

THE WASPS

by Aristophanes

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THE WASPS

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CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

PHILOCLEON
BDELYCLEON, his Son
SOSIAS, Slave of Philocleon
XANTHIAS, Slave of Philocleon
BOYS
DOGS
A GUEST
A BAKER'S WIFE
AN ACCUSER
CHORUS OF WASPS

(SCENE:—In the background is the house of PHILOCLEON, surrounded by a huge net. Two slaves are on guard, one of them asleep. On the roof is BDELYCLEON.)

SOSIAS (waking XANTHIAS UP)

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

XANTHIAS

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

SOSIAS

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

XANTHIAS

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

(He falls asleep again.)

SOSIAS

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

XANTHIAS.

Are you crazy, like a Corybant?

SOSIAS

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No! It's Bacchus who lulls me off.

XANTHIAS

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

SOSIAS

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

XANTHIAS

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

SOSIAS

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

XANTHIAS

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

SOSIAS

Rest undisturbed! Please the gods, no evil will befall you.

XANTHIAS

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

SOSIAS

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

XANTHIAS

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

SOSIAS

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

XANTHIAS

Faugh! faugh!

SOSIAS

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THE WASPS

What's the matter?

XANTHIAS

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

SOSIAS

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

XANTHIAS

Alas! it's our poor Athenian people, whom this accursed beast wishes to cut up and despoil of their fat.

SOSIAS

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

XANTHIAS

Ah! that's very well lisped indeed!

SOSIAS

Isn't this mighty strange? Theorus turning into a crow!

XANTHIAS

No, it is glorious.

SOSIAS

Why?

XANTHIAS

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

SOSIAS

Interpreting dreams so aptly certainly is worth two obols.

XANTHIAS (turning to the audience)

Come, I must explain the matter to the spectators. But first a few words of preamble: expect nothing very high-flown from us, nor any jests stolen from Megara; we have no slaves, who throw baskets of nuts to the spectators, nor any Heracles to be robbed of his dinner, nor does Euripides get loaded with contumely; and despite the happy chance that gave Cleon his fame we shall not go out of our way to belabour him again, Our little subject is not wanting in sense; it is well within your capacity and at the same time cleverer than many vulgar

THE WASPS

comedies.—We have a master of great renown, who is now sleeping up there on the other story. He has bidden us keep guard over his father, whom he has locked in, so that he may not go out. This father has a curious complaint; not one of you could hit upon or guess it, if I did not tell you.—Well then, try! I hear Amarynias, the son of Pronapus, over there, saying, "He is addicted to gambling." He's wrong! He is imputing his own malady to others. Yet love is indeed the principal part of his disease. Ah! here Sosias is telling Dercylus, "He loves drinking." Wrong again! the love of wine is a good man's failing. "Well then," says Nicostratus of the Scambonian deme, "he either loves sacrifices or else strangers." God no! he is not fond of strangers, Nicostratus, for he who says "Philoxenus" means a pederast, It's mere waste of time, you will not find it out. If you want to know it, keep silence! I will tell your our master's complaint; of all men, it is he who is fondest of the Heliaea. Thus, to be judging is his hobby, and he groans if he is not sitting on the first seat. He does not close an eye at night, and if he dozes off for an instant his mind flies instantly to the clepsydra. He is so accustomed to hold the balloting pebble, that he awakes with his three fingers pinched together as if he were offering incense to the new moon. If he sees scribbled on some doorway, "How charming is Demos, the son of Pylilampes!" he will write beneath it, "How charming is Cemos!" His cock crowed one evening; said he, "He has had money from the accused to awaken me too late. As soon as he rises from supper he bawls for his shoes and away he rushes down there before dawn to sleep beforehand, glued fast to the column like an oyster. He is a merciless judge, never failing to draw the convicting line and return home with his nails full of wax like a bumble—bee. Fearing he might run short of pebbles he keeps enough at home to cover a sea—beach, so that he may have the means of recording his sentence. Such is his madness, and all advice is useless; he only judges the more each day. So we keep him under lock and key, to prevent his going out; for his son is broken—hearted over this mania. At first he tried him with gentleness, wanted to persuade him to wear the cloak no longer, to go out no more; unable to convince him, he had him bathed and purified according to the ritual without any greater success, and then handed him over to the Corybantes; but the old man escaped them, and carrying off the kettledrum, rushed right into the midst of the Heliasts. As Cybele could do nothing with her rites, his son took him to Aegina and forcibly made him lie one night in the temple of Asclepius, the God of Healing, but before daylight there he was to be seen at the gate of the tribunal. Since then we let him go out no more, but he escaped us by the drains or by the skylight, so we stuffed up every opening with old rags and made all secure; then he drove short sticks into the wall and sprang from rung to rung like a magpie. Now we have stretched—nets all around the court and we keep watch and ward. The old man's name is Philocleon, it's the best name he could have, and the son is called Bdelycleon, for he is a man very fit to cure an insolent fellow of his boasting.

BDELYCLEON (from the roof)

Xanthias! Sosias! Are you asleep?

XANTHIAS

Alas!

SOSIAS

What is the matter?

XANTHIAS

Why, Bdelycleon is getting up.

BDELYCLEON

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

THE WASPS

XANTHIAS

Yes, master.

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON (poking his head out of the chimney)

I am the smoke going up.

BDELYCLEON

Smoke? smoke of what wood?

PHILOCLEON

Of fig-wood.

BDELYCLEON

Ah! that's the most acrid of all. But you shall not get out. Where is the chimney cover? Come down again. Now, up with another cross-bar. Now look out for some fresh dodge. But am I not the most unfortunate of men? Henceforward I shall only be called the son of Capnius.

XANTHIAS

He is pushing the door.

BDELYCLEON

Throw your weight upon it, come, put heart into the work. I will come and help you. Watch both lock and bolt. Take care he does not gnaw through the peg.

PHILOCLEON (from within)

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

XANTHIAS

Would you mind that?

PHILOCLEON

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

XANTHIAS

THE WASPS

Apollo the Saviour, what a prophecy!

PHILOCLEON

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

XANTHIAS

No, Philocleon, no never, by Posidon!

PHILOCLEON

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

XANTHIAS

But you have no teeth.

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

Our friend is planning some great crime.

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

Could I not sell it just as well?

PHILOCLEON

Not as well as I could.

BDELYCLEON

No, but better.

PHILOCLEON

Bring out the ass anyway.

XANTHIAS

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

BDELYCLEON

THE WASPS

THE WASPS

Yes, but I have not swallowed the hook; I scented the trick. I will go in and fetch the ass, so that the old man may not point his weapons that way again. (He goes in, returning immediately with the ass.) Stupid old ass, are you weeping because you are going to be sold? Come, go a bit quicker. Why, what are you moaning and groaning for? You might be carrying another Odysseus.

XANTHIAS

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

BDELYCLEON

Who, who? Let's see. Why it's he! What does this mean? Who are you? Come, speak!

PHILOCLEON

I am Noman.

BDELYCLEON

Noman? Of what country?

PHILOCLEON

Of Ithaca, son of Apodrasippides.

BDELYCLEON

Ha! Mister Noman, you will not laugh presently. Pull him out quick. Ah! the wretch, where has he crept to? Does he not resemble a she-ass to the life?

PHILOCLEON

If you do not leave me in peace, I shall sue.

BDELYCLEON

And what will the suit be about?

PHILOCLEON

The shade of an ass.

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

THE WASPS

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

XANTHIAS

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

BDELYCLEON

Perhaps a rat loosened it.

XANTHIAS

A rat? it's surely our gutter-judge, who has crept beneath the tiles of the roof.

BDELYCLEON

Ah! woe to us! there he is, he has turned into a sparrow; he will be flying off. Where is the net? where? Shoo! shoo! get back! Ah! by Zeus! I would rather have to guard Scione than such a father.

XANTHIAS

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

BDELYCLEON

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

XANTHIAS

Why, it's scarcely dawn yet!

BDELYCLEON

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

XANTHIAS

THE WASPS

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

BDELYCLEON

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

XANTHIAS

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

(Enter the CHORUS, composed of old men costumed as wasps.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

BOY

Father, father, watch out for the mud.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Pick up a blade of straw and trim your lamp.

BOY

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

BOY

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

THE WASPS

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

CHORUS (singing)

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

(Here a duet begins between the BOY and the CHORUS.)

BOY

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

CHORUS

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

BOY

No, father, I prefer figs; they are better.

CHORUS

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

BOY

Well then, I will lead you no farther.

CHORUS

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

BOY

But, father, if the Archon should not form a court to-day, how are we to buy our dinner? Have you some good hope to offer us or only "Helle's sacred waves"?

CHORUS

THE WASPS

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

BOY

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

CHORUS

So that you might give me troubles to feed on.

BOY

Little wallet, you seem like to be a mere useless ornament!

BOY AND CHORUS

It is our destiny to groan.

PHILOCLEON (appearing at an upper window; singing)

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

CHORUS (singing)

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

PHILOCLEON (singing)

My son. But no bawling, he is there in front asleep; lower your voice.

CHORUS (singing)

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

PHILOCLEON (singing)

My friends, he will not have me judge nor do anyone any ill, but he wants me to stay at home and enjoy myself, and I will not. And does this wretch, this Demologocleon dare to say such odious things, just because you tell the truth about our navy? He would not have dared, had he not been a conspirator.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

PHILOCLEON

THE WASPS

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

PHILOCLEON

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

PHILOCLEON

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

CHORUS (singing)

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

PHILOCLEON (singing)

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

CHORUS (singing)

It's acting like a man eager for his safety. Get your jaws to work.

PHILOCLEON (singing)

There! it's gnawed through! But no shouting! let Bdelycleon notice nothing!

CHORUS (singing)

Have no fear, have no fear! if he breathes a syllable, it will be to bruise his own knuckles; he will have to fight to defend his own head. We shall teach him not to insult the mysteries of the goddesses.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But fasten a rope to the window, tie it around your body and let yourself down to the ground, with your heart bursting with the fury of Diopithes.

THE WASPS

PHILOCLEON

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We shall call up the full strength of our oak-tough courage to your aid. That is what we will do.

PHILOCLEON

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

PHILOCLEON

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

(He slides down as quietly as possible; nevertheless BDELYCLEON

wakes up.)

BDELYCLEON (to XANTHIAS)

Ho, there! ho! get up!

XANTHIAS (waking up)

What's the matter?

BDELYCLEON

I thought I heard talking close to me. Is the old man at it again, escaping through some loophole?

XANTHIAS

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

BDELYCLEON

Ha, rascal! what are you doing there? You shall not descend. (To XANTHIAS) Mount quick to the other window, strike him with the boughs that hang over the entrance; perhaps he will turn back when he feels himself being thrashed.

THE WASPS

PHILOCLEON (to the audience)

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Why do we delay to let loose that fury, that is so terrible, when our nests are attacked?

CHORUS (singing)

I feel my angry sting is stiffening, that sharp sting, with which we punish our enemies. Come, children, cast your cloaks to the winds, run, shout, tell Cleon what is happening, that he may march against this foe of our city, who deserves death, since he proposes to prevent the trial of lawsuits.

(The Boys run off, taking the CHORUS' mantles with them.)

BDELYCLEON (rushing out of the house with the two slaves and seizing his father) Friends, listen to the truth, instead of bawling.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

By Zeus! we will shout to heaven.

BDELYCLEON

And I shall not let him go.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Why, this is intolerable, 'tis manifest tyranny.

CHORUS (singing)

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

XANTHIAS

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

BDELYCLEON

It was with these weapons that they killed Philippus the son of Gorgias when he was put on trial.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

XANTHIAS

THE WASPS

THE WASPS

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

CHORUS (singing)

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

(opening the door and trying to shove his struggling father in)

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

PHILOCLEON

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

PHILOCLEON (to XANTHIAS)

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

You shall repay us for all this, and that soon. Tremble at our ferocious glance; you shall taste our just anger.

BDELYCLEON

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

XANTHIAS

That's just what I am doing.

THE WASPS

THE WASPS

BDELYCLEON

Blind them with smoke too!

XANTHIAS AND SOSIAS

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

BDELYCLEON

Hit them with your stick Xanthias, and you Sosias, to smoke them out better, throw Aeschines, the son of Sellartius, on the fire.

XANTHIAS (as the CHORUS retires from the unequal conquest)

There, we were bound to drive you off sooner or later!

BDELYCLEON

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

CHORUS (singing)

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

BDELYCLEON

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Confer with you, the people's foe! with you, a royalist....

CHORUS (singing)

....and accomplice of Brasidas, you with your woollen-fringed coat and your long beard?

BDELYCLEON

Ah! it would be better to separate altogether from my father than to steer my boat daily through such stormy seas!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

BDELYCLEON

THE WASPS

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

CHORUS (singing)

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

BDELYCLEON

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

XANTHIAS

Yesterday I went to see a whore about noon and told her to get on top; she flew into a rage, pretending I wanted to restore the tyranny of Hippias.

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

I deceive myself, when I am judging?

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

I a slave, I, who lord it over all?

BDELYCLEON

THE WASPS

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

PHILOCLEON

Much, and I appoint my colleagues jurymen.

BDELYCLEON

And I also. (To the slaves) Release him.

PHILOCLEON

And bring me a sword; If I am worsted in this debate, I shall fall on the blade.

BDELYCLEON

Tell me whether you will accept the verdict of the Court.

PHILOCLEON

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

CHORUS (singing)

Now it is necessary for you, who are of our school, to say something novel, that you may not seem...

BDELYCLEON (interrupting)

And I must note down everything he says, so as to remember it; someone bring me a tablet, quick.

CHORUS (singing)

...to side with this youth in his opinions. You see how serious the question has become; if he should prevail, which the gods forbend, it will be all over for us.

PHILOCLEON

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

CHORUS (singing)

That old men are no longer good for anything; we shall be perpetually laughed at in the streets, shall be called thallopores, mere brief-bags.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

You are to be the champion of all our rights and sovereignty. Come, take courage! Bring into action all the resources of your wit.

PHILOCLEON

THE WASPS

THE WASPS

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

BDELYCLEON

Let us note this first point, the supplicants.

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

And if the Senate and the people have trouble in deciding some important case, it is decreed to send the culprits before the Heliasts; then Euathlus and the illustrious Colaconymus, who cast away his shield, swear not to betray us and to fight for the people. Did ever an orator carry the day with his opinion if he had not first declared that the jury should be dismissed for the day as soon as they had given their first verdict? We are the only ones whom Cleon, the great bawler, does not badger. On the contrary, he protects and caresses us; he keeps off the flies,

THE WASPS

which is what you have never done for your father. Theorus, who is a man not less illustrious than Euphemius, takes the sponge out of the pot and blacks our shoes. See then what good things you deprive and despoil me of. Pray, is this obeying or being a slave, as you pretended to be able to prove?

BDELYCLEON

Talk away to your heart's content; you must come to a stop at last and then you shall see that this grand power only resembles an anus; no matter how much you wash it, you can never get it clean.

PHILOCLEON

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

CHORUS (singing)

Never have I heard speech so elegant or so sensible.

PHILOCLEON

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

CHORUS (singing)

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

BDELYCLEON

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

CHORUS (singing)

Come, plot everything you can to beat him; 'tis not easy to soften me if you do no talk on my side.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

If you have nothing but nonsense to spout, it's time to buy a good millstone, freshly cut withal, to crush my anger.

BDELYCLEON

THE WASPS

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

What! our pay is not even a tithe of the state revenue?

BDELYCLEON

Why no, certainly not.

PHILOCLEON

And where does the rest go then?

BDELYCLEON

To those who say: "I shall never betray the interests of the masses; I shall always fight for the people." And it is you, father, who let yourself be caught with their fine talk, who give them all power over yourself. They are the men who extort fifty talents at a time by threat and intimidation from the allies. "Pay tribute to me," they say, "or I shall loose the lightning on you—town and destroy it." And you, you are content to gnaw the crumbs of your own might. What do the allies do? They see that the Athenian mob lives on the tribunal in niggard and miserable fashion, and they count you for nothing, for not more than the vote of Connus; it is on those wretches that they lavish everything, dishes of salt fish, wine, tapestries, cheese, honey, chaplets, necklets, drinking—cups, all that yields pleasure and health. And you, their master, to you as a reward for all your toil both on land and sea, nothing is given, not even a clove of garlic to eat with your little fish.

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

Is it not the worst of all slaveries to see all these wretches and their flatterers, whom they gorge with gold, at the head of affairs? As for you, you are content with the three obols which they give you and which you have so painfully earned in the galleys, in battles and sieges. But what I stomach least is that you go to sit on the tribunal

THE WASPS

by order. Some young fairy, the son of Chaereas, to wit, enters your house wiggling his arse, foul with debauchery, on his straddling legs and charges you to come and judge at daybreak, and precisely to the minute. "He who presents himself after the opening of the Court," says he, "will not get the triobolus." But he himself, though he arrives late, will nevertheless get his drachma as a public advocate. If an accused man makes him some present, he shares it with a colleague and the pair agree to arrange the matter like two sawyers, one of whom pulls and the other pushes. As for you, you have only eyes for the public pay-clerk, and you see nothing.

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

Alas! my hand is benumbed; I can no longer draw my sword. What has become of my strength?

BDELYCLEON

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (to BDELYCLEON)

He was right who said, "Decide nothing till you have heard both sides," for now it seems to me that you are the one who gains the complete victory. My wrath is appeased and I throw away my sticks. (To PHILOCLEON) But, you, our comrade and contemporary....

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (taking this up in song)

.... let yourself be won over by his words; come, be not too obstinate or too perverse. Would that I had a relative or kinsman to correct me thus! Clearly some god is at hand and is now protecting you and loading you with benefits. Accept them.

THE WASPS

BDELYCLEON

I will feed him, I will give him everything that is suitable for an old man; oatmeal gruel, a cloak, soft furs, and a wench to rub his tool and his loins. But he keeps silent and will not utter a sound; that's a bad sign.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (singing)

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

PHILOCLEON

Alas! alas!

BDELYCLEON

Now why this lamentation?

PHILOCLEON (in tragic style)

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

What is it? Let us hear.

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

But what is there to judge? Are you mad?

THE WASPS

BDELYCLEON

Everything as in a tribunal. If a servant opens a door secretly, you inflict upon him a simple fine; that's what you have repeatedly done down there. Everything can be arranged to suit you. If it is warm in the morning, you can judge in the sunlight; if it is snowing, then seated at your fire; if it rains, you go indoors; and if you don't rise till noon, there will be no Thesmothetes to exclude you from the precincts.

PHILOCLEON

The notion pleases me.

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

But could I judge as well with my mouth full?

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

I will.

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

And what did he say to that?

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

You see, that is yet another advantage.

THE WASPS

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

Wait! I will bring everything here.

(He goes into the house.)

PHILOCLEON (to himself)

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

BDELYCLEON (returning with slaves who are carrying various objects)

There, what do you think of that? I have brought you everything needful and much more into the bargain. See, here is a thunder-mug in case you have to pee; I shall hang it up beside you.

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

Here is a fire, and near to it are lentils, should you want to have a bite to eat.

PHILOCLEON

That's admirably arranged. In this way, even when feverish, I shall nevertheless receive my pay; and besides, I could eat my lentils without quitting my seat. But why this cock?

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

What is that?

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

THE WASPS

THE WASPS

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

PHILOCLEON

Oh! hero, my master I how repulsive you are to look at I

BDELYCLEON

He looks just like Cleonymus.

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

Let us see. What case shall we bring up first? Is there a slave who has done something wrong? Ah! you Thracian there, you burnt the stew-pot the other day.

PHILOCLEON

Wait, wait! This is a fine state of affairs! You almost made me judge without a bar, and that is the most sacred thing of all for us.

BDELYCLEON

There isn't any, by Zeus.

PHILOCLEON

I'll run indoors and get one myself. (Exit)

BDELYCLEON

What does it matter? Terrible thing, the force of habit.

XANTHIAS (coming out of the house)

Damn that animal! How can anyone keep such a dog?

BDELYCLEON

Hullo! what's the matter?

THE WASPS

THE WASPS

XANTHIAS

Oh, it's Labes, who has just rushed into the kitchen and seized a whole Sicilian cheese and gobbled it up.

BDELYCLEON

Good! this will be the first offence I shall make my father try. (To XANTHIAS) Come along and lay your accusation. XANTHIAS No, not I; the other dog vows he will be accuser, if the matter is brought up for trial.

BDELYCLEON

Well then, bring them both along.

XANTHIAS

That's what we'll have to do.

(He goes hack into the house. A moment later PHILOCLEON comes out.)

BDELYCLEON

What is this?

PHILOCLEON

The pig-trough of the swine dedicated to Hestia.

BDELYCLEON

Did you steal it from a shrine?

PHILOCLEON

No, no, by addressing Hestia first, I might, thanks to her, crush an adversary. But put an end to delay by calling up the case. My verdict is already settled.

BDELYCLEON

Wait! I still have to bring out the tablets and the scrolls.

(He goes into the house.)

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON (coming out with tablets and scrolls)

There you are.

THE WASPS

THE WASPS

PHILOCLEON

Then call the case.

BDELYCLEON

Right. Who is first on the docket?

PHILOCLEON

My god! This is unbearable! I have forgotten the urns.

BDELYCLEON

Now where are you going?

PHILOCLEON

To look for the urns.

BDELYCLEON

Don't bother, I have these pots.

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON (pointing to the thunder-mug)

What is this if it is not a clepsydra?

PHILOCLEON

You know how to supply everything.

BDELYCLEON

Let fire be brought quickly from the house with myrtle boughs and incense, and let us invoke the gods before opening the sitting.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Offer them libations and your vows and we will thank them that a noble agreement has put an end to your bickerings and strife. And first let there be a sacred silence.

CHORUS (singing)

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

THE WASPS

BDELYCLEON (solemnly)

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

CHORUS (singing)

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

(XANTHIAS brings in two persons costumed as dogs, but with masks

that suggest Laches and Cleon.)

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

Who is the defendant?

BDELYCLEON

This one.

PHILOCLEON (aside)

He does not stand a chance.

BDELYCLEON

Listen to the indictment. A dog of Cydathenaea doth hereby charge Labes of Aexonia with having devoured a Sicilian cheese by himself without accomplices. Penalty demanded, a collar of fig-tree wood.

PHILOCLEON

Nay, a dog's death, if convicted.

BDELYCLEON

This is Labes, the defendant.

PHILOCLEON

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

THE WASPS

DOG

Bow wow! bow wow!

BDELYCLEON

Here he is.

PHILOCLEON

Why, he's another Labes, a great barker and a licker of dishes.

BDELYCLEON (as Herald)

Silence! Keep your seats! (To the Cydathenaeon dog.) And you, up on your feet and accuse him.

PHILOCLEON

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

DOG

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

PHILOCLEON

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

DOG

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

PHILOCLEON

He has not shared anything, not even with his comrade. His madness is as hot as my lentils.

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

DOG

THE WASPS

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

PHILOCLEON

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

DOG

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

Ha, ha! I reckon I know somebody who will crap for fright to-day.

BDELYCLEON

Will you never cease showing yourself hard and intractable, and especially to the accused? You tear them to pieces tooth and nail. (To LABES) Come forward and defend yourself. What means this silence? Answer.

PHILOCLEON

No doubt he has nothing to say.

BDELYCLEON

Not at all, I think he has got what happened once to Thucydides in court; his jaws suddenly set fast. Get away! I will undertake your defence.—Gentlemen of the jury, it is a difficult thing to speak for a dog who has been calumniated, but nevertheless I will try. He is a good dog, and he chases wolves finely.

PHILOCLEON

He is a thief and a conspirator.

BDELYCLEON

No, he is the best of all our dogs; he is capable of guarding a whole flock.

PHILOCLEON

THE WASPS

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

But, by Zeus! he lies.

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON (aside)

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

BDELYCLEON

Have pity, father, pity, I adjure you; you would not have him dead. Where are his puppies? (A group of children costumed as puppies comes out.) Come, poor little beasties, yap, up on your haunches, beg and whine!

PHILOCLEON

Descend, descend, descend, descend!

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

Then he is acquitted?

THE WASPS

THE WASPS

PHILOCLEON

It is difficult to tell.

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

Come quickly, I will show you the way.

(He takes his father by the hand and leads him to the second urn.)

PHILOCLEON

Is this the first urn?

BDELYCLEON

Yes.

PHILOCLEON (dropping in his vote)

Then I have voted.

BDELYCLEON (aside)

I have fooled him and he has acquitted in spite of himself. (To PHILOCLEON) Come, I will turn out the urns.

PHILOCLEON

What is the result?

BDELYCLEON

We shall see. (He examines both urns.) Labes, you stand acquitted. (PHILOCLEON faints) Eh! father, what's the matter, what is it? (To slaves) Water! water! (To PHILOCLEON) Pull yourself together, sir!

PHILOCLEON (weakly)

Tell me! Is he really acquitted?

BDELYCLEON

Yes, certainly.

THE WASPS

THE WASPS

PHILOCLEON (falling back)

Then it's all over with me!

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON (dolefully)

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON (resignedly)

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

(They all go into the house.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Go where it pleases you and may your happiness be great. (The CHORUS turns and faces the audience.) You meanwhile, oh! countless myriads, listen to the sound counsels I am going to give you and take care they are not lost upon you. That would be the fate of vulgar spectators, not that of such an audience. Hence, people, lend me your ear, if you love frank speaking.

The poet has a reproach to make against his audience; he says you have ill-treated him in return for the many services he has rendered you. At first he kept himself in the background and lent help secretly to other poets, and like the prophetic Genius, who hid himself in the belly of Eurycles, slipped within the spirit of another and whispered to him many a comic hit. Later he ran the risks of the theatre on his own account, with his face uncovered, and dared to guide his Muse unaided. Though overladen with success and honours more than any of your poets, indeed despite all his glory, he does not yet believe he has attained his goal; his heart is not swollen with pride and he does not seek to seduce the young folk in the wrestling school. If any lover runs up to him to complain because he is furious at seeing the object of his passion derided on the stage, he takes no heed of such reproaches, for he is inspired only with honest motives and his Muse is no pander. From the very outset of his dramatic career he has disdained to assail those who were men, but with a courage worthy of Heracles himself he attacked the most formidable monsters, and at the beginning went straight for that beast with the sharp teeth, with the terrible eyes that flashed lambent fire like those of Cynna, surrounded by a hundred lewd flatterers who spittle-licked him to his heart's content; he had a voice like a roaring torrent, the stench of a seal, the unwashed balls of a Lamia, and the arse of a camel. Our poet did not tremble at the sight of this horrible monster, nor did he dream of gaining him over; and again this very day he is fighting for your good. Last year besides, he attacked those pale, shivering and feverish beings who strangled your fathers in the dark, throttled your grandfathers, and who, lying in the beds of the most inoffensive, piled up against them lawsuits, summonses and witnesses to such an extent, that many of them flew in terror to the Polemarch for refuge. Such is the champion you have found to purify your country of all its evil, and last year you betrayed him, when he sowed the most novel ideas, which,

THE WASPS

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

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS (singing)

Ah, once long ago we were brave in the dance, brave too in battle, and on this account alone the most courageous of men! That was formerly, was formerly; all that is gone now and these hairs of ours are whiter than the swan. But from what is left we must rekindle a youthful ardour; really we prefer our old age to the curly hair and the fine clothes and the effeminacy of many of the young.

LEADER OF THE FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

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

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS (singing)

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

LEADER OF THE SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Look well at us, and you will see that we have all the character and habits of the wasp. Firstly, if roused, no beings are more irascible, more relentless than we are. In all other things, too, we act like wasps. We collect in swarms, in a kind of nests, and some go judging with the Archon, some with the Eleven, others at the Odeon; there are yet others, who hardly move at all, like the grubs in the cells, but remain glued to the walls, and bent double to the ground. We also pay full attention to the discovery of all sorts of means of existing and sting the first who comes, so as to live at his expense. Finally, we have among us drones, who have no sting and who, without giving themselves the least trouble, seize on our revenues as they flow past them and devour them. It's this that grieves us most of all, to see men who have never served or held either lance or oar in defence of their country, enriching themselves at our expense without ever raising a blister on their hands. In short, I give it as my deliberate opinion that in future every citizen not possessed of a sting shall not receive the triobolus.

(PRILOCLEON comes out of the house, followed by his son and a slave. The CHORUS turns to face them.)

THE WASPS

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

You do not know what is good for you.

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

Very well then! what must I do?

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

Was it worth while to beget and bring up children, so that this one should now wish to choke me?

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

Some call it a pelisse, others a Persian cloak.

PHILOCLEON

Ah! I thought it was a wraprascal like those made at Thymaetis.

BDELYCLEON

No wonder. It's only at Sardis you could have seen them, and you have never been there.

PHILOCLEON

THE WASPS

THE WASPS

Of course not, but it seems to me exactly like the mantle Morychus sports.

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

What! are there woollen ox-guts then at Ecbatana?

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

Oh! horrors! what a waft of heat the hussy sends up my nose!

BDELYCLEON

Will you have done with this fooling?

PHILOCLEON

No by Zeus.

BDELYCLEON

But good sir....

PHILOCLEON

If need be, I prefer you should put me in the oven.

BDELYCLEON

Come, I will put it round you. There!

PHILOCLEON

At all events, bring out a crook.

THE WASPS

BDELYCLEON

Why, whatever for?

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

I put on odious slippers made by our foes! Never

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

You're doing wrong here. You want me to put my foot on Laconian ground.

BDELYCLEON

Now the other.

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

Positively you must.

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

(He takes a few steps.)

PHILOCLEON (trying to do likewise)

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

THE WASPS

THE WASPS

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

Undoubtedly.

BDELYCLEON

What will you say to them?

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

Then what should I talk about?

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

THE WASPS

THE WASPS

At least say, that you have just seen Ephudion doing well in the pancratium with Ascondas and, that despite his age and his white hair, he is still robust in loin and arm and flank and that his chest is a very breast-plate.

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

How must I recline? Tell me quick!

BDELYCLEON

In an elegant style.

PHILOCLEON (lying on the ground)

Like this?

BDELYCLEON

Not at all.

PHILOCLEON

How then?

BDELYCLEON

THE WASPS

THE WASPS

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

Quite well.

BDELYCLEON

Really?

PHILOCLEON

Better than any born mountaineer of Attica.

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

....such a rogue or such a thief."

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

THE WASPS

THE WASPS

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

ELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

(They go out.)

CHORUS (singing)

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

THE WASPS

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

(XANTHIAS enters, weeping and wailing and rubbing his sides.)

XANTHIAS

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

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

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

XANTHIAS

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

(PHILOCLEON enters, inebriated and hilarious, carrying a torch;

his other hand is occupied with a wholly nude flute-girl; he is

followed by a group of angry victims of his exuberance.)

PHILOCLEON (singing)

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

GUEST

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

THE WASPS

PHILOCLEON (singing)

Ho! ho! summon me? what old women's babble! Know that I can no longer bear to hear even the name of suits. Ha! ha! ha! this is what pleases me, "Down with the urns!" Get out of here! Down with the dicasts! away with them, away with them!

(Dropping into speech; to the flute-girl)

Mount up there, my little gilded cock-chaffer; take hold of this rope's end in your hand. Hold it tight, but have a care; the rope's a bit old and worn. But even though it's worn, it still has its virtues. Do you see how opportunely I got you away from the solicitations of those fellators, who wanted you to make love to them in their own odd way? You therefore owe me this return to gratify me. But will you pay the debt? Oh! I know well you will not even try; you will play with me, you will laugh heartily at me as you have done at many another man. And yet, if you would not be a naughty girl, I would redeem you, when my son is dead, and you should be my concubine, my little one. At present I am not my own master; I am very young and am watched very closely. My dear son never lets me out of his sight; he's an unbearable creature, who would quarter a thread and skin a flint; he is afraid I should get lost, for I am his only father. But here he comes running towards us. But be quick, don't stir, hold these torches. I am going to play him a young man's trick, the same as he played me before I was initiated into the mysteries.

BDELYCLEON

Oh! oh! you debauched old dotard! you are amorous, it seems, of pretty baggages; but, by Apollo, it shall not be with impunity!

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

Only a rascal would steal the flute-girl away from the other guests.

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

Is this a torch?

PHILOCLEON

THE WASPS

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

DELYCLEON

And what is that black part in the middle?

PHILOCLEON

That's the pitch running out while it burns.

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

No. That's just a small bit of the torch, that projects.

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

Oh! What do you want to do?

BDELYCLEON

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

(He takes the girl into the house.)

PHILOCLEON

Listen to me! One day, at Olympia, I saw Euphudion boxing bravely against Ascondas; he was already aged, and yet with a blow from his fist he knocked down his young opponent. So watch out that I don't blacken your eyes.

BDELYCLEON (who has returned)

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

(A BAKER'S WIFE enters with an empty basket; she brings CHAEREPHON

with her as witness.)

BAKER'S WIFE (to CHAEREPHON)

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

BDELYCLEON

THE WASPS

THE WASPS

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

PHILOCLEON

Oh, no, no! a little pretty talk and pleasant tales will soon settle the matter and reconcile her with me. Not so, by the goddesses twain! It shall not be said that you have with impunity spoilt the wares of Myrtia, the daughter of Ancyliion and Sostrate.

PHILOCLEON

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

BAKER'S WIFE

By Zeus, no anecdotes for me, thank you.

PHILOCLEON

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

BAKER'S WIFE

You make a mock of me! Very well! I don't care who you are, I shall summons you before the market inspectors for damage done to my business. Chaerephon here shall be my witness.

PHILOCLEON

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

BAKER'S WIFE

Ah! really, did he now!

PHILOCLEON

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

(The BAKER'S WIFE and CHAEREPHON depart.)

BDELYCLEON

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

(A badly bruised man enters.)

ACCUSER

I summons you, old man, for outrage.

THE WASPS

BDELYCLEON

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

PHILOCLEON

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

ACCUSER

Fix it; I like neither lawsuits nor disputes.

PHILOCLEON

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

BDELYCLEON

You are incorrigible.

ACCUSER (to his witness)

At all events, make a note of his reply. (They start to leave.)

PHILOCLEON

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

ACCUSER (to his witness)

I again ask you to witness this.

PHILOCLEON

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

ACCUSER

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

(He and his witness depart.)

BDELYCLEON (to PHILOCLEON)

By Demeter! you'll stay here no longer! I am going to take you and carry you off.

THE WASPS

PHILOCLEON

And what for?

BDELYCLEON

What for? I am going to carry you into the house, so that the accusers will not run out of witnesses.

PHILOCLEON

One day at Delphi, Aesop....

BDELYCLEON

I don't care a fig for that.

PHILOCLEON

...was accused of having stolen a sacred vase. But he replied, that the horn-beetle....

BDELYCLEON

Oh, dear, dear! You'll drive me crazy with your horn-beetle. (PHILOCLEON goes on with his fable while BDELYCLEON is carrying him off the scene by main force.)

CHORUS (singing)

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

XANTHIAS (coming out of the house)

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

(BDELYCLEON comes out of the house with his father who is costumed

as POLYPHEMUS in Euripides' Cyclops.)

PHILOCLEON

"Who loiters at the door of the vestibule?"

XANTHIAS

THE WASPS

THE WASPS

Here comes our pest, our plague!

PHILOCLEON

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

(He begins to dance in a manner grotesquely parodying that of Euripides.)

XANTHIAS

Or rather the madness.

PHILOCLEON

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

XANTHIAS

Go and fill yourself with hellebore.

PHILOCLEON

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

XANTHIAS

He'll be stoned.

PHILOCLEON

His leg kicks out sky-high....

XANTHIAS

....and his arse gapes open.

PHILOCLEON

Mind your own business. Look how easily my leg-joints move. Isn't that good?

XANTHIAS

God, no, it's merely insane!

PHILOCLEON

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

THE WASPS

XANTHIAS

Here comes one, and one only.

(A very small dancer, costumed as a crab, enters.)

PHILOCLEON

Who is the wretch?

XANTHIAS

The younger son of Carcinus.

PHILOCLEON

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

XANTHIAS

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

(Another dancer, hardly larger than the first, and similarly

costumed, enters.)

PHILOCLEON

Him I will devour for my dinner.

XANTHIAS

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

(A third dancer enters, likewise resembling a crab, but smaller

than either of the others.)

PHILOCLEON

What's this? A shrimp or a spider?

XANTHIAS

It's a crab,—a hermit—crab, the smallest of its kind; it writes tragedies.

PHILOCLEON

Oh! Carcinus, how proud you should be of your brood! What a crowd of kinglets have come swooping down here! But we shall have to measure ourselves against them. Have marinade prepared for seasoning them, in case I prove the victor.

THE WASPS

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Let us stand out of the way a little, so that they may twirl at their ease.

CHORUS

(It divides in two and accompanies with its song the wild dancing of PHILOCLEON and the sons of CARCINUS in the centre of the Orchestra.) Come, illustrious children of this inhabitant of the brine, brothers of the shrimps, skip on the sand and the shore of the barren sea; show us the lightning whirls and twirls of your nimble limbs. Glorious offspring of Phrynichus, let fly your kicks, so that the spectators may be overjoyed at seeing your legs so high in air. Twist, twirl, tap your bellies, kick your legs to the sky. Here comes your famous father, the ruler of the sea, delighted to see his three lecherous kinglets. Go on with your dancing, if it pleases you, but as for us, we shall not join you. Lead us promptly off the stage, for never a comedy yet was seen where the Chorus finished off with a dance.

THE END