are we going to war about a woman?

POSIDON What else is there to do?

HERACLES What else? Why, conclude peace.

POSIDON Oh! you ninny! do you always want to be fooled? Why, you are seeking your own downfall. If Zeus were to die, after having yielded them the sovereignty, you would be ruined, for you are the heir of all the wealth he will leave behind.

PISTHETAERUS Oh! by the gods! how he is cajoling you. Step aside, that I may have a word with you. Your uncle is getting the better of you, my poor friend.(1) The law will not allow you an obolus of the paternal property, for you are a bastard and not a legitimate child.

f(1) Heracles, the god of strength, was far from being remarkable in the way of cleverness.

HERACLES I a bastard! What's that you tell me?

PISTHETAERUS Why, certainly; are you not born of a stranger woman? Besides, is not Athene recognized as Zeus' sole heiress? And no daughter would be that, if she had a legitimate brother.

HERACLES But what if my father wished to give me his property on his death-bed, even though I be a bastard?

PISTHETAERUS The law forbids it, and this same Posidon would be the first to lay claim to his wealth, in virtue of being his legitimate brother. Listen; thus runs Solon's law: "A bastard shall not inherit, if there are legitimate children; and if there are no legitimate children, the property shall pass to the nearest kin."(1)

f(1) This was Athenian law.

HERACLES And I get nothing whatever of the paternal property?

PISTHETAERUS Absolutely nothing. But tell me, has your father had you entered on the registers of his phratria?(1)

f(1) The poet attributes to the gods the same customs as those which governed Athens, and according to which no child was looked upon as legitimate unless his

father had entered him on the registers of his phratria. The phratria was a division of the tribe and consisted of thirty families.

HERACLES No, and I have long been surprised at the omission.

PISTHETAERUS What ails you, that you should shake your fist at heaven? Do you want to fight it? Why, be on my side, I will make you a king and will feed you on bird's milk and honey.

HERACLES Your further condition seems fair to me. I cede you the young damsel.

POSIDON But I, I vote against this opinion.

PISTHETAERUS Then it all depends on the Triballian. (TO THE TRIBALLIAN.) What do you say?

TRIBALLUS Big bird give daughter pretty and queen.

HERACLES You say that you give her?

POSIDON Why no, he does not say anything of the sort, that he gives her; else I cannot understand any better than the swallows.

PISTHETAERUS Exactly so. Does he not say she must be given to the swallows?

POSIDON Very well! you two arrange the matter; make peace, since you wish it so; I'll hold my tongue.

HERACLES We are of a mind to grant you all that you ask. But come up there with us to receive Basileia and the celestial bounty.

PISTHETAERUS Here are birds already cut up, and very suitable for a nuptial feast.

HERACLES You go and, if you like, I will stay here to roast them.

PISTHETAERUS You to roast them! you are too much the glutton; come along with us.

HERACLES Ah! how well I would have treated myself!

PISTHETAERUS Let some(one) bring me a beautiful and magnificent tunic for the

wedding.

CHORUS(1) At Phanae,(2) near the Clepsydra,(3) there dwells a people who have neither faith nor law, the Englottogastors,(4) who reap, sow, pluck the vines and the figs(5) with their tongues; they belong to a barbaric race, and among them the Philippi and the Gorgiases(6) are to be found; 'tis these Englottogastorian Philippi who introduced the custom all over Attica of cutting out the tongue separately at sacrifices.(7)

f(1) The chorus continues to tell what it has seen on its flights.

f(2) The harbour of the island of Chios; but this name is here used in the sense of being the land of informers ((from the Greek for) 'to denounce').

f(3) i.e. near the orators' platform, in the Public Assembly, or because there stood the water-clock, by which speeches were limited.

f(4) A coined name, made up of (the Greek for) the tongue, and (for) the stomach, and meaning those who fill their stomach with what they gain with their tongues, to wit, the orators.

f(5) (The Greek for) a fig forms part of the word which in Greek means an informer.

f(6) Both rhetoricians.

f(7) Because they consecrated it specially to the god of eloquence.

A MESSENGER Oh, you, whose unbounded happiness I cannot express in words, thrice happy race of airy birds, receive your king in your fortunate dwellings. More brilliant than the brightest star that illumes the earth, he is approaching his glittering golden palace; the sun itself does not shine with more dazzling glory. He is entering with his bride at his side,(1) whose beauty no human tongue can express; in his hand he brandishes the lightning, the winged shaft of Zeus; perfumes of unspeakable sweetness pervade the ethereal realms. 'Tis a glorious spectacle to see the clouds of incense wafting in light whirlwinds before the breath of the Zephyr! But here he is

himself. Divine Muse! let thy sacred lips begin with songs of happy omen.

f(1) Basileia, whom he brings back from heaven.

CHORUS Fall back! to the right! to the left! advance!(1) Fly around this happy mortal, whom Fortune loads with her blessings. Oh! oh! what grace! what beauty! Oh, marriage so auspicious for our city! All honour to this man! 'tis through him that the birds are called to such glorious destinies. Let your nuptial hymns, your nuptial songs, greet him and his Basileia! 'Twas in the midst of such festivities that the Fates formerly united Olympian Here to the King who governs the gods from the summit of his inaccessible throne. Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus! Rosy Eros with the golden wings held the reins and guided the chariot; 'twas he, who presided over the union of Zeus and the fortunate Here. Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus!

f(1) Terms used in regulating a dance.

PISTHETAERUS I am delighted with your songs, I applaud your verses. Now celebrate the thunder that shakes the earth, the flaming lightning of Zeus and the terrible flashing thunderbolt.

CHORUS Oh, thou golden flash of the lightning! oh, ye divine shafts of flame, that Zeus has hitherto shot forth! Oh, ye rolling thunders, that bring down the rain! 'Tis by the order of OUR king that ye shall now stagger the earth! Oh, Hymen! 'tis through thee that he commands the universe and that he makes Basileia, whom he has robbed from Zeus, take her seat at his side. Oh! Hymen! oh! Hymenaeus!

PISTHETAERUS Let all the winged tribes of our fellow-citizens follow the bridal couple to the palace of Zeus(1) and to the nuptial couch! Stretch forth your hands, my dear wife! Take hold of me by my wings and let us dance; I am going to lift you up and carry you through the air.

f(1) Where Pisthetaerus is henceforth to reign.

CHORUS Oh, joy! Io Paean! Tralala! victory is thing, oh, thou greatest of the gods!

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