

THE BIRDS

by Aristophanes

anonymous translator

CHARACTERS

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

EUELPIDES
PITHETAERUS
TROCHILUS, Servant to Elops
Elops (the Hoopoe)
A BIRD
A HERALD
A PRIEST
A POET
AN ORACLE-MONGER
METON, a Geometrician
AN INSPECTOR
A DEALER IN DECREES
IRIS
A PARRICIDE
CINESIAS, a Dithyrambic Poet
AN INFORMER
PROMETHEUS
POSIDON
TRIBALLUS
HERACLES
SLAVES OF PITHETAERUS
MESSENGERS
CHORUS OF BIRDS

BIRDS

(SCENE:- A wild and desolate region; only thickets, rocks, and a single tree are seen. EUELPIDES and PITHETAERUS enter, each with a bird in his hand.)

EUELPIDES (to his jay)

Do you think I should walk straight for yon tree?

PITHETAERUS (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; we're wasting our time.

PITHETAERUS

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

EUELPIDES

And that I, in obedience to this jay, should have worn my toes down to the nails!

PITHETAERUS

If only I knew where we were....

EUELPIDES

Could you find your country again from here?

PITHETAERUS

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

EUELPIDES

Alas!

PITHETAERUS

Aye, aye, my friend, it's surely the road of "alases" 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, the Epops, who is a bird, without being born of one. He has indeed sold us this jay, a true son of Tharrhelides, for an obolus, and this crow for three, but what can they do? Why, nothing whatever but bite and scratch! (To his jay) 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.

PITHETAERUS

Not even the vestige of a trail in any direction.

EUELPIDES

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

PITHETAERUS

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

EUELPIDES

And which way does it tell us to go now?

PITHETAERUS

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 crows, 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. It's not that we hate it; we recognize it to be great and rich, likewise that everyone has the right to ruin himself paying taxes; 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. That is why we started off with a basket, a stew-pot and some myrtle boughs 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.

PITHETAERUS

Here! look!

EUELPIDES

What's the matter?

PITHETAERUS

Why, the crow has been directing 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.

PITHETAERUS

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

EUELPIDES

And you your head to double the noise.

PITHETAERUS

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

EUELPIDES

Good idea! (He does so.) Ho there, within! Slave! slave!

PITHETAERUS

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 (rushing out of a thicket)

Who's there? Who calls my master?

PITHETAERUS (in terror)

Apollo the Deliverer! what an enormous beak!

(He defecates. In the confusion both the jay and the crow fly away.)

TROCHILUS (equally frightened)

Good god! they are bird-catchers.

EUELPIDES (reassuring himself)

But is it so terrible? Wouldn't it be better to explain things?

TROCHILUS (also reassuring himself)

You're done for.

EUELPIDES

But we are not men.

TROCHILUS

What are you, then?

EUELPIDES (defecating also)

I am the Fearling, an African bird.

TROCHILUS

You talk nonsense.

EUELPIDES

Well, then, just ask it of my feet.

TROCHILUS

And this other one, what bird is it? (To PITHETAERUS) Speak up!

PITHETAERUS (weakly)

I? I am a Crapple, from the land of the pheasants.

EUELPIDES

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

TROCHILUS

Why, I am a slave-bird.

EUELPIDES

Why, have you been conquered by a cock?

TROCHILUS

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

EUELPIDES

Does a bird need a servant, then?

TROCHILUS

That's no doubt because he was once a man. At times he wants to eat a dish of sardines 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. Come, Trochilus, do us the kindness to call your master.

TROCHILUS

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

EUELPIDES

Never mind; wake him up.

TROCHILUS

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

(He goes back into the thicket.)

PITHETAERUS (as soon as TROCHILUS is out of sight)

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

EUELPIDES

Oh! my god! it was sheer fear that made me lose my jay.

PITHETAERUS

Ah! you big 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? Tell me that.

PITHETAERUS

Not at all.

EUELPIDES

Where is it, then?

PITHETAERUS

It flew away.

EUELPIDES

And you did not let it go? Oh! you brave fellow!

EPOPS (from within)

Open the thicket, that I may go out!

(He comes out of the thicket.)

EUELPIDES

By Heracles! what a creature! what plumage! What means this triple

crest?

EPOPS

Who wants me?

EUELPIDES (banteringly)

The twelve great gods have used you ill, it seems.

EPOPS

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

EUELPIDES

It's not you we are jeering at.

EPOPS

At what, then?

EUELPIDES

Why, it's your beak that looks so ridiculous to us.

EPOPS

This is how Sophocles outrages me in his tragedies. Know, I once was Tereus.

EUELPIDES

You were Tereus, and what are you now? a bird or a peacock?

EPOPS

I am a bird.

EUELPIDES

Then where are your feathers? I don't see any.

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.

EPOPS

Are you dicasts?

EUELPIDES

No, if anything, we are anti-dicasts.

EPOPS

Is that kind of seed sown among you?

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 live in.

EPOPS

Then you are looking for an aristocratic country.

EUELPIDES

I? Not at all! I hold the son of Scellias in horror.

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 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! (To PITHETAERUS) And what say you?

PITHETAERUS

My tastes are similar.

EPOPS

And they are?

PITHETAERUS

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 kissed him, nor took him with you, nor ever once felt his balls. 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. It's on the Red Sea.

EUELPIDES

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

EPOPS

Why not choose Lepreum in Elis for your settlement?

EUELPIDES

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

EPOPS

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

EUELPIDES

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

EPOPS

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

EUELPIDES

That does away with a lot of 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.

PITHETAERUS

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?

PITHETAERUS

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, "It's 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?

PITHETAERUS

Found a city.

EPOPS

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

PITHETAERUS

Oh, really, really! you talk like such a fool! Look down.

EPOPS

I am looking.

PITHETAERUS

Now look up.

EPOPS

I am looking.

PITHETAERUS

Turn your head round.

EPOPS

Ah! it will be pleasant for me if I end in twisting my neck off!

PITHETAERUS

What have you seen?

EPOPS

The clouds and the sky.

PITHETAERUS

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

EPOPS

How their pole?

PITHETAERUS

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

EPOPS

How so?

PITHETAERUS

The air is between earth and heaven. When we want to go to Delphi, we ask the Boeotians 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.

EPOPS

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

PITHETAERUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

But how can they be gathered together?

EPOPS

Easily. I will hasten down to the thicket to waken my dear Procne and as soon as they hear our voices, they will come to us hot wing.

PITHETAERUS

My dear bird, lose no time, please! Fly at once into the thicket and awaken Procne.

(EPOPS rushes into the thicket.)

EPOPS (from within; singing)

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, 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 pours forth a sacred chant of blessed voices.

(The flute is played behind the scene, imitating the song of the

nightingale.)

PITHETAERUS

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

EUELPIDES

Hush!

PITHETAERUS

What's the matter?

EUELPIDES

Be still!

PITHETAERUS

What for?

EUELPIDES

Epops is going to sing again.

EPOPS (in the thicket, singing)

Epopopoi popoi popopopoi 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 that sings so sweetly. And you whose gentle twitter resounds through the fields with the little cry of tiotiotiotiotiotio; 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. Torotorotorotix, kikkabau, kikkabau, torotorolorililix.

PITHETAERUS

Can you see any bird?

EUELPIDES

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

PITHETAERUS

It was hardly worth Epops' while to go and bury himself in the thicket like a hatching plover.

A BIRD (entering)

Torotix, torotix.

PITHETAERUS

Wait, friend, there's a bird.

EUELPIDES

By Zeus, it is a bird, but what kind? Isn't it a peacock?

PITHETAERUS (as EPOPS comes out of the thicket)

Epops will tell us. What is this bird?

EPOPS

It's not one of those you are used to seeing; it's a bird from the marshes.

EUELPIDES

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

EPOPS

Undoubtedly; indeed he is called flamingo.

EUELPIDES (excitedly)

Hi! I say! You!

PITHETAERUS

What are you shouting for?

EUELPIDES

Why, here's another bird.

PITHETAERUS

Aye, indeed; this one's a foreign bird too. (To EPOPS) What is this bird from beyond the mountains with a look as solemn as it is stupid?

EPOPS

He is called the Mede.

EUELPIDES

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

PITHETAERUS

Here's another bird with a crest.

(From here on, the numerous birds that make up the CHORUS keep rushing in.)

EUELPIDES

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

EPOPS

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

EUELPIDES

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

EPOPS

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

EUELPIDES

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

EPOPS

This one? That's the glutton.

EUELPIDES

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

EPOPS

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

PITHETAERUS

Oh, Posidon! look what awful 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.

PITHETAERUS

Here is the partridge.

EUELPIDES

Why, there is the francolin.

PITHETAERUS

There is the poachard.

EUELPIDES

Here is the kingfisher. (To EPOPS) What's that bird behind the king-fisher?

EPOPS

That's the barber.

EUELPIDES

What? a bird a barber?

PITHETAERUS

Why, Sporgilus is one.

EPOPS

Here comes the owl.

EUELPIDES

And who is it brings an owl to Athens?

EPOPS (pointing to the various species)

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...

PITHETAERUS

Oh! what a lot of birds!

EUELPIDES

Oh! what a lot of blackbirds!

PITHETAERUS

How they scold, how they come rushing up! What a noise! what a noise!

EUELPIDES

Can they be bearing us ill-will?

PITHETAERUS

Oh! there! there! they are opening their beaks and staring at us.

EUELPIDES

Why, so they are.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

EPOPS

I have been waiting for you a long while! I never fail in my word to my friends.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Titititititi. What good news have you for me?

EPOPS

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Where? How? What are you saying?

EPOPS

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! it's a horrible, unheard-of crime! What are you saying?

EPOPS

Never let my words scare you.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What have you done to me?

EPOPS

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And you have dared to do that!

EPOPS

Yes, and I am delighted at having done so.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And are they already with us?

EPOPS

Just as much as I am.

CHORUS (singing)

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.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

It's all over with us.

EUELPIDES

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

PITHETAERUS

To have you with me.

EUELPIDES

Say rather to have me melt into tears.

PITHETAERUS

Go on! you are talking nonsense. How will you weep with your eyes pecked out?

CHORUS (singing)

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.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Come, peck, tear to ribbons. Where is the chief of the cohort? Let
him engage the right wing.

(They rush at the two Athenians.)

EUELPIDES

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

PITHETAERUS

Wait! Stay here!

EUELPIDES

That they may tear me to pieces?

PITHETAERUS

And how do you think to escape them?

EUELPIDES

I don't know at all.

PITHETAERUS

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?

PITHETAERUS

The owl will not attack us then.

EUELPIDES

But do you see all those hooked claws?

PITHETAERUS

Take the spit and pierce the foe on your side.

EUELPIDES

And how about my eyes?

PITHETAERUS

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, where stratagem is concerned.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

EPOPS (stepping in front of the CHORUS)

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.

LEADER OF THE 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.

LEADER OF THE 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. It is just such a thing as one will not learn
from a friend and which an enemy compels you to know. To begin with,
it's the foe and not the friend that taught cities to build high
walls, to equip long vessels of war; and it's this knowledge that
protects our children, our slaves and our wealth.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

PITHETAERUS (to EUELPIDES)

Their wrath seems to cool. Draw back a little.

EPOPS

It's only justice, and you will thank me later.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Never have we opposed your advice up to now.

PITHETAERUS

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?

PITHETAERUS

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

LEADER OF THE 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?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Who are they? From what country?

EPOPS

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

LEADER OF THE 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.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Indeed, and what are their plans?

EPOPS

They are wonderful, incredible, unheard of.

LEADER OF THE 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.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Are they mad?

EPOPS

They are the sanest people in the world.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Clever men?

EPOPS

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

EPOPS (to two attendants)

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

PITHETAERUS

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 balls, nor shove things into my...

EUELPIDES (bending over and pointing his finger at his anus)

Do you mean this?

PITHETAERUS

No, I mean my eyes.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Agreed.

PITHETAERUS

Swear it.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

PITHETAERUS

It is a bargain.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

EPOPS (as 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 (singing)

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.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

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!

EUELPIDES

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

PITHETAERUS

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We kings? Over whom?

PITHETAERUS

...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.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What, older than the Earth!

PITHETAERUS

By Phoebus, yes.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

By Zeus, but I never knew that before!

PITHETAERUS

That's because you are ignorant and heedless, and have never read your Aesop. He is the one 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.

PITHETAERUS

Hence, if they existed before the Earth, before the gods, the kingship belongs to them 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.

PITHETAERUS

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 Megabazus. It's in memory of his reign that he is called the Persian bird.

EUELPIDES

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

PITHETAERUS

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. It was 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 Halimus. 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.

PITHETAERUS

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

The Greeks?

PITHETAERUS

And when he was king, he was the one who first taught them to fall on their knees before the kites.

EUELPIDES

By Zeus! that's what I did myself one day on seeing a kite; but at the moment I was on my knees, and leaning backwards with mouth agape, I bolted an obolus and was forced to carry my meal-sack home empty.

PITHETAERUS

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.

EUELPIDES

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

PITHETAERUS

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.

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 to see if he got any present.

PITHETAERUS

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

EUELPIDES

By Demeter, the point is well taken. But what are all these birds doing in heaven?

PITHETAERUS

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.

EUELPIDES

And even now Lampon swears by the goose whenever he wishes to deceive someone.

PITHETAERUS

Thus it is clear that you were once great and sacred, but now you are looked upon as slaves, as fools, as Maneses; 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.

CHORUS (singing)

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.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

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, Porphyryon! what a terribly strong place!

PITHETAERUS

Then, when this has been 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 their tools up, as hitherto, for the purpose of laying their Alcmenas, their Alopes, or their Semeles! if they try to pass through, you put rings on their tools so that they can't make love any 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; if a steer is being offered to Heracles, let honey-cakes be dedicated to the gull; if a goat is being slain for King Zeus, there is a King-Bird, the wren, to whom the sacrifice of a male gnat is due before Zeus himself even.

EUELPIDES

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

PITHETAERUS

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.

EUELPIDES

But will not Zeus thunder and send his winged bolts against us?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

If men in their blindness do not recognize us as gods and so continue to worship the dwellers in Olympus?

PITHETAERUS

Then a cloud of sparrows greedy for corn must descend upon their fields and eat up all their seeds; we shall see then if Demeter will mete them out any wheat.

EUELPIDES

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

PITHETAERUS

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.

EUELPIDES

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

PITHETAERUS

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.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Name me one of these then.

PITHETAERUS

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

PITHETAERUS

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.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

No more shall perish? How is that?

PITHETAERUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

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."

EUELPIDES

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And how are we to give them health, which belongs to the gods?

PITHETAERUS

If they are happy, is not that the chief thing towards health? The miserable man is never well.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Old Age also dwells in Olympus. How will they get at it? Must they die in early youth?

PITHETAERUS

Why, the birds, by Zeus, will add three hundred years to their life.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

From whom will they take them?

PITHETAERUS

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!

PITHETAERUS (solemnly)

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; 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.

LEADER OF THE 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.

CHORUS (singing)

Inspired by your words, I threaten my rivals the gods, and I swear that if you march in alliance with me against the gods and are faithful to our just, loyal and sacred bond, we shall soon have shattered their sceptre.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We shall charge ourselves with the performance of everything that requires force; that which demands thought and deliberation shall be yours to supply.

EPOPS

By Zeus! it's no longer the time to delay and loiter like Nicias; 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.

PITHETAERUS

That is soon done; my name is Pithetaerus, and his, Euelpides, of the deme Crioa.

EPOPS

Good! and good luck to you.

PITHETAERUS

We accept the omen.

EPOPS

Come in here.

PITHETAERUS

Very well, you are the one who must lead us and introduce us.

EPOPS

Come then.

(He starts to fly away.)

PITHETAERUS (stopping himself)

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.

PITHETAERUS

Remember Aesop's fables. It is told there that the fox fared very badly, 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.

PITHETAERUS

Then let us enter. Xanthias and Manodorus, pick up our baggage.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Hi! Epop! do you hear me?

EPOPS

What's the matter?

LEADER OF THE 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.

PITHETAERUS

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.

EPOPS

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

(PROCNE appears; she resembles a young flute-girl.)

PITHETAERUS

Oh! great Zeus! what a beautiful little bird! what a dainty form! what brilliant plumage! Do you know how dearly I should like to get between her thighs?

EUELPIDES

She is dazzling all over with gold, like a young girl. Oh! how I should like to kiss her!

PITHETAERUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

Lead the way, and may success attend us.

(EPOPS goes into the thicket, followed by PITHETAERUS and EUELPIDES.)

CHORUS (singing)

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, lead off our anapests.

(The CHORUS turns and faces the audience.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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 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 opened their thighs because of 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.

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, and Orestes 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. 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 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. Is it not clear that we are a prophetic Apollo to you? (More and more rapidly from here on.) 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 cloyed with enjoyment.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (singing)

Oh, rustic Muse of such varied note, tiotiotiotiotinx, I sing with you in the groves and on the mountain tops, tiotiotiotinx. I poured forth sacred strains from my golden throat in honour of the god

Pan, tiotiototinx, from the top of the thickly leaved ash, and my voice mingles with the mighty choirs who extol Cybele on the mountain tops, tototototototototinx. '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, tiotiototinx.

LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

If there is 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 it's a crime to beat your father, but with us it's 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." The runaway slave, whom you brand, is only a spotted francolin with us. Are you Phrygian like Spintharus? Among us you would be the Phrygian bird, the goldfinch, of the race of Philemon. Are you a slave and a Carian like Execestides? Among us you can create yourself fore-fathers; you can always find relations. Does the son of Pisas 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.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (singing)

So the swans on the banks of the Hebrus, tiotiototototinx, mingle their voices to serenade Apollo, tiotiototinx, flapping their wings the while, tiotiototinx; their notes reach beyond the clouds of heaven; they startle the various tribes of the beasts; a windless sky calms the waves, tototototototototinx; all Olympus resounds, and astonishment seizes its rulers; the Olympian graces and Muses cry aloud the strain, tiotiototinx.

LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

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, needing to take a crap, would not have to spill it out on his cloak, but could fly off, satisfy his requirements, let a few farts 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 to her, and, having laid her, resume his place. Is it not the most priceless gift of all, to be winged? Look at Diitrephes! 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; he's now the finest gilded cock of his tribe.

(PITHETAERUS and EUELPIDES return; they now have wings.)

PITHETAERUS

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

EUELPIDES

What makes you laugh?

PITHETAERUS

Your little wings. D'you know what you look like? Like a goose painted by some dauber.

EUELPIDES

And you look like a close-shaven blackbird.

PITHETAERUS

We ourselves asked for this transformation, and, as Aeschylus has it, "These are no borrowed feathers, but truly our own."

EPOPS

Come now, what must be done?

PITHETAERUS

First give our city a great and famous name, then sacrifice to the gods.

EUELPIDES

I think so too.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Let's see. What shall our city be called?

PITHETAERUS

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, even though I had nothing but bands of rushes.

PITHETAERUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

Do you like *Nephelococcygia*?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! capital! truly that's a brilliant thought!

EUELPIDES

Is it in *Nephelococcygia* that all the wealth of Theogenes and most of Aeschines' is?

PITHETAERUS

No, it's rather the plain of *Phlegra*, where the gods withered the pride of the sons of the Earth with their shafts.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

EUELPIDES

Why not choose *Athene Polias*?

PITHETAERUS

Oh! what a well-ordered town it would be to have a female deity armed from head to foot, while *Clisthenes* was spinning!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Who then shall guard the *Pelargicon*?

PITHETAERUS

A bird.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

One of us? What kind of bird?

PITHETAERUS

A bird of Persian strain, who is everywhere proclaimed to be the bravest of all, a true chick of Ares.

EUELPIDES

Oh! noble chick!

PITHETAERUS

Because he is a god well suited to live on the rocks. 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, if you like, post sentinels, keep the fire smouldering beneath the ashes, go round the walls, bell in hand, and go to sleep up there yourself; then despatch two heralds, one to the gods above, the other to mankind on earth and come back here.

EUELPIDES

As for yourself, remain here, and may the plague take you for a troublesome fellow!

(He departs.)

PITHETAERUS

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 (singing)

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.

PITHETAERUS

Enough! but, by Heracles! what is this? Great gods! I have seen many prodigious things, but I never saw a muzzled raven. (The PRIEST arrives.) Priest! it's high time! Sacrifice to the new gods.

PRIEST

I begin, but where is the man with the basket? Pray to the Hestia of the birds, to the kite, who presides over the hearth, and to all the god and goddess-birds who dwell in Olympus...

PITHETAERUS

Oh! Hawk, the sacred guardian of Sunium, oh, god of the storks!

PRIEST

...to the swan of Delos, to Leto the mother of the quails, and to Artemis, the goldfinch...

PITHETAERUS

It's no longer Artemis Colaenis, but Artemis the goldfinch.

PRIEST

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

PITHETAERUS

Oh! sovereign ostrich Cybele, mother of Cleocritus!

PRIEST

...to grant health and safety to the Nephelococcygians as well as to the dwellers in Chios...

PITHETAERUS

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

PRIEST

...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...

PITHETAERUS

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.

(The PRIEST departs.)

CHORUS (singing)

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.

PITHETAERUS

Let us address our sacrifices and our prayers to the winged gods.

(A POET enters.)

POET

Oh, Muse! celebrate happy Nephelococcygia in your hymns.

PITHETAERUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

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 parthenia worthy of Simonides himself.

PITHETAERUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

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

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, thou, whose name recalls the holy sacrifices, make us such gift as thy generous heart shall suggest."

(He puts out his hand.)

PITHETAERUS

He will drive us silly if we do not get rid of him by some present. (To the PRIEST'S acolyte) 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.

PITHETAERUS

Oh! what a pest! It's impossible then to get 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 get what I mean?

PITHETAERUS

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

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!"

(He departs.)

PITHETAERUS

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. (To a slave) Come, take the lustral water and circle the altar. Let all keep silence!

(An ORACLE-MONGER enters.)

ORACLE-MONGER

Let not the goat be sacrificed.

PITHETAERUS

Who are you?

ORACLE-MONGER

Who am I? An oracle-monger.

PITHETAERUS

Get out!

ORACLE-MONGER

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

PITHETAERUS

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

ORACLE-MONGER

The divine spirit was against it.

PITHETAERUS

Well, I suppose there's nothing to do but hear the terms of the oracle.

ORACLE-MONGER

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

PITHETAERUS

But how do the Corinthians concern me?

ORACLE-MONGER

It is the regions of the air that Bacis indicates 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."

PITHETAERUS

Does it say sandals there?

ORACLE-MONGER

Look at the book. "And besides this a goblet of wine and a good share of the entrails of the entrails of the victim."

PITHETAERUS

Of the entrails- does it say that?

ORACLE-MONGER

Look at the book. "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."

PITHETAERUS

Does it say all that?

ORACLE-MONGER

Look at the book.

PITHETAERUS

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."

ORACLE-MONGER

You are drivelling.

PITHETAERUS

Look at the book. "And don't spare him, were he an eagle from out of the clouds, were it Lampon himself or the great Diopithes."

ORACLE-MONGER

Does it say that?

PITHETAERUS

Look at the book and go and hang yourself.

ORACLE-MONGER

Oh! unfortunate wretch that I am.

(He departs.)

PITHETAERUS

Away with you, and take your prophecies elsewhere.

(Enter METON, With surveying instruments.)

METON

I have come to you...

PITHETAERUS (interrupting)

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.

PITHETAERUS

In the name of the gods, who are you?

METON

Who am I? Meton, known throughout Greece and at Colonus.

PITHETAERUS

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?

PITHETAERUS

Not in the 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.

PITHETAERUS

A regular Thales! Meton...

METON

What d'you want with me?

PITHETAERUS

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

METON

Why, what have I to fear?

PITHETAERUS

It's 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?

PITHETAERUS

No, certainly not.

METON

What's wrong then?

PITHETAERUS

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

METON

Then I'll be going.

PITHETAERUS

I'm afraid it's too late. The thunder growls already.

(He beats him.)

METON

Oh, woe! oh, woe!

PITHETAERUS

I warned you. Now, be off, and do your surveying somewhere else.

(METON takes to his heels. He is no sooner gone than an INSPECTOR arrives.)

INSPECTOR

Where are the Proxeni?

PITHETAERUS

Who is this Sardanapalus?

INSPECTOR

I have been appointed by lot to come to Nephelococcygia. as inspector.

PITHETAERUS

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

INSPECTOR

A decree of Teleas.

PITHETAERUS

Will you just pocket your salary, do nothing, and get out?

INSPECTOR

Indeed I will; I am urgently needed to be at Athens to attend the Assembly; for I am charged with the interests of Pharnaces.

PITHETAERUS

Take it then, and get on your way. This is your salary.

(He beats him.)

INSPECTOR

What does this mean?

PITHETAERUS

This is the assembly where you have to defend Pharnaces.

INSPECTOR

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

PITHETAERUS

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

(The INSPECTOR goes into hiding. A DEALER IN DECREES arrives.)

DEALER IN DECREES (reading)

"If the Nephelococcygian does wrong to the Athenian..."

PITHETAERUS

What trouble now? What book is that?

DEALER IN DECREES

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

PITHETAERUS

Which?

DEALER IN DECREES

"The Nephelococcygians shall adopt the same weights, measures and decrees as the Olophyxians."

PITHETAERUS

And you shall soon be imitating the Ototyxians.

(He beats him.)

DEALER IN DECREES

Ow! what are you doing?

PITHETAERUS

Now will you get out of here with your decrees? For I am going to let you see some severe ones.

(The DEALER IN DECREES departs; the INSPECTOR comes out of hiding.)

INSPECTOR (returning)

I summon Pithetaerus for outrage for the month of Munychion.

PITHETAERUS

Ha! my friend! are you still here?

(The DEALER IN DECREES also returns.)

DEALER IN DECREES

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

PITHETAERUS

What! rascal! you are back too?

(He rushes at him.)

INSPECTOR

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

PITHETAERUS

And I'll smash your urns.

INSPECTOR

Do you recall that evening when you crapped on the column where the decrees are posted?

PITHETAERUS

Here! here! let him be seized. (The INSPECTOR runs off.) Why, don't you want to stay any longer? But let us get indoors as quick as possible; we will sacrifice the goat inside.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (singing)

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.

LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

I hear it proclaimed everywhere: "A talent for him who shall kill Diagoras of Melos, and a talent for him who destroys one of the dead tyrants." We likewise wish to make our proclamation: "A talent to him among you who shall kill Philocrates, the Struthian; 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.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (singing)

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, as 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.

LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

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 received. Firstly, the owls of Laurium, 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 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 stomachs as capacious as a bird's crop. But, if your award is against us, don't fail to have metal covers fashioned for yourselves, like those they place over statues; else, look out! for the day you wear a white tunic all the birds will soil it with their droppings.

PITHETAERUS

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 in the Olympic stadium.

MESSENGER (running back and forth)

Where, where, where is he? Where, where, where is he? Where, where, where is he? Where is Pithetaerus, our leader?

PITHETAERUS

Here am I.

MESSENGER

The wall is finished.

PITHETAERUS

That's good news.

MESSENGER

It's 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.

PITHETAERUS

That's fine!

MESSENGER

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

PITHETAERUS

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, 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.

PITHETAERUS

And who carried the mortar?

MESSENGER

Hérons, in hods.

PITHETAERUS

But how could they put the mortar into the hods?

MESSENGER

Oh! it was 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.

PITHETAERUS

Ah! to what use cannot feet 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 trowels on their backs, just the way little children are carried.

PITHETAERUS

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.

(He departs.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (to PITHETAERUS)

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

PITHETAERUS

By the gods, yes, and with good reason. It's 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 (rushing in)

Alas! alas! alas! alas! alas! alas!

PITHETAERUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

It's a terrible and criminal deed. What god was it?

SECOND MESSENGER

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

PITHETAERUS

Why were not patrolmen sent against him at once?

SECOND MESSENGER

We have despatched thirty thousand hawks of the legion of Mounted Archers. 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.

PITHETAERUS

To arms, all, with slings and bows! This way, all our soldiers; shoot and strike! Some one give me a sling!

CHORUS (singing)

War, a terrible war is breaking out between us and the gods! Come, let each one guard Air, the son of Erebus, in which the clouds float. Take care no immortal enters it without your knowledge.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Scan all sides with your glance. Hark! methinks I can hear the rustle of the swift wings of a god from heaven.

(The Machine brings in IRIS, in the form of a young girl.)

PITHETAERUS

Hi! you woman! where, where, where are you flying to? Halt, don't stir! keep motionless! not a beat of your wing! (She pauses in her flight.) Who are you and from what country? You must say whence you come.

IRIS

I come from the abode of the Olympian gods.

PITHETAERUS

What's your name, ship or head-dress?

IRIS

I am swift Iris.

PITHETAERUS

Paralus or Salaminia?

IRIS

What do you mean?

PITHETAERUS

Let a buzzard rush at her and seize her.

IRIS

Seize me? But what do all these insults mean?

PITHETAERUS

Woe to you!

IRIS

I do not understand it.

PITHETAERUS

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

IRIS

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

PITHETAERUS

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 dreaming?

PITHETAERUS

Did you get one?

IRIS

Are you mad?

PITHETAERUS

No head-bird gave you a safe-conduct?

IRIS

A safe-conduct to me. You poor fool!

PITHETAERUS

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?

PITHETAERUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

You would have died nevertheless.- Oh! that would 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.

PITHETAERUS

Of which gods are you speaking?

IRIS

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

PITHETAERUS

You, gods?

IRIS

Are there others then?

PITHETAERUS

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

IRIS (in tragic style)

Oh! fool! fool! Rouse not the wrath of the gods, for it is terrible indeed. Armed with the brand of Zeus, Justice would annihilate your race; the lightning would strike you as it did Lycymnius and consume both your body and the porticos of your palace.

PITHETAERUS

Here! that's enough tall talk. Just you listen and keep quiet! Do you take me for a Lydian or a Phrygian 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. I shall send more than six hundred porphyryons clothed in leopards' skins up to heaven against him; and formerly a single Porphyryon gave him enough to do. As for you, his messenger, if you annoy me, I shall begin by getting between your thighs, and even though you are Iris, you will be surprised at the erection the old man can produce; it's three times as good as the ram on a ship's prow!

IRIS

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

PITHETAERUS

Won't you get out of here quickly? Come, stretch your wings or look out for squalls!

IRIS

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

(The Machine takes IRIS away.)

PITHETAERUS

Ha!... but just you be off elsewhere to roast younger folk than us with your lightning.

CHORUS (singing)

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.

PITHETAERUS

It's odd that the messenger we sent to the mortals has never returned.

(The HERALD enters, wearing a golden garland on his head.)

HERALD

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

PITHETAERUS

Get to your story!

HERALD

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

PITHETAERUS

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 it's 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; indeed he looks like a quail that has been hit hard on 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.

PITHETAERUS

Ah! by Zeus, there's no time for idling. (To some slaves) Go as quick as possible and fill every hamper, every basket you can find with wings. Manes will bring them to me outside the walls, where I will welcome those who present themselves.

CHORUS (Singing)

This town will soon be inhabited by a crowd of men. Fortune favours us alone and thus they have fallen in love with our city.

PITHETAERUS (to the slave MANES, who brings in a basket full of wings)

Come, hurry up and bring them along.

CHORUS (singing)

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

PITHETAERUS (as MANES Comes in with another basket)

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

CHORUS (singing)

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.

PITHETAERUS

Aye, Manes is a great craven.

CHORUS (singing)

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 and the aquatic birds; then you must take care to distribute them to the men according to their character.

PITHETAERUS (to MANES, who is bringing in another basket)

Oh! by the kestrels! I can keep my hands off you no longer; you are too slow and lazy altogether.

(He hits MANES, who runs away. A young PARRICIDE enters.)

PARRICIDE (singing)

Oh! might I but become an eagle, who soars in the skies! Oh! might I fly above the azure waves of the barren sea!

PITHETAERUS

Ha! it would seem the news was true; I hear someone coming who talks of wings.

PARRICIDE

Nothing is more charming than to fly; I am bird-mad and fly towards you, for I want to live with you and to obey your laws.

PITHETAERUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

Yes, 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.

PITHETAERUS

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 (petulantly)

It's hardly worth while coming all this distance to be compelled to keep my father!

PITHETAERUS

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.

PARRICIDE

By Bacchus! You're right; I will follow your counsel.

PITHETAERUS

It's acting wisely, by Zeus.

(The PARRICIDE departs, and the dithyrambic poet CINESIAS arrives.)

CINESIAS (singing)

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

PITHETAERUS

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

CINESIAS (singing)

"...and being fearless and vigorous, it is seeking fresh outlet."

PITHETAERUS

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

CINESIAS (singing)

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

PITHETAERUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

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 empty space and are clothed in mist and dense obscurity. To appreciate this, just listen.

PITHETAERUS

Oh! no, no, no!

CINESIAS

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

PITHETAERUS

Stop! Way enough!

CINESIAS

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

PITHETAERUS

By Zeus! I'll cut your breath short.

(He picks up a pair of wings and begins trying to stop CINESIAS' mouth with them.)

CINESIAS (running away)

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

PITHETAERUS

What! are you not delighted to be cleaving the air?

CINESIAS

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

PITHETAERUS

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

CINESIAS

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

(CINESIAS departs and an INFORMER arrives.)

INFORMER

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

PITHETAERUS

Oh! it's a regular invasion that threatens us. Here comes another one, humming along.

INFORMER

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

PITHETAERUS

It's his cloak I believe he's addressing; it stands in great need of the swallows' return.

INFORMER

Where is he who gives out wings to all comers?

PITHETAERUS

Here I am, but you must tell me for what purpose you want them.

INFORMER

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

PITHETAERUS

Do you want to fly straight to Pellene?

INFORMER

I? Why, I am an accuser of the islands, an informer...

PITHETAERUS

A fine trade, truly!

INFORMER

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

PITHETAERUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

It's just my words that gives you wings.

INFORMER

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

PITHETAERUS

They all start this way.

INFORMER

How?

PITHETAERUS

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?

PITHETAERUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

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

INFORMER

That's just it.

PITHETAERUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

I catch the idea. Wait, I've got some fine Corcyraean wings. How do you like them?

INFORMER

Oh! woe is me! Why, it's a whip!

PITHETAERUS

No, no; these are the wings, I tell you, that make the top spin.

INFORMER (as PITHETAERUS lashes him)

Oh! oh! oh!

PITHETAERUS

Take your flight, clear off, you miserable cur, or you will soon see what comes of quibbling and lying. (The INFORMER flees. To his slaves) Come, let us gather up our wings and withdraw.

(The baskets are taken away.)

CHORUS (singing)

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.

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- except 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.

(PROMETHEUS enters, masked to conceal his identity.)

PROMETHEUS

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

PITHETAERUS

Ha! what is this? A masked man!

PROMETHEUS

Can you see any god behind me?

PITHETAERUS

No, none. But who are you, pray?

PROMETHEUS

What's the time, please?

PITHETAERUS

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

PROMETHEUS

Is it the fall of day? Is it no later than that?

PITHETAERUS

This is getting dull!

PROMETHEUS

What is Zeus doing? Is he dispersing the clouds or gathering them?

PITHETAERUS

Watch out for yourself!

PROMETHEUS

Come, I will raise my mask.

PITHETAERUS

Ah! my dear Prometheus!

PROMETHEUS

Sh! Sh! speak lower!

PITHETAERUS

Why, what's the matter, Prometheus?

PROMETHEUS

Sh! 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.

PITHETAERUS

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

PROMETHEUS

Then listen.

PITHETAERUS

I am listening, proceed!

PROMETHEUS

Zeus is done for.

PITHETAERUS

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. The barbarian gods, who are dying of hunger, are bawling like Illyrians and threaten to make an armed descent upon Zeus, if he does not open markets where joints of the victims are sold.

PITHETAERUS

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?

PITHETAERUS

And what is the name of these gods?

PROMETHEUS

Their name? Why, the Triballi.

PITHETAERUS

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

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 with them, unless Zeus restores the sceptre to the birds and gives you Basileia in marriage.

PITHETAERUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

Oh, yes! it's thanks to you that we roast our meat.

PROMETHEUS

I hate the gods, as you know.

PITHETAERUS

Aye, by Zeus, you have always detested them.

PROMETHEUS

Towards them I am a veritable Timon; 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 Canephoroi.

PITHETAERUS

Wait, take this stool as well.

(PROMETHEUS leaves. PITHETAERUS goes into the thicket.)

CHORUS (singing)

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

(POSIDON enters, accompanied by HERACLES and TRIBALLUS.)

POSIDON

This is the city of Nephelococcygia, to which 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? Oh! democracy! whither, oh! whither are you leading us? Is it possible that the gods have chosen such an envoy? You are undisturbed? Ugh! you 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 dared to wall us out.

POSIDON

But, my friend, we are envoys of peace.

HERACLES

All the more reason why I wish to strangle him.

(PITHETAERUS comes out of the thicket, followed by slaves, who are carrying various kitchen utensils; one of them sets up a table on which he places poultry dressed for roasting.)

PITHETAERUS

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

HERACLES

Mortal! we who greet you are three gods.

PITHETAERUS

Wait a bit till I have prepared my silphium pickle.

HERACLES

What are these meats?

PITHETAERUS

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

HERACLES

And you are going to season them before answering us?

PITHETAERUS (looking up from his work for the first time)

Ah! Heracles! welcome, welcome! What's the matter?

POSIDON

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

PITHETAERUS (ignoring this)

There's no more oil in the flask.

HERACLES

And yet the birds must be thoroughly basted with it.

POSIDON

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 plenipotentiaries.

PITHETAERUS

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?

PITHETAERUS

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!

HERACLES

My notion too.

PITHETAERUS (to TRIBALLUS)

And you, what's your opinion?

TRIBALLUS

Nabaisatreu.

PITHETAERUS

D'you see? he also approves. But listen, here is 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! and how?

PITHETAERUS

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 Triballus.

HERACLES

Hi! Triballus, do you want a thrashing?

TRIBALLUS

Sure, bashum head withum stick.

HERACLES

He says, "Right willingly."

POSIDON

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

HERACLES

Very well! we accord you the sceptre.

PITHETAERUS

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.

PITHETAERUS

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 blockhead! 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.

PITHETAERUS

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. The law will not allow you an obolus of the paternal property, for you are a bastard and not a legitimate child.

HERACLES

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

PITHETAERUS

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?

PITHETAERUS

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."

HERACLES

And I get nothing whatever of the paternal property?

PITHETAERUS

Absolutely nothing. But tell me, has your father had you entered on the registers of his phratry?

HERACLES

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

PITHETAERUS

Why do you shake your fist at heaven? Do you want to fight? 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.

PITHETAERUS

Then it all depends on the Triballus. (To the TRIBALLUS) What do you say?

TRIBALLUS

Givum bird pretty gel bigum queen.

HERACLES

He says give her.

POSIDON

Why no, he does not say anything of the sort, or else, like the swallows he does not know how to walk.

PITHETAERUS

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

POSIDON (resignedly)

All right, 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.

PITHETAERUS

Here are birds already dressed, and very suitable for a nuptial feast.

HERACLES

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

PITHETAERUS

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

HERACLES

Ah! how well I would have treated myself!

PITHETAERUS

Let some one bring me a beautiful and magnificent tunic for the wedding.

(The tunic is brought. PITHETAERUS and the three gods depart.)

CHORUS (singing)

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

(A MESSENGER enters.)

MESSENGER (in tragic style)

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 illumines 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, 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.

(PITHETAERUS enters, with a crown on his head; he is accompanied by BASILEIA.)

CHORUS (singing)

Fall back! to the right! to the left! advance! 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!

PITHETAERUS

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 (singing)

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!

PITHETAERUS (singing)

Let all the winged tribes of our fellow-citizens follow the bridal couple to the palace of Zeus 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.

(PITHETAERUS and BASILEIA leave dancing; the CHORUS follows them.)

CHORUS (singing)

Alalai! Ie Paion! Tenella kallinike! Loftiest art thou of gods!
THE END