

PLUTUS

by Aristophanes

Table of Contents

<u>PLUTUS</u>	1
<u>by Aristophanes</u>	2

PLUTUS

PLUTUS
by Aristophanes

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.
<http://www.blackmask.com>

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

CHREMYLUS
CARIO, Servant of Chremylus
PLUTUS, God of Riches
BLEPSIDEMUS, friend of Chremylus
POVERTY
WIFE OF CHREMYLUS
A JUST MAN
AN INFORMER
AN OLD WOMAN
A YOUTH
HERMES
A PRIEST OF ZEUS
CHORUS OF RUSTICS

(SCENE:—The Orchestra represents a public square in Athens.
In the background is the house of CHREMYLUS. A ragged old
blind man enters, followed by CHREMYLUS and his slave CARIO.)

CARIO

What an unhappy fate, great gods, to be the slave of a fool! A servant may give the best of advice, but if his master does not follow it, the poor slave must inevitably have his share in the disaster; for fortune does not allow him to dispose of his own body, it belongs to his master who has bought it. Alas! 'tis the way of the world. But the god, Apollo (in tragic style), whose oracles the Pythian priestess on her golden tripod makes known to us, deserves my censure, for surely he is a physician and a cunning diviner; and yet my master is leaving his temple infected with mere madness and insists on following a blind man. Is this not opposed to all good sense? It is for us, who see clearly, to guide those who don't; whereas he clings to the trail of a blind fellow and compels me to do the same without answering my questions with ever a word. (To CHREMYLUS) Aye, master, unless you tell me why we are following this unknown fellow, I will not be silent, but I will worry and torment you, for you cannot beat me because of my sacred chaplet of laurel.

CHREMYLUS

No, but if you worry me I will take off your chaplets, and then you will only get a sounder thrashing.

CARIO

That's an old song! I am going to leave you no peace till you have told me who this man is; and if I ask it, it's entirely because of my interest in you.

CHREMYLUS

Well, be it so. I will reveal it to you as being the most faithful and the most rascally of all my servants. I honoured the gods and did what was right, and yet I was none the less poor and unfortunate.

CARIO

I know it but too well.

CHREMYLUS

Others amassed wealth—the sacrilegious, the demagogues, the informers, indeed every sort of rascal.

CARIO

I believe you.

CHREMYLUS

Therefore I came to consult the oracle of the god, not on my own account, for my unfortunate life is nearing

PLUTUS

its end, but for my only son; I wanted to ask Apollo if it was necessary for him to become a thorough knave and renounce his virtuous principles, since that seemed to me to be the only way to succeed in life.

CARIO (with ironic gravity)

And with what responding tones did the sacred tripod resound?

CHREMYLUS

You shall know. The god ordered me in plain terms to follow the first man I should meet upon leaving the temple and to persuade him to accompany me home.

CARIO

And who was the first one you met?

CHREMYLUS

This blind man.

CARIO

And you are stupid enough not to understand the meaning of such an answer! Why, the god was advising you thereby, and that in the clearest possible way, to bring up your son according to the fashion of your country.

CHREMYLUS

What makes you think that?

CARIO

Is it not evident to the blind, that nowadays to do nothing that is right is the best way to get on?

CHREMYLUS

No, that is not the meaning of the oracle; there must be another that is nobler. If this blind man would tell us who he is and why and with what object he has led us here, we should no doubt understand what our oracle really does mean.

CARIO (to PLUTUS)

Come, tell us at once who you are, or I shall give effect to my threat. (He menaces him.) And quick too, be quick, I say.

PLUTUS

I'll thrash you.

CARIO (to CHREMYLUS)

Do you understand who he says he is?

CHREMYLUS

It's to you and not to me that he replies thus: your mode of questioning him was ill-advised. (To PLUTUS) Come, friend, if you care to oblige an honest man, answer me.

PLUTUS

I'll knock you down.

CARIO (sarcastically)

Ah! what a pleasant fellow and what a delightful prophecy the god has given you!

CHREMYLUS (to PLUTUS)

By Demeter, you'll have no reason to laugh presently.

CARIO

If you don't speak, you wretch, I will surely do you an ill turn.

PLUTUS

Friends, take yourselves off and leave me.

CHREMYLUS

That we very certainly shan't.

CARIO

This, master, is the best thing to do. I'll undertake to secure him the most frightful death; I will lead him to the verge of a precipice and then leave him there, so that he'll break his neck when he pitches over.

CHREMYLUS

Well then, seize him right away.

(CARIO does so.)

PLUTUS

PLUTUS

Oh, no! Have mercy!

CHREMYLUS

Will thou speak then?

PLUTUS

But if you learn who I am, I know well that you will ill-use me and will let me go again.

CHREMYLUS

I call the gods to witness that you have naught to fear if you will only speak.

PLUTUS

Well then, first unhand me.

CHREMYLUS

There! we set you free.

PLUTUS

Listen then, since I must reveal what I had intended to keep a secret. I am Plutus.

CARIO

Oh! you wretched rascal! You Plutus all the while, and you never said so!

CHREMYLUS

You, Plutus, and in this piteous guise! Oh, Phoebus Apollo! oh, ye gods of heaven and hell! Oh, Zeus! is it really and truly as you say?

PLUTUS

Yes.

CHREMYLUS

Plutus' very own self?

PLUTUS

His own very self and none other.

CHREMYLUS

But tell me, how come you're so squalid?

PLUTUS

I have just left Patrocles' house, who has not had a bath since his birth.

CHREMYLUS

But your infirmity; how did that happen? Tell me.

PLUTUS

Zeus inflicted it on me, because of his jealousy of—mankind. When I was young, I threatened him that I would only go to the just, the wise, the men of ordered life; to prevent my distinguishing these, he struck me with blindness' so much does he envy the good!

CHREMYLUS

And yet, it's only the upright and just who honour him.

PLUTUS

Quite true.

CHREMYLUS

Therefore, if ever you recovered your sight, you would shun the wicked?

PLUTUS

Undoubtedly.

CHREMYLUS

You would visit the good?

PLUTUS

Assuredly. It is a very long time since I saw them.

CARIO (to the audience)

That's not astonishing. I, who see clearly, don't see a single one.

PLUTUS

Now let me leave you, for I have told you everything.

CHREMYLUS

PLUTUS

No, certainly not! we shall fasten ourselves on to you faster than ever.

PLUTUS

Did I not tell you, you were going to plague me?

CHREMYLUS

Oh! I adjure you, believe what I say and don't leave me; for you will seek in vain for a more honest man than myself.

CARIO

There is only one man more worthy; and that is I.

PLUTUS

All talk like this, but as soon as they secure my favours and grow rich, their wickedness knows no bounds.

CHREMYLUS

And yet all men are not wicked.

PLUTUS

All. There's no exception.

CARIO

You shall pay for that opinion.

CHREMYLUS

Listen to what happiness there is in store for you, if you but stay with us. I have hope; aye, I have good hope with the god's help to deliver you from that blindness, in fact to restore your sight.

PLUTUS

Oh! do nothing of the kind, for I don't wish to recover it.

CHREMYLUS

What's that you say?

CARIO

This fellow hugs his own misery.

PLUTUS

If you were mad enough to cure me, and Zeus heard of it, he would overwhelm me with his anger.

CHREMYLUS

And is he not doing this now by leaving you to grope your wandering way?

PLUTUS

I don't know; but I'm horribly afraid of him.

CHREMYLUS

Indeed? Ah! you are the biggest poltroon of all the gods! Why, Zeus with his throne and his lightnings would not be worth an obolus if you recovered your sight, were it but for a few moments.

PLUTUS

Impious man, don't talk like that.

CHREMYLUS

Fear nothing! I will prove to you that you are far more powerful and mightier than he.

PLUTUS

I mightier than he?

CHREMYLUS

Aye, by heaven! (To CARIO) For instance, what is the basis of the power that Zeus wields over the other gods?

CARIO

Money; he has so much of it.

CHREMYLUS

And who gives it to him?

CARIO (pointing to Plutus)

This fellow.

CHREMYLUS

If sacrifices are offered to him, is not Plutus their cause?

PLUTUS

CARIO

Undoubtedly, for it's wealth that all demand and clamour most loudly for.

CHREMYLUS

Thus it's Plutus who is the fount of all the honours rendered to Zeus, whose worship he can wither up at the root, if it so pleases him.

PLUTUS

And how so?

CHREMYLUS

Not an ox, nor a cake, nor indeed anything at all could be offered, if you did not wish it.

PLUTUS

Why?

CHREMYLUS

Why? but what means are there to buy anything if you are not there to give the money? Hence if Zeus should cause you any trouble, you will destroy his power without other help.

PLUTUS

So it's because of me that sacrifices are offered to him?

CHREMYLUS

Most assuredly. Whatever is dazzling, beautiful or charming in the eyes of mankind, comes from you. Does not everything depend on wealth?

CARIO

I myself was bought for a few coins; if I'm a slave, it's only because I was not rich.

CHREMYLUS

And what of the Corinthian whores? If a poor man offers them proposals, they do not listen; but if it be a rich one, instantly they turn their arses to him.

CARIO

It's the same with the lads; they care not for love, to them money means everything.

CHREMYLUS

You speak of male whores; yet some of them are honest, and it's not money they ask of their patrons.

CARIO

What then?

CHREMYLUS

A fine horse, a pack of hounds.

CARIO

Yes, they would blush to ask for money and cleverly disguise their shame.

CHREMYLUS

It is in you that every art, all human inventions, have had their origin; it is through you that one man sits cutting leather in his shop.

CARIO

That another fashions iron or wood.

CHREMYLUS

That yet another chases the gold he has received from you.

CARIO

That one is a fuller.

CHREMYLUS

That the other washes wool.

CARIO

That this one is a tanner.

CHREMYLUS

And that other sells onions.

CARIO

And if the adulterer, caught red-handed, is depilated, it's on account of you.

PLUTUS

PLUTUS

Oh! great gods! I knew naught of all this!

CARIO (to **CHREMYLUS**)

Is it not he who lends the Great King all his pride? Is it not he who draws the citizens to the Assembly?

CHREMYLUS

And tell me, is it not you who equip the triremes?

CARIO

And who feed our mercenaries at Corinth? Are not you the cause of Pamphilus' sufferings?

CHREMYLUS

And of the needle–seller's with Pamphilus?

CARIO

It is not because of you that Agyrrhius farts so loudly?

CHREMYLUS

And that Philepsius rolls off his fables? That troops are sent to succour the Egyptians? And that Lais is kept by Philonides?

CARIO

That the tower of Timotheus...

CHREMYLUS

...(To **CARIO**) May it fall upon your head! (To **PLUTUS**) In short, Plutus, it is through you that everything is done; you must realize that you are the sole cause both of good and evil.

CARIO

In war, it's the flag under which you serve that victory favours.

PLUTUS

What! I can do so many things by myself and unaided?

CHREMYLUS

And many others besides; wherefore men are never tired of your gifts. They get weary of all else,—of love...

CARIO

Bread.

CHREMYLUS

Music.

CARIO

Sweetmeats.

CHREMYLUS

Honours.

CARIO

Cakes.

CHREMYLUS

Battles.

CARIO

Figs.

CHREMYLUS

Ambition.

CARIO

Gruel.

CHREMYLUS

Military advancement.

CARIO

Lentil soup.

CHREMYLUS

But of you they never tire. If a man has thirteen talents, he has all the greater ardour to possess sixteen; if that wish is achieved, he will want forty or will complain that he knows not how to make both ends meet.

PLUTUS

PLUTUS

All this, I suppose, is very true; there is but one point that makes me feel a bit uneasy.

CHREMYLUS

And that is?

PLUTUS

How could I use this power, which you say I have?

CHREMYLUS

Ah! they were quite right who said there's nothing more timorous than Plutus

PLUTUS

No, no; it was a thief who calumniated me. Having broken into a house, he found everything locked up and could take nothing, so he dubbed my prudence fear.

CHREMYLUS

Don't be disturbed; if you support me zealously, I'll make you more sharp-sighted than Lynceus.

PLUTUS

And how should you be able to do that, you, who are but a mortal?

CHREMYLUS

I have great hope, after the answer Apollo gave me, shaking his sacred laurels the while.

PLUTUS

Is he in the plot then?

CHREMYLUS

Surely.

PLUTUS

Take care what you say.

CHREMYLUS

Never fear, friend; for, be well assured, that if it has to cost me my life, I will carry out what I have in my head.

CARIO

And I will help you, if you permit it.

CHREMYLUS

We shall have many other helpers as well—all the worthy folk who are wanting for bread.

PLUTUS

Ah! they'll prove sorry helpers.

CHREMYLUS

No, not so, once they've grown rich. But you, Cario, run quick...

CARIO

Where?

CHREMYLUS

...to call my comrades, the other husbandmen (you'll probably find the poor fellows toiling away in the fields), that each of them may come here to take his share of the gifts of Plutus.

CARIO

I'm off. But let someone come from the house to take this morsel of meat.

CHREMYLUS

I'll see to that; you run your hardest. As for you, Plutus, the most excellent of all the gods, come in here with me; this is the house you must fill with riches to-day, by fair means or foul.

PLUTUS

I don't at all like going into other folks' houses in this manner; I have never got any good from it. If I got inside a miser's house, straightway he would bury me deep underground; if some honest fellow among his friends came to ask him for the smallest coin, he would deny ever having seen me. Then if I went to a fool's house, he would sacrifice in dicing and wenching, and very soon I should be completely stripped and pitched out of doors.

CHREMYLUS

That's because you have never met a man who knew how to avoid the two extremes; moderation is the strong

PLUTUS

point in my character. I love saving as much as anybody, and I know how to spend, when it's needed. But let us go in; I want to make you known to my wife and to my only son, whom I love most of all after yourself.

PLUTUS

I'm quite sure of that.

CHREMYLUS

Why should I hide the truth from you?

(They enter CHREMYLUS' house.)

CARIO (to the CHORUS, which has followed him in)

Come, you active workers, who, like my master, eat nothing but garlic and the poorest food, you who are his friends and his neighbours, hasten your steps, hurry yourselves; there's not a moment to lose; this is the critical hour, when your presence and your support are needed by him.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Why, don't you see we are speeding as fast as men can, who are already enfeebled by age? But do you deem it fitting to make us run like this before ever telling us why your master has called us?

CARIO

I've grown hoarse with the telling, but you won't listen. My master is going to drag you all out of the stupid, sapless life you are leading and ensure you, one full of all delights.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And how is he going to manage that?

CARIO

My poor friends, he has brought with him a disgusting old fellow, all bent and wrinkled, with a most pitiful appearance, bald and toothless; upon my word, I even believe he is circumcised like some vile barbarian.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This news is worth its weight in gold! What are you saying? Repeat it to me; no doubt it means he is bringing back a heap of wealth.

CARIO

No, but a heap of all the infirmities attendant on old age.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

If you are tricking us, you shall pay us for it. Beware of our sticks!

CARIO

Do you deem me so brazen as all that, and my words mere lies?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What serious airs the rascal puts on! Look! his legs are already shrieking, "oh! oh!" They are asking for the shackles and wedges.

CARIO

It's in the tomb that it's your lot to judge. Why don't you go there? Charon has given you your ticket.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Plague take you! you cursed rascal, who rail at us and have not even the heart to tell us why your master has made us come. We were pressed for time and tired out, yet we came with all haste, and in our hurry we have passed by lots of wild onions without even gathering them.

CARIO

I will no longer conceal the truth from you. Friends, it's Plutus whom my master brings, Plutus, who will give you riches.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What! we shall really all become rich?

CARIO

Aye, certainly; you will then be Midases, provided you grow ass's ears.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What joy, what happiness! If what you tell me is true, I long to dance with delight.

CARIO (singing, with appropriate gestures)

And I too, threttanelo! want to imitate the Cyclops and lead your troop by stamping like this. Do you, my dear

PLUTUS

little ones, cry, aye, cry again and bleat forth the plaintive song of the sheep and of the stinking goats; follow me like lascivious goats with their tools out.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

(Singing, to the same tune and with similar mimicry)

As for us, threttanelo! we will seek you, dear Cyclops, bleating, and if we find you with your wallet full of fresh herbs, all disgusting in your filth, sodden with wine and sleeping in the midst of your sheep, we will seize a great flaming stake and burn out your eye.

CARIO

I will copy that Circe of Corinth, whose potent philtres compelled the companions of Philonides like swine to swallow balls of dung, which she herself had kneaded with her hands; and do you too grunt with joy and follow your mother, my little pigs.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! Circe with the potent philtress, who besmear your companions so filthily, what pleasure I shall have in imitating the son of Laertes! I will hang you up by your balls, I will rub your nose with dung like a goat, and like Aristyllus you shall say through your half-opened lips, "Follow your mother, my little pigs."

CARIO

Enough of tomfoolery, assume a grave demeanour; unknown to my master I am going to take bread and meat; and when I have fed well, I shall resume my work.

(Interlude of dancing by the CHORUS.)

CHREMYLUS (coming out of his house)

To say, "Hail! my dear neighbours!" is an old form of greeting and well worn with use; so therefore I embrace you, because you have not crept like tortoises, but have come rushing here in all haste. Now help me to watch carefully and closely over the god.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Be at ease. You shall see with what martial zeal I will guard him. What! we jostle each other at the Assembly for three obols, and am I going to let Plutus in person be stolen from me?

CHREMYLUS

But I see Blepsidemus; by his bearing and his haste I can readily see he knows or suspects something.

BLEPSIDEMUS

What has happened then? Whence, how has Chremylus suddenly grown rich? I don't believe a word of it. Nevertheless, nothing but his sudden fortune was being talked about in the barber-shops. But I am above all surprised that his good fortune has not made him forget his friends; that is not the usual way!

CHREMYLUS

By the gods, Blepsidemus, I will hide nothing from you. To-day things are better than yesterday; let us share, for are you not my friend?

BLEPSIDEMUS

Have you really grown rich as they say?

CHREMYLUS

I shall be soon, if the god agrees to it. But there is still some risk to run.

BLEPSIDEMUS

What risk?

CHREMYLUS

Well...

BLEPSIDEMUS

Tell me, quick!

CHREMYLUS

If we succeed, we are happy for ever, but if we fail, it is all over with us.

BLEPSIDEMUS

It's a bad business, and one that doesn't please me! To grow rich all at once and yet to be fearful! ah! I suspect something that's little good.

CHREMYLUS

PLUTUS

What do you mean?

BLEPSIDEMUS

No doubt you have just stolen some gold and silver from some temple and are repenting.

CHREMYLUS

Nay! heaven preserve me from that!

BLEPSIDEMUS

A truce to idle phrases! the thing is only too apparent, my friend.

CHREMYLUS

Don't suspect such a thing of me.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Alas! then there is no honest man! not one, that can resist the attraction of gold!

CHREMYLUS

By Demeter, you have no common sense.

BLEPSIDEMUS (aside)

How he has changed!

CHREMYLUS

But, good gods, you are mad, my dear fellow!

BLEPSIDEMUS (aside)

His very look is distraught; he has done some crime!

CHREMYLUS

Ah! I know the tune you are playing now; you think I have stolen, and want your share.

BLEPSIDEMUS

My share of what, pray?

CHREMYLUS

You are beside the mark; the thing is quite otherwise.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Perhaps it's not a theft, but some piece of knavery!

CHREMYLUS

You are insane!

BLEPSIDEMUS

What? You have done no man an injury?

CHREMYLUS

No! assuredly not I

BLEPSIDEMUS

But, great gods, what am I to think? You won't tell me the truth.

CHREMYLUS

You accuse me without really knowing anything.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Listen, friend, no doubt the matter can yet be hushed up, before it gets noised abroad, at trifling expense; I will buy the orators' silence.

CHREMYLUS

Aye, you will lay out three minae and, as my friend, you will reckon twelve against me.

BLEPSIDEMUS

I know someone who will come and seat himself at the foot of the tribunal, holding a supplicant's bough in his hand and surrounded by his wife and children, for all the world like the Heraclidae of Pamphilus.

CHREMYLUS

Not at all, poor fool! But, thanks to me, worthy folk alone shall be rich henceforth.

BLEPSIDEMUS

What are you saying? Have you then stolen so much as all that?

CHREMYLUS

Oh your insults will be the death of me.

PLUTUS

BLEPSIDEMUS

You're the one who is courting death.

CHREMYLUS

Not so, you wretch, since I have Plutus.

BLEPSIDEMUS

You have Plutus? Which one?

CHREMYLUS

The god himself.

BLEPSIDEMUS

And where is he?

CHREMYLUS

There.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Where?

CHREMYLUS

Indoors.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Indoors?

CHREMYLUS

Aye, certainly.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Get you gone! Plutus in your house?

CHREMYLUS

Yes, by the gods I

BLEPSIDEMUS

Are you telling the truth?

CHREMYLUS

I am.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Swear it by Hestia.

CHREMYLUS

I swear it by Posidon.

BLEPSIDEMUS

The god of the sea?

CHREMYLUS

Yes, and by all the other Posidons, such there be.

BLEPSIDEMUS

And you don't send him to us, to your friends?

CHREMYLUS

We've not got to that point yet.

BLEPSIDEMUS

What do you say? Is there no chance of sharing?

CHREMYLUS

Why, no. We must first.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Do what?

CHREMYLUS

...restore him his sight.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Restore whom his sight? Speak!

CHREMYLUS

PLUTUS

Plutus. It must be done, no matter how.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Is he then really blind?

CHREMYLUS

Yes, undoubtedly.

BLEPSIDEMUS

I am no longer surprised he never came to me.

CHREMYLUS

If it please the gods, he'll come there now.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Must we not go and seek a physician?

CHREMYLUS

Seek physicians at Athens? Nay! there's no art where there's no fee.

BLEPSIDEMUS (running his eyes over the audience)

Let's look carefully.

CHREMYLUS (after a thorough survey)

There is not one.

BLEPSIDEMUS

It's a positive fact; I don't know of one.

CHREMYLUS

But I have thought the matter well over, and the best thing is to make Plutus lie in the Temple of Asclepius.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Unquestionably that's the very best thing. Hurry and lead him away to the temple.

CHREMYLUS

I am going there.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Then hurry up.

CHREMYLUS

That's just what I am doing.

(They are just leaving when POVERTY comes running in; she is a picture of squalor and the two men recoil in horror.)

POVERTY

Unwise, perverse, unholy men! What are you daring to do, you pitiful, wretched mortals? Whither are you flying? Stop! I command it!

BLEPSIDEMUS

Oh! great gods!

POVERTY

My arm shall destroy you, you infamous beings! Such an attempt is not to be borne; neither man nor god has ever dared the like. You shall die!

CHREMYLUS

And who are you? Oh! what a ghastly pallor!

BLEPSIDEMUS

Perhaps it's some Erinyes, some Fury, from the theatre; there's a kind of wild tragic look in her eyes.

CHREMYLUS

But she has no torch.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Let's knock her down!

POVERTY

Who do you think I am?

CHREMYLUS

Some wine-shop keeper or egg-woman. Otherwise you would not have shrieked so loud at us, who have

PLUTUS

done nothing to you.

POVERTY

Indeed? And have you not done me the most deadly injury by seeking to banish me from every country?

CHREMYLUS

Why, have you not got the Barathrum left? But who are you? Answer me quickly!

POVERTY

I am one that will punish you this very day for having wanted to make me disappear from here.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Might it be the tavern-keeper in my neighbourhood, who is always cheating me in measure?

POVERTY

I am Poverty, who have lived with you for so many years.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Oh! great Apollo! oh, ye gods! whither shall I fly?

(He starts to run away.)

CHREMYLUS

Here! what are you doing! You coward! Are going to leave me here?

BLEPSIDEMUS (still running)

Not I.

CHREMYLUS

Stop then! Are two men to run away from one woman?

BLEPSIDEMUS

But, you wretch, it's Poverty, the most fearful monster that ever drew breath.

CHREMYLUS

Stay where you are, I beg of you.

BLEPSIDEMUS

No no! a thousand times, no!

CHREMYLUS

Could we do anything worse than leave the god in the lurch and fly before this woman without so much as ever offering to fight?

BLEPSIDEMUS

But what weapons have we? Are we in a condition to show fight? Where is the breastplate, the buckler, that this wretch has not pawned?

CHREMYLUS

Be at ease. Plutus will readily triumph over her threats unaided.

POVERTY

Dare you reply, you scoundrels, you who are caught red-handed at the most horrible crime?

CHREMYLUS

As for you, you cursed jade, you pursue me with your abuse, though I have never done you the slightest harm.

POVERTY

Do you think it is doing me no harm to restore Plutus to the use of his eyes?

CHREMYLUS

Is this doing you harm, that we shower blessings on all men?

POVERTY

And what do you think will ensure their happiness?

CHREMYLUS

Ah! first of all we shall drive you out of Greece.

POVERTY

Drive me out? Could you do mankind a greater harm?

CHREMYLUS

Yes—if I gave up my intention to deliver them from you.

POVERTY

PLUTUS

Well, let us discuss this point first. I propose to show that I am the sole cause of all your blessings, and that your safety depends on me alone. If I don't succeed, then do what you like to me.

CHREMYLUS

How dare you talk like this, you impudent hussy?

POVERTY

Agree to hear me and I think it will be very easy for me to prove that you are entirely on the wrong road, when you want to make the just men wealthy.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Oh! cudgel and rope's end, come to my help!

POVERTY

Why such wrath and these shouts, before you hear my arguments?

BLEPSIDEMUS

But who could listen to such words without exclaiming?

POVERTY

Any man of sense.

CHREMYLUS

But if you lose your case, what punishment will you submit to?

POVERTY

Choose what you will.

CHREMYLUS

That's all right.

POVERTY

You shall suffer the same if you are beaten!

CHREMYLUS

Do you think twenty deaths a sufficiently large stake?

BLEPSIDEMUS

Good enough for her, but for us two would suffice.

POVERTY

You won't escape, for is there indeed a single valid argument to oppose me with?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

To beat her in this debate, you must call upon all your wits. Make no allowances and show no weakness!

CHREMYLUS

It is right that the good should be happy, that the wicked and the impious, on the other hand, should be miserable; that is a truth, I believe, which no one will gainsay. To realize this condition of things is a proposal as great as it is noble and useful in every respect, and we have found a means of attaining the object of our wishes. If Plutus recovers his sight and ceases from wandering about unseeing and at random, he will go to seek the just men and never leave them again; he will shun the perverse and ungodly; so, thanks to him, all men will become honest, rich and pious. Can anything better be conceived for the public weal?

BLEPSIDEMUS

Of a certainty, no! I bear witness to that. It is not even necessary she should reply.

CHREMYLUS

Does it not seem that everything is extravagance in the world, or rather madness, when you watch the way things go? A crowd of rogues enjoy blessings they have won by sheer injustice, while more honest folks are miserable, die of hunger, and spend their whole lives with you. Now, if Plutus became clear-sighted again and drove out Poverty, it would be the greatest blessing possible for the human race.

POVERTY

Here are two old men, whose brains are easy to confuse, who assist each other to talk rubbish and drivel to their hearts' content. But if your wishes were realized, your profit would be great! Let Plutus recover his sight and divide his favours out equally to all, and none will ply either trade or art any longer; all toil would be done away with. Who would wish to hammer iron, build ships, sew, turn, cut up leather, bake bricks, bleach linen, tan hides, or break up the soil of the earth with the plough and garner the gifts of Demeter, if he could live in idleness and

PLUTUS

free from all this work?

CHREMYLUS

What nonsense all this is! All these trades which you just mention will be plied by our slaves.

POVERTY

Your slaves! And by what means will these slaves be got?

CHREMYLUS

We will buy them.

POVERTY

But first say, who will sell them, if everyone is rich?

CHREMYLUS

Some greedy dealer from Thessaly—the land which supplies so many.

POVERTY

But if your system is applied, there won't be a single slave—dealer left. What rich man would risk his life to devote himself to this traffic? You will have to toil, to dig and submit yourself to all kinds of hard labour; so that your life would be more wretched even than it is now.

CHREMYLUS

May this prediction fall upon yourself!

POVERTY

You will not be able to sleep in a bed, for no more will ever be manufactured; nor on carpets, for who would weave them, if he had gold? When you bring a young bride to your dwelling, you will have no essences wherewith to perfume her, nor rich embroidered cloaks dyed with dazzling colours in which to clothe her. And yet what is the use of being rich, if you are to be deprived of all these enjoyments? On the other hand, you have all that you need in abundance, thanks to me; to the artisan I am like a severe mistress, who forces him by need and poverty to seek the means of earning his livelihood.

CHREMYLUS

And what good thing can you give us, unless it be burns in the bath, and swarms of brats and old women who cry with hunger, and clouds uncountable of lice, gnats and flies, which hover about the wretch's head, trouble him, awake him and say, "You will be hungry, but get up!" Besides, to possess a rag in place of a mantle, a pallet of rushes swarming with bugs, that do not let you close your eyes, for a bed; a rotten piece of matting for a coverlet; a big stone for a pillow, on which to lay your head; to eat mallow roots instead of bread, and leaves of withered radish instead of cake; to have nothing but the cover of a broken jug for a stool, the stave of a cask, and broken at that, for a kneading—trough, that is the life you make for us! Are these the mighty benefits with which you pretend to load mankind?

POVERTY

It's not my life that you describe,; you are attacking the existence beggars lead.

CHREMYLUS

Is Beggary not Poverty's sister?

POVERTY

Thrasybulus and Dionysius are one and the same according to you. No, my life is not like that and never will be. The beggar, whom you have depicted to us, never possesses anything. The poor man lives thriftily and attentive to his work: he has not got too much, but he does not lack what he really needs.

CHREMYLUS

Oh! what a happy life, by Demeter! to live sparingly, to toil incessantly and not to leave enough to pay for a tomb!

POVERTY

That's it! jest, jeer, and never talk seriously! But what you don't know is this, that men with me are worth more, both in mind and body, than with Plutus. With him they are gouty, big—bellied, heavy of limb and scandalously stout; with me they are thin, wasp—waisted, and terrible to the foe.

CHREMYLUS

No doubt it's by starving them that you give them that waspish waist.

POVERTY

PLUTUS

As for behaviour, I will prove to you that modesty dwells with me and insolence with Plutus.

CHREMYLUS

Oh the sweet modesty of stealing and burglary.

POVERTY

Look at the orators in our republics; as long as they are poor, both state and people can only praise their uprightness; but once they are fattened on the public funds, they conceive a hatred for justice, plan intrigues against the people and attack the democracy.

CHREMYLUS

That is absolutely true, although your tongue is very vile. But it matters not, so don't put on those triumphant airs; you shall not be punished any the less for having tried to persuade me that poverty is worth more than wealth.

POVERTY

Not being able to refute my arguments, you chatter at random and exert yourself to no purpose.

CHREMYLUS

Then tell me this, why does all mankind flee from you?

POVERTY

Because I make them better. Children do the very same; they flee from the wise counsels of their fathers. So difficult is it to see one's true interest.

CHREMYLUS

Will you say that Zeus cannot discern what is best? Well, he takes Plutus to himself...

BLEPSIDEMUS

...and banishes Poverty to the earth.

POVERTY

Ah me! how purblind you are, you old fellows of the days of Cronus! Why, Zeus is poor, and I will clearly prove it to you. In the Olympic games, which he founded, and to which he convokes the whole of Greece every four years, why does he only crown the victorious athletes with wild olive? If he were rich he would give them gold.

CHREMYLUS

That's the way he shows that he clings to his wealth; he is sparing with it, won't part with any portion of it, only bestows baubles on the victors and keeps his money for himself.

POVERTY

But wealth coupled to such sordid greed is yet more shameful than poverty.

CHREMYLUS

May Zeus destroy you, both you and your chaplet of wild olive!

POVERTY

Thus you dare to maintain that Poverty is not the fount of all blessings!

CHREMYLUS

Ask Hecate whether it is better to be rich or starving; she will tell you that the rich send her a meal every month and that the poor make it disappear before it is even served. But go and hang yourself and don't breathe another syllable. I will not be convinced against my will.

POVERTY

"Oh! citizens of Argos! do you hear what he says?"

CHREMYLUS

Invoke Pauson, your boon companion, rather.

POVERTY

Alas! what is to become of me?

CHREMYLUS

Get you gone, be off quick and a pleasant journey to you.

POVERTY

But where shall I go?

PLUTUS

CHREMYLUS

To gaol; but hurry up, let us put an end to this.

POVERTY (as she departs)

One day you will recall me.

CHREMYLUS

Then you can return; but disappear for the present. I prefer to be rich; you are free to knock your head against the walls in your rage.

BLEPSIDEMUS

And I too welcome wealth. I want, when I leave the bath all perfumed with essences, to feast bravely with my wife and children and to fart in the faces of toilers and Poverty.

CHREMYLUS

So that hussy has gone at last! But let us make haste to put Plutus to bed in the Temple of Asclepius.

BLEPSIDEMUS

Let us make haste; else some bothering fellow may again come to interrupt us.

CHREMYLUS (loudly)

Cario, bring the coverlets and all that I have got ready from the house; let us conduct the god to the temple, taking care to observe all the proper rites.

(CARIO comes out of the house with a

bundle under one arm and leading PLUTUS with the other.

CHREMYLUS and BLEPSIDEMUS join him and all four of them depart.)

(Interlude of dancing by the CHORUS.)

CARIO

Oh! you old fellows, who used to dip out the broth served to the poor at the festival of Theseus with little pieces of bread hollowed like a spoon, how worthy of envy is your fate! How happy you are, both you and all just men!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

My good fellow, what has happened to your friends? You seem the bearer of good tidings.

CARIO

What joy—for my master and even more for Plutus! The god has regained his sight; his eyes sparkle with the greatest brilliancy, thanks to the benevolent care of Asclepius.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh! what transports of joy! oh! what shouts of gladness!

CARIO

Aye! one is compelled to rejoice, whether one will or not.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I will sing to the honour of Asclepius, the son of illustrious Zeus, with a resounding voice; he is the beneficent star which men adore.

CHREMYLUS' WIFE (coming out of the house)

What mean these shouts? Is there good news? With what impatience have I been waiting in the house, and for so long too!

CARIO

Quick! quick, some wine, mistress. And drink some yourself, (aside) it's much to your taste. I bring you all blessings in a lump.

WIFE

Where are they?

CARIO

In my words, as you are going to see.

WIFE

Have done with trifling! come, speak.

CARIO

Listen, I am going to tell you everything from the feet to the head.

PLUTUS

WIFE

Oh! don't throw anything at my head.

CARIO

Not even the happiness that has come to you?

WIFE

No, no, nothing ... to annoy me.

CARIO

Having arrived near to the temple with our patient, then so unfortunate, but now at the apex of happiness, of blessedness, we first led him down to the sea to purify him.

WIFE

Ah! what a singular pleasure for an old man to bathe in the cold seawater!

CARIO (in the manner of the tragic messenger)

Then we repaired to the temple of the god. Once the wafers and the various offerings had been consecrated upon the altar, and the cake of wheaten-meal had been banded over to the devouring Hephaestus, we made Plutus lie on a couch according to the rite, and each of us prepared himself a bed of leaves.

WIFE

Had any other folk come to beseech the deity?

CARIO

Yes. Firstly, Neoclides, who is blind, but steals much better than those who see clearly; then many others attacked by complaints of all kinds. The lights were put out and the priest enjoined us to sleep, especially recommending us to keep silent should we hear any noise. There we were all lying down quite quietly. I could not sleep; I was thinking of a certain stew-pan full of pap placed close to an old woman and just behind her head. I had a furious longing to slip towards that side. But just as I was lifting my head, I noticed the priest, who was sweeping off both the cakes and the figs on the sacred table; then he made the round of the altars and sanctified the cakes that remained, by stowing them away in a bag. I therefore resolved to follow such a pious example and made straight for the pap.

WIFE

You rogue! and had you no fear of the god?

CARIO

Aye, indeed! I feared that the god with his crown on his head might have been near the stew-pan before me. I said to myself, "Like priest, like god." On hearing the noise I made the old woman put out her hand, but I hissed and bit it, just as a sacred serpent might have done. Quick she drew back her hand, slipped down into the bed with her head beneath the coverlets and never moved again; only she let flee a fart in her fear which stank worse than a weasel. As for myself, I swallowed a goodly portion of the pap and, having made a good feed, went back to bed.

WIFE

And did not the god come?

CARIO

He did not tarry; and when he was near us, oh! dear! such a good joke happened. My belly was quite blown up, and I let a thunderous fart!

WIFE

Doubtless the god pulled a wry face?

CARIO

No, but Iaso blushed a little and Panacea turned her head away, holding her nose; my farts are not perfume.

WIFE

And what did the god do?

CARIO

He paid not the slightest heed.

WIFE

He must then be a pretty coarse kind of god?

CARIO

I don't say that, but he's used to tasting stools.

PLUTUS

WIFE

Impudent knave, go on with you!

CARIO

Then I hid myself in my bed all a-tremble. Asclepius did the round of the patients and examined them all with great attention; then a slave placed beside him a stone mortar, a pestle and a little box.

WIFE

Of stone?

CARIO

No, not of stone.

WIFE

But how could you see all this, you arch-rascal, when you say you were hiding all the time?

CARIO

Why, great gods, through my cloak, for it's not without holes! He first prepared an ointment for Neoclides; he threw three heads of Tenian garlic into the mortar, pounded them with an admixture of fig-tree sap and lentisk, moistened the whole with Sphettian vinegar, and, turning back the patient's eyelids, applied his salve to the interior of the eyes, so that the pain might be more excruciating. Neoclides shrieked, howled, sprang towards the foot of his bed and wanted to bolt, but the god laughed and said to him, "Keep where you are with your salve; by doing this you will not go and perjure yourself before the Assembly."

WIFE

What a wise god and what a friend to our city

CARIO

Thereupon he came and seated himself at the head of Plutus' bed, took a perfectly clean rag and wiped his eyelids; Panacea covered his head and face with a purple cloth, while the god whistled, and two enormous snakes came rushing from the sanctuary.

WIFE

Great gods!

CARIO

They slipped gently beneath the purple cloth and, as far as I could judge, licked the patient's eyelids; for, in less time than even you need, mistress, to drain down ten beakers of wine, Plutus rose up; he could see. I clapped my hands with joy and awoke my master, and the god immediately disappeared with the serpents into the sanctuary. As for those who were lying near Plutus, you can imagine that they embraced him tenderly. Dawn broke and not one of them had closed an eye. As for myself, I did not cease thanking the god who had so quickly restored to Plutus his sight and had made Neoclides blinder than ever.

WIFE

Oh! thou great Asclepius! How mighty is thy power! (To CARIO) But tell me, where is Plutus now?

CARIO

He is approaching, escorted by an immense crowd. The rich, whose wealth is ill-gotten, are knitting their brows and shooting at him looks of fierce hate, while the just folk, who led a wretched existence, embrace him and grasp his hand in the transport of their joy; they follow in his wake, their heads wreathed with garlands, laughing and blessing their deliverer; the old men make the earth resound as they walk together keeping time. Come, all of you, all, down to the very least, dance, leap and form yourselves into a chorus; no longer do you risk being told, when you go home. "There is no meal in the bag."

WIFE

And I, by Hecate! I will string you a garland of cakes for the good tidings you have brought me.

CARIO

Hurry, make haste then; our friends are close at hand.

WIFE

I will go indoors to fetch some gifts of welcome, to celebrate these eyes that have just been opened.

(She goes back into the house.)

CARIO

Meantime I am going forth to meet them.

PLUTUS

(Exit)

(Interlude of dancing by the CHORUS.)

PLUTUS

I adore thee, oh! thou divine sun, and thee I greet, thou city, the beloved of Pallas: be welcome, thou land of Cecrops, which hast received me. Alas! what manner of men I associated with! I blush to think of it. While, on the other hand, I shunned those who deserved my friendship; I knew neither the vices of the ones nor the virtues of the others. A two-fold mistake, and in both cases equally fatal! Ah! what a misfortune was mine! But I want to change everything; and in the future I mean to prove to mankind that, if I gave to the wicked, it was against my will.

CHREMYLUS (to the wings)

Get you gone! Oh! what a lot of friends spring into being when you are fortunate! They dig me with their elbows and bruise my shins to prove their affection. Each one wants to greet me. What a crowd of old fellows thronged round me on the market-place!

WIFE

Oh! thou, who art dearest of all to me, and thou too, be welcome! Allow me, Plutus, to shower these gifts of welcome over you in due accord with custom.

PLUTUS

No. This is the first house I enter after having regained my sight; I shall take nothing from it, for it is my place rather to give.

WIFE

Do you refuse these gifts?

PLUTUS

I will accept them at your fireside, as custom requires. Besides, we shall thus avoid a ridiculous scene; it is not meet that the poet should throw dried figs and dainties to the spectators; it is a vulgar trick to make them laugh.

WIFE

You are right. Look! yonder's Dexinicus, who was already getting to his feet to catch the figs as they flew past him.

(Interlude of dancing by the CHORUS.)

CARIO

How pleasant it is, friends, to live well, especially when it costs nothing! What a deluge of blessings flood our household, and that too without our having wronged a single soul! Ah! what a delightful thing is wealth! The bin is full of white flour and the wine-jars run over with fragrant liquor; all the chests are crammed with gold and silver, it is a sight to see; the tank is full of oil, the phials with perfumes, and the garret with dried figs. Vinegar flasks, plates, stew-pots and all the platters are of brass; our rotten old wooden trenchers for the fish have to-day become dishes of silver; even the thunder-mug is of ivory. We others, the slaves, we play at odd and even with gold pieces, and carry luxury so far that we no longer wipe our arses with stones, but use garlic stalks instead. My master, at this moment, is crowned with flowers and sacrificing a pig, a goat and ram; it's the smoke that has driven me out, for I could no longer endure it, it hurt my eyes so.

(A JUST MAN enters, followed by a small slave-lad who carries a thread-bare cloak and a pair of badly worn sandals.)

JUST MAN

Come, my child, come with me. Let us go and find the god.

CARIO

Who's this?

JUST MAN

A man who was once wretched, but now is happy.

CARIO

A just man then?

JUST MAN

That's right.

CARIO

PLUTUS

Well! what do you want?

JUST MAN

I come to thank the god for all the blessings he has showered on me. My father had left me a fairly decent fortune, and I helped those of my friends who were in want; it was, to my thinking, the most useful thing I could do with my fortune.

CARIO

And you were quickly ruined?

JUST MAN

Quite.

CARIO

And since then you have been living in misery?

JUST MAN

Quite; I thought I could count, in case of need, upon the friends whose property I had helped, but they turned their backs upon me and pretended not to see me.

CARIO

They laughed at you, that's obvious.

JUST MAN

Quite. With my empty coffers, I had no more friends. But my lot has changed, and so I come to the god to make him the acts of gratitude that are his due.

CARIO

But why are you bringing this old cloak, which your slave is carrying! Tell me.

JUST MAN

I wish to dedicate it to the god.

CARIO

Were you initiated into the Great Mysteries in that cloak?

JUST MAN

No, but I shivered in it for thirteen years.

CARIO

And this footwear?

JUST MAN

These also are my winter companions.

CARIO

And you wish to dedicate them too?

JUST MAN

Certainly.

CARIO

Fine presents to offer to the god!

(An INFORMER enters, followed by a witness.)

INFORMER (before he sees CARIO)

Alas! alas! I am a lost man. Ah! thrice, four, five, twelve times, or rather ten thousand times unhappy fate! Why, why must fortune deal me such rough blows?

CARIO

Oh, Apollo, my tutelary! oh! ye favourable gods! what has overtaken this man?

INFORMER (to CARIO)

Ah! am I not deserving of pity? I have lost everything; this cursed god has stripped me bare. Ah! if there be justice in heaven, he shall be struck blind again,

JUST MAN

I think I know what's the matter. If this man is unfortunate, it's because he's of little account and small honesty; and indeed he looks it too.

CARIO

Then, by Zeus! his plight is but just.

PLUTUS

INFORMER

He promised that if he recovered his sight, he would enrich us all unaided; whereas he has ruined more than one.

CARIO

But whom has he thus ill-used?

INFORMER

Me.

CARIO

You were doubtless a villainous thief then.

INFORMER

No, it is rather you yourselves who were such wretches; I am certain you have got my money.

CARIO

Ha! by Demeter! an informer! What impudence! He's ravenously hungry, that's certain.

INFORMER

You shall follow me this very instant to the market-place, where the torture of the wheel shall force the confession of your misdeeds from you.

CARIO (with a threatening gesture)

Watch out, now!

JUST MAN

By Zeus the Deliverer, what gratitude all Greeks owe to Plutus, if he destroys these vile informers!

INFORMER

You are laughing at me. Well, then I denounce you as their accomplice. Where did you steal that new cloak from? Yesterday I saw you with one utterly worn out.

JUST MAN

I fear you not, thanks to this ring, for which I paid Eudemus a drachma.

CARIO

Ah! there's no ring to preserve you from the informer's bite.

INFORMER

The insolent wretches! But, my fine jokers, you have not told me what you are up to here. Nothing good, I'm sure of that.

CARIO

Nothing of any good for you, be sure of that.

INFORMER

By Zeus! it's at my expense that you are about to dine.

CARIO

You and your witness, I hope you both burst...

JUST MAN

With an empty belly.

INFORMER

You deny it? I reckon, you villains, that there is much salt fish and roast meat in this house. (He sniffs elaborately.)

CARIO

Can you smell anything, rascal?

JUST MAN

The cold, perhaps.

INFORMER

Can such outrages be home, oh, Zeus! Ye gods! how cruel it is to see me treated thus, when I am such an honest fellow and such a good citizen!

JUST MAN

You an honest man! you a good citizen!

INFORMER

PLUTUS

A better one than any.

JUST MAN

Ah! well then, answer my questions.

INFORMER

Concerning what?

JUST MAN

Are you a husbandman?

INFORMER

D'ye take me for a fool?

JUST MAN

A merchant?

INFORMER

I assume the title, when it serves me.

JUST MAN

Do you ply any trade?

INFORMER

No, most assuredly not!

JUST MAN

Then how do you live, if you do nothing?

INFORMER

I superintend public and private business.

JUST MAN

You do? And by what right, pray?

INFORMER

Because it pleases me to do so.

JUST MAN

Like a thief you sneak yourself in where you have no business. You are hated by all and you claim to be an honest man.

INFORMER

What, you fool? I have not the right to dedicate myself entirely to my country's service?

JUST MAN

Is the country served by vile intrigue?

INFORMER

It is served by watching that the established law is observed—by allowing no one to violate it.

JUST MAN

That's the duty of the tribunals; they are established to that end.

INFORMER

And who is the prosecutor before the dicasts?

JUST MAN

Whoever wishes to be.

INFORMER

Well then, it is I who choose to be prosecutor; and thus all public affairs fall within my province.

JUST MAN

I pity Athens for being in such vile clutches. But would you not prefer to live quietly and free from all care and anxiety?

INFORMER

To do nothing is to live an animal's life.

JUST MAN

Thus you will not change your mode of life?

INFORMER

No, though they gave me Plutus himself and the silphium of Battus.

PLUTUS

CARIO (to the INFORMER)

Come, quick, off with your cloak.

(The INFORMER does not move.)

JUST MAN

Hi! friend! it's you they are speaking to.

CARIO

Off with your shoes.

(The INFORMER still remains motionless.)

JUST MAN

I say, all this is addressed to you.

INFORMER (defiantly)

Very well! let one of you come near me, if he dares.

CARIO

I dare.

(He strips the INFORMER of his cloak and shoes.

The witness runs away.)

INFORMER

Alas! I am robbed of my clothes in full daylight.

CARIO

That's what comes of meddling with other folk's business and living at their expense.

INFORMER (over his shoulder to the departing witness)

You see what is happening; I call you to witness.

CARIO (laughing)

Look how the witness whom you brought is taking to his heels.

INFORMER

Great gods! I am all alone and they assault me.

CARIO

Shout away!

INFORMER

Oh! woe, woe is me!

CARIO

Give me that old ragged cloak, that I may dress out the informer.

JUST MAN

No, no; I have dedicated it to Plutus.

CARIO

And where would your offering be better bestowed than on the shoulders of a rascal and a thief? To Plutus fine, rich cloaks should be given.

JUST MAN

And what then shall be done with these shoes? Tell me.

CARIO

I will nail them to his brow as gifts are nailed to the trunks of the wild olive.

INFORMER

I'm off, for you are the strongest, I own. But if I find someone to join me, let him be as weak as he will, I will summon this god, who thinks himself so strong, before the court this very day, and denounce him as manifestly guilty of overturning the democracy by his will alone and without the consent of the Senate or the Assembly.

JUST MAN

Now that you are rigged out from head to foot with my old clothes, hasten to the bath and stand there in the front row to warm yourself better; that's the place I formerly had.

CARIO

Ah! the bath-man would grab you by the balls and fling you through the door; he would only need to see you to appraise you at your true value.... But let us go in, friend, that you may address your thanksgivings to the god.

PLUTUS

(Interlude of dancing by the CHORUS.)

(An OLD WOMAN enters,
dressed as a young girl and trying to walk
in a youthful and alluring manner. She carries a plate of food.)

OLD WOMAN (coyly)

My dear old men, am I near the house where the new god lives, or have I missed the road?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

You are at his door, my pretty little maid, who question us so sweetly.

OLD WOMAN

Then I will summon someone in the house.

CHREMYLUS

No need. I am here myself. But what brings you here?

OLD WOMAN

Ah! a cruel, unjust fate! My dear friend, this god has made life unbearable to me through ceasing to be blind.

CHREMYLUS

What does this mean? Can you be a female informer?

OLD WOMAN

Most certainly not.

CHREMYLUS

Have you drunk up your money then?

OLD WOMAN

You are mocking me! No! I am being devoured with a consuming fire.

CHREMYLUS

Then tell me what is consuming you so fiercely.

OLD WOMAN

Listen! I loved a young man, who was poor, but so handsome, so well-built, so honest! He readily gave way to all I desired and acquitted himself so well! I, for my part, refused him nothing.

CHREMYLUS

And what did he generally ask of you?

OLD WOMAN

Very little; he bore himself towards me with astonishing discretion! perchance twenty drachmae for a cloak or eight for footwear; sometimes he begged me to buy tunics for his sisters or a little mantle for his mother: at times he needed four bushels of corn.

CHREMYLUS

That's very little, in truth; I admire his modesty.

OLD WOMAN

And it wasn't as a reward for his complacency that he ever asked me for anything, but as a matter of pure friendship; a cloak I had given would remind him from whom he had got it.

CHREMYLUS

It was a fellow who loved you madly.

OLD WOMAN

But it's no longer so, for the faithless wretch has sadly altered! I had sent him this cake with the sweetmeats you see here on this dish and let him know that I would visit him in the evening...

CHREMYLUS

Well?

OLD WOMAN

He sent me back my presents and added this tart to them, on condition that I never set foot in his house again. Besides, he sent me this message, "Once upon a time the Milesians were brave."

CHREMYLUS

An honest lad, indeed What do you expect? When poor, he would devour anything; now he is rich, he no longer cares for lentils.

PLUTUS

OLD WOMAN

Formerly he came to me every day.

CHREMYLUS

To see if you were being buried?

OLD WOMAN

No! he longed to hear the sound of my voice.

CHREMYLUS (aside)

And to carry off some present.

OLD WOMAN

If I was downcast, he would call me his little duck or his little dove in a most tender manner...

CHREMYLUS (aside)

And then would ask for the money to buy a pair of sandals.

OLD WOMAN

When I was at the Mysteries of Eleusis in a carriage, someone made eyes at me; he was so jealous that he beat me the whole of that day.

CHREMYLUS (aside)

That was because he liked to feed alone.

OLD WOMAN

He told me I had very beautiful hands.

CHREMYLUS (aside)

Aye, no doubt, when they handed him twenty drachmae.

OLD WOMAN

That my whole body breathed a sweet perfume.

CHREMYLUS (aside)

Yes, like enough, if you poured him out Thasian wine.

OLD WOMAN

That my glance was gentle and charming.

CHREMYLUS (aside)

He was no fool. He knew how to drag drachmae from a sex-starved old woman.

OLD WOMAN

Ah! the god has done very, very wrong, saying he would support the victims of injustice.

CHREMYLUS

Well, what should he do? Speak, and it shall be done.

OLD WOMAN

Compel him, whom I have loaded with benefits, to repay them in his turn; if not, he does not merit the least of the god's favours.

CHREMYLUS

And did he not do this every night?

OLD WOMAN

He swore he would never leave me, as long as I lived.

CHREMYLUS

Aye, right but he thinks you are no longer alive.

OLD WOMAN

Ah! friend, I am pining away with grief.

CHREMYLUS (aside)

You are rotting away, it seems to me.

OLD WOMAN

I have grown so thin, I could slip through a ring.

CHREMYLUS

Yes, if it were as large as the hoop of a sieve.

(A young man enters,

PLUTUS

wearing a garland on his head
and carrying a torch in his hand.)

OLD WOMAN

But here is the youth, the cause of my complaint; he looks as though he were going to a festival.

CHREMYLUS

Yes, if his chaplet and his torch are any guides.

YOUTH (to the OLD WOMAN, With cool politeness)

Greeting to you.

OLD WOMAN (in a puzzled tone)

What was that he said?

YOUTH

My ancient old dear, you have grown white very quickly, by heaven!

OLD WOMAN

Oh! what an insult!

CHREMYLUS

It is a long time, then, since he saw you?

OLD WOMAN

A long time? My god! he was with me yesterday.

CHREMYLUS

It must be, then, that, unlike other people, he sees more clearly when he's drunk.

OLD WOMAN

No, but I have always known him for an insolent fellow.

YOUTH

Oh! divine Posidon! Oh, ye gods of old age! what wrinkles she has on her face! (He holds his torch close to her, in order to inspect her more closely.)

OLD WOMAN

Oh! oh! keep your distance with that torch.

CHREMYLUS (aside)

It's just as well; if a single spark were to reach her, she would catch fire like an old olive branch.

YOUTH

I propose to have a game with you.

OLD WOMAN (eagerly)

Where, naughty boy?

YOUTH

Here. Take some nuts in your hand.

OLD WOMAN

What game is this?

YOUTH

Let's play at guessing how many ... teeth you have.

CHREMYLUS

Ah! I'll tell you; she's got three, or perhaps four.

YOUTH

Pay up; you've lost! she has only one single grinder.

OLD WOMAN

You wretch! you're not in your right senses. Do you insult me thus before this crowd?

YOUTH

I am washing you thoroughly; that's doing you a service.

CHREMYLUS

No, no! as she is there, she can still deceive; but if this white-lead is washed off, her wrinkles will come out plainly.

OLD WOMAN

PLUTUS

You are only an old fool!

YOUTH

Ah! he is playing the gallant, he is playing with your tits, and thinks I do not see it.

OLD WOMAN (to CHREMYLUS)

Oh! no, by Aphrodite, don't do that, you naughty jealous fellow.

CHREMYLUS

Oh! most certainly not, by Hecate! Verily and indeed I would need to be mad! But, young man, I cannot forgive you, if you cast off this beautiful child.

YOUTH

Why, I adore her.

CHREMYLUS

But nevertheless she accuses you...

YOUTH

Accuses me of what?

CHREMYLUS

...of having told her insolently, "Once upon a time the Milesians were brave."

YOUTH

Oh! I shall not dispute with you about her.

CHREMYLUS

Why not?

YOUTH

Out of respect for your age; with anyone but you I should not be so easy; come, take the girl and be happy.

CHREMYLUS

see, I see; you don't want her any more.

OLD WOMAN

Nay this is a thing that cannot be allowed.

YOUTH

I cannot argue with a woman who has been laid by every one of these thirteen thousand men.

(He points to the audience.)

CHREMYLUS

Yet, since you liked the wine, you should now consume the lees.

YOUTH

But these lees are quite rancid and fusty.

CHREMYLUS

Pass them through a straining-cloth; they'll clarify.

YOUTH

But I want to go in with you to offer these chaplets to the god.

OLD WOMAN

And I too have something to tell him.

YOUTH

Then I won't enter.

CHREMYLUS

Come, have no fear; she won't harm you.

YOUTH

That's true; I've been managing the old bark so long.

OLD WOMAN

Go in; Ill follow after you.

(They enter the house.)

CHREMYLUS

Good gods! that old hag has fastened herself to her youth like a limpet to its rock.

(He follows them in.)

PLUTUS

(Interlude of dancing by the CHORUS.)

(HERMES enters and begins knocking on the door.)

CARIO (opening the door)

Who is knocking at the door? Halloa! I see no one; it was then by chance it gave forth that plaintive tone.

HERMES (to CARIO, who is about to close the door)

Cario! stop!

CARIO

Eh! friend, was it you who knocked so loudly? Tell me.

HERMES

No, I was going to knock and you forestalled me by opening. Come, call your master quick, then his wife and his children, then his slave and his dog, then yourself and his pig.

CARIO

And what's it all about?

HERMES

It's about this, rascal! Zeus wants to serve you all with the same sauce and hurl the lot of you into the Barathrum.

CARIO (aside)

Have a care for your tongue, you bearer of ill tidings! (To HERMES) But why does he want to treat us in that scurvy fashion?

HERMES

Because you have committed the most dreadful crime. Since Plutus has recovered his sight, there is nothing for us other gods, neither incense, nor laurels, nor cakes, nor victims, nor anything in the world.

CARIO

And you will never be offered anything more; you governed us too ill

HERMES

I care nothing at all about the other gods, but it's myself. I tell you I am dying of hunger.

CARIO

That's reasoning like a wise fellow.

HERMES

Formerly, from earliest dawn, I was offered all sorts of good things in the wine-shops, -wine-cakes, honey, dried figs, in short, dishes worthy of Hermes. Now, I lie the livelong day on my back, with my legs in the air, famishing.

CARIO

And quite right too, for you often had them punished who treated you so well.

HERMES

Ah! the lovely cake they used to knead for me on the fourth of the month!

CARIO

You recall it vainly; your regrets are useless!

HERMES

Ah! the ham I was wont to devour!

CARIO

Well then! make use of your legs and hop on one leg upon the wine-skin, to while away the time.

HERMES

Oh! the grilled entrails I used to swallow down!

CARIO

Your own have got the colic, I think

HERMES

Oh! the delicious tippie, half-wine, half-water!

CARIO

Here, take this and be off. (He farts.)

HERMES (in tragic style)

PLUTUS

Would you render service to the friend that loves you?

CARIO

Willingly, if I can.

HERMES

Give me some well-baked bread and a big hunk of the victims they are sacrificing in your house.

CARIO

That would be stealing.

HERMES

Do you forget, then, how I used to take care he knew nothing about it when you were stealing something from your master?

CARIO

Because I used to share it with you, you rogue; some cake or other always came your way,

HERMES

Which afterwards you ate up all by yourself.

CARIO

But then you did not share the blows when I was caught.

HERMES

Forget past injuries, now you have taken Phyle. Ah! how I should like to live with you! Take pity and receive me.

CARIO

You would leave the gods to stop here?

HERMES

One is much better off among you.

CARIO

What! you would desert Do you think that is honest?

HERMES

"Where I live well, there is my country."

CARIO

But how could we employ you here?

HERMES

Place me near the door; I am the watchman god and would shift of the robbers.

CARIO

Shift off! Ah! but we have no love for shifts.

HERMES

Entrust me with business dealings.

CARIO

But we are rich; why should we keep a baggling Hermes?

HERMES

Let me intrigue for you.

CARIO

No, no, intrigues are forbidden; we believe in good faith.

HERMES

I will work for you as a guide.

CARIO

But the god sees clearly now, so we no longer want a guide.

HERMES

Well then, I will preside over the games. Ah! what can you object to In that? Nothing is fitter for Plutus than to give scenic and gymnastic games.

CARIO

How useful it is to have so many names Here you have found the means of earning your bread. I don't wonder the jurymen so eagerly try to get entered for many tribunals.

PLUTUS

HERMES

So then, you admit me on these terms?

CARIO

Go and wash the entrails of the victims at the well, so that you may show yourself serviceable at once.
(They both enter the house. A PRIEST of ZEUS comes hurrying in.)

PRIEST

Can anyone tell me where Chremylus is?

CHREMYLUS (emerging from the house)

What would you with him, friend?

PRIEST

Much ill. Since Plutus has recovered his sight, I am perishing of starvation; I, the priest of Zeus the Deliverer, have nothing to eat!

CHREMYLUS

And what is the cause of that, pray?

PRIEST

No one dreams of offering sacrifices.

CHREMYLUS

Why not?

PRIEST

Because all men are rich. Ah! when they had nothing, the merchant who escaped from shipwreck, the accused who was acquitted, all immolated victims; another would sacrifice for the success of some wish and the priest joined in at the feast; but now there is not the smallest victim, not one of the faithful in the temple, but thousands who come there to take a crap.

CHREMYLUS

Why don't you take your share of those offerings?

PRIEST (ignoring this)

Hence I think I too am going to say good-bye to Zeus the Deliverer and stop here myself.

CHREMYLUS

Be at ease, all will go well, if it so please the god. Zeus the Deliverer is here; he came of his own accord.

PRIEST

Ha! that's good news.

(He moves toward the door.)

CHREMYLUS

Wait a little; we are going to install Plutus presently in the place he formerly occupied behind the Temple of Athene; there he will watch over our treasures for ever. (Calling out) Let lighted torches be brought to the priest. Take these and walk in solemn procession in front of the god.

PRIEST

That's magnificent!

CHREMYLUS

Let Plutus be summoned.

(PLUTUS comes out of the house, followed by the OLD WOMAN.)

OLD WOMAN

And I, what am I to do?

CHREMYLUS

Take the pots of vegetables which we are going to offer to the god in honour of his installation and carry them on your head; you just happen luckily to be wearing, a beautiful embroidered robe.

OLD WOMAN

And what about the object of my coming?

CHREMYLUS

Everything shall be according to your wish. The young man will be with you this evening.

OLD WOMAN

PLUTUS

Oh! if you promise me his visit, I will right willingly carry the pots.

(She puts them on her head.)

CHREMYLUS

Those are strange pots indeed! Generally the scum rises to the, top of the pots, but here the pots are raised to the top of the old woman.

(PLUTUS begins to march solemnly off the stage;

the OLD WOMAN follows him.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Let us withdraw without more tarrying, and follow the others, singing as we go

(They do so.)

THE END