

The Clouds

By Aristophanes

Written 419 B.C.E

Dramatis Personae

STREPSIADES
PHIDIPPIDES
SERVANT OF STREPSIADES
DISCIPLES OF SOCRATES
SOCRATES
JUST DISCOURSE
UNJUST DISCOURSE
PASIAS, a Money-lender
AMYNIAS, another Money-lender
CHORUS OF CLOUDS

Scene

In the background are two houses, that of Strepsiades and that of Socrates, the Thoughtery. The latter is small and dingy; the interior of the former is shown and two beds are seen, each occupied.

STREPSIADES *sitting up*

Great gods! will these nights never end? will daylight never come? I heard the cock crow long ago and my slaves are snoring still! Ah! Ah! It wasn't like this formerly. Curses on the war! has it not done me ill enough? Now I may not even chastise my own slaves. Again there's this brave lad, who never wakes the whole long night, but, wrapped in his five coverlets, farts away to his heart's content.

He lies down

Come! let me nestle in well and snore too, if it be possible....oh! misery, it's vain to think of sleep with all these expenses, this stable, these debts, which are devouring me, thanks to this fine cavalier, who only knows how to look after his long locks, to show himself off in his chariot and to dream of horses! And I, I am nearly dead, when I see the moon bringing the third decade in her train and my liability falling due....Slave! light the lamp and bring me my tablets.

The slave obeys.

Who are all my creditors? Let me see and reckon up the interest. What is it I owe?....Twelve minae to Pasiyas....What! twelve minae to Pasiyas?....Why did I borrow these? Ah! I know! It was to buy that thoroughbred, which cost me so much. How I should have prized the stone that had blinded him!

PHIDIPPIDES *in his sleep*

That's not fair, Philo! Drive your chariot straight, I say.

STREPSIADES

This is what is destroying me. He raves about horses, even in his sleep.

PHIDIPPIDES *still sleeping*

How many times round the track is the race for the chariots of war?

STREPSIADES

It's your own father you are driving to death....to ruin. Come! what debt comes next, after that of Pusias?....Three minae to Amynias for a chariot and its two wheels.

PHIDIPPIDES *still asleep*

Give the horse a good roll in the dust and lead him home.

STREPSIADES

Ah! wretched boy! it's my money that you are making roll. My creditors have distrained on my goods, and here are others again, who demand security for their interest.

PHIDIPPIDES *awaking*

What is the matter with you, father, that you groan and turn about the whole night through?

STREPSIADES

I have a bum-bailiff in the bedclothes biting me.

PHIDIPPIDES

For pity's sake, let me have a little sleep.

He turns over.

STREPSIADES

Very well, sleep on! but remember that all these debts will fall back on your shoulders. Oh! curses on the go-between who made me marry your mother! I lived so happily in the country, a commonplace, everyday life, but a good and easy one-had not a trouble, not a care, was rich in bees, in sheep and in olives. Then indeed I had to marry the niece of Megacles, the son of Megacles; I belonged to the country, she was from the town; she was a haughty, extravagant woman, a true Coesyra. On the nuptial day, when I lay beside her, I was reeking of the dregs of the wine-cup, of cheese and of wool; she was redolent with essences, saffron, voluptuous kisses, the love of spending, of good cheer and of wanton delights. I will not say she did nothing; no, she worked hard...to ruin me, and pretending all the while merely to be showing her the cloak she had woven for me, I said, "Wife you go too fast about your work, your threads are too closely woven and you use far too much wool."

A slave enters with a lamp.

SLAVE

There is no more oil in the lamp.

STREPSIADES

Why then did you light such a thirsty lamp? Come here, I am going to beat you.

SLAVE

What for?

STREPSIADES

Because you have put in too thick a wick....Later, when we had this boy, what was to be his name? It was the cause of much quarrelling with my loving wife. She insisted on having some reference to a horse in his name, that he should be called Xanthippus, Charippus or Callippides. I wanted to name him Phidonides after his grandfather. We disputed long, and finally agreed to style him Phidippides....She used to fondle and coax him, saying, "Oh! what a joy it will be to me when you have grown up, to see you, like my father, Megacles, clothed in purple and standing up straight in your chariot driving your steeds toward the town." And I would say to him, "When, like your father, you will go, dressed in a skin, to fetch back your goats from Phelleus." Alas! he never listened to me and his madness for horses has shattered my fortune.

He gets out of bed.

But by dint of thinking the livelong night, I have discovered a road to salvation, both miraculous and divine. If he will but follow it, I shall be out of my trouble! First, however, he must be awakened, but it must be done as gently as possible. How shall I manage it? Phidippides! my little Phidippides!

PHIDIPPIDES *awaking again*

What is it, father?

STREPSIADES

Kiss me and give me your hand.

PHIDIPPIDES *getting up and doing as his father requests*

There! What's it all about?

STREPSIADES

Tell me! do you love me?

PHIDIPPIDES

By Posidon, the equestrian Posidon! yes, I swear I do.

STREPSIADES

Oh, do not, I pray you, invoke this god of horses; he is the one who is the cause of all my cares. But if you really love me, and with your whole heart, my boy, believe me.

PHIDIPIDES

Believe you? about what?

STREPSIADES

Alter your habits forthwith and go and learn what I tell you.

PHIDIPIDES

Say on, what are your orders?

STREPSIADES

Will you obey me ever so little?

PHIDIPIDES

By Bacchus, I will obey you.

STREPSIADES

Very well then! Look this way. Do you see that little door and that little house?

PHIDIPIDES

Yes, father. But what are you driving at?

STREPSIADES

That is the Thoughtery of wise souls. There they prove that we are coals enclosed on all sides under a vast snuffer, which is the sky. If well paid, these men also teach one how to gain law-suits, whether they be just or not.

PHIDIPIDES

What do they call themselves?

STREPSIADES

I do not know exactly, but they are deep thinkers and most admirable people.

PHIDIPIDES

Bah! the wretches! I know them; you mean those quacks with pale faces, those barefoot fellows, such as that miserable Socrates and Chaerephon?

STREPSIADES

Silence! say nothing foolish! If you desire your father not to die of hunger, join their company and let your horses go.

PHIDIPIDES

No, by Bacchus! even though you gave me the pheasants that Leogoras raises.

STREPSIADES

Oh! my beloved son, I beseech you, go and follow their teachings.

PHIDIPIDES

And what is it I should learn?

STREPSIADES

It seems they have two courses of reasoning, the true and the false, and that, thanks to the false, the worst law-suits can be gained. If then you learn this science, which is false, I shall not have to pay an obolus of all the debts I have contracted on your account.

PHIDIPIDES

No, I will not do it. I should no longer dare to look at our gallant horsemen, when I had so ruined my tan.

STREPSIADES

Well then, by Demeter! I will no longer support you, neither you, nor your team, nor your saddle-horse. Go and hang yourself, I turn you out of house and home.

PHIDIPIDES

My uncle Megacles will not leave me without horses; I shall go to him and laugh at your anger.

He departs. STREPSIADES goes over to SOCRATES' house.

STREPSIADES

One rebuff shall not dishearten me. With the help of the gods I will enter the Thoughtery and learn myself.

He hesitates.

But at my age, memory has gone and the mind is slow to grasp things. How can all these fine distinctions, these subtleties be learned?

Making up his mind

Bah! why should I dally thus instead of rapping at the door? Slave, slave!

He knocks and calls.

A DISCIPLE *from within*

A plague on you! Who are you?

STREPSIADES

Strepsiades, the son of Phido, of the deme of Cicynna.

DISCIPLE *coming out of the door*

You are nothing but an ignorant and illiterate fellow to let fly at the door with such kicks. You have brought on a miscarriage-of an idea!

STREPSIADES

Pardon me, please; for I live far away from here in the country. But tell me, what was the idea that miscarried?

DISCIPLE

I may not tell it to any but a disciple.

STREPSIADES

Then tell me without fear, for I have come to study among you.

DISCIPLE

Very well then, but reflect, that these are mysteries. Lately, a flea bit Chaerephon on the brow and then from there sprang on to the head of Socrates. Socrates asked Chaerephon, "How many times the length of its legs does a flea jump?"

STREPSIADES

And how ever did he go about measuring it?

DISCIPLE

Oh! it was most ingenious! He melted some wax, seized the flea and dipped its two feet in the wax, which, when cooled, left them shod with true Persian slippers. These he took off and with them measured the distance.

STREPSIADES

Ah! great Zeus! what a brain! what subtlety!

DISCIPLE

I wonder what then would you say, if you knew another of Socrates' contrivances?

STREPSIADES

What is it? Pray tell me.

DISCIPLE

Chaerephon of the deme of Sphettia asked him whether he thought a gnat buzzed through its proboscis or through its anus.

STREPSIADES

And what did he say about the gnat?

DISCIPLE

He said that the gut of the gnat was narrow, and that, in passing through this tiny passage, the air is driven with force towards the breech; then after this slender channel, it encountered the rump, which was distended like a trumpet, and there it resounded sonorously.

STREPSIADES

So the arse of a gnat is a trumpet. Oh! what a splendid arsevation! Thrice happy Socrates! It would not be difficult to succeed in a law-suit, knowing so much about a gnat's guts!

DISCIPLE

Not long ago a lizard caused him the loss of a sublime thought.

STREPSIADES

In what way, please?

DISCIPLE

One night, when he was studying the course of the moon and its revolutions and was gazing open-mouthed at the heavens, a lizard crapped upon him from the top of the roof.

STREPSIADES

A lizard crapping on Socrates! That's rich!

DISCIPLE

Last night we had nothing to eat.

STREPSIADES

Well, what did he contrive, to secure you some supper?

DISCIPLE

He spread over the table a light layer of cinders, bending an iron rod the while; then he took up a pair of compasses and at the same moment unhooked a piece of the victim which was hanging in the palaestra.

STREPSIADES

And we still dare to admire Thales! Open, open this home of knowledge to me quickly! Haste, haste to show me Socrates; I long to become his disciple. But do please open the door.

The door opens, revealing the interior of the Thoughtery, in which the DISCIPLES OF SOCRATES are seen in various postures of meditation and study; they are pale and emaciated creatures.

Ah! by Heracles! what country are those animals from?

DISCIPLE

Why, what are you astonished at? What do you think they resemble?

STREPSIADES

The captives of Pylos. But why do they look so fixedly on the ground?

DISCIPLE

They are seeking for what is below the ground.

STREPSIADES

Ah! they're looking for onions. Do not give yourselves so much trouble; I know where there are some, fine big ones. But what are those fellows doing, bent all double?

DISCIPLE

They are sounding the abysses of Tartarus.

STREPSIADES

And what are their arses looking at in the heavens?

DISCIPLE

They are studying astronomy on their own account. But come in so that the master may not find us here.

STREPSIADES

Not yet; not yet; let them not change their position. I want to tell them my own little matter.

DISCIPLE

But they may not stay too long in the open air and away from school.

STREPSIADES *pointing to a celestial globe*

In the name of all the gods, what is that? Tell me.

DISCIPLE

That is astronomy.

STREPSIADES *pointing to a map*

And that?

DISCIPLE

Geometry.

STREPSIADES

What is that used for?

DISCIPLE

To measure the land.

STREPSIADES

But that is apportioned by lot.

DISCIPLE

No, no, I mean the entire earth.

STREPSIADES

Ah! what a funny thing! How generally useful indeed is this invention!

DISCIPLE

There is the whole surface of the earth. Look! Here is Athens.

STREPSIADES

Athens! you are mistaken; I see no courts in session.

DISCIPLE

Nevertheless it is really and truly the Attic territory.

STREPSIADES

And where are my neighbors of Cicynna?

DISCIPLE

They live here. This is Euboea; you see this island, that is so long and narrow.

STREPSIADES

I know. Because we and Pericles have stretched it by dint of squeezing it. And where is Lacedaemon?

DISCIPLE

Lacedaemon? Why, here it is, look.

STREPSIADES

How near it is to us! Think it well over, it must be removed to a greater distance.

DISCIPLE

But, by Zeus, that is not possible.

STREPSIADES

Then, woe to you! and who is this man suspended up in a basket?

DISCIPLE

That's himself.

STREPSIADES

Who's himself?

DISCIPLE

Socrates.

STREPSIADES

Socrates! Oh! I pray you, call him right loudly for me.

DISCIPLE

Call him yourself; I have no time to waste.

He departs. The machine swings in SOCRATES in a basket.

STREPSIADES

Socrates! my little Socrates!

SOCRATES *loftily*

Mortal, what do you want with me?

STREPSIADES

First, what are you doing up there? Tell me, I beseech you.

SOCRATES *POMPOUSLY*

I am traversing the air and contemplating the sun.

STREPSIADES

Thus it's not on the solid ground, but from the height of this basket, that you slight the gods, if indeed....

SOCRATES

I have to suspend my brain and mingle the subtle essence of my mind with this air, which is of the like nature, in order clearly to penetrate the things of heaven. I should have discovered nothing, had I remained on the ground to consider from below the things that are above; for the earth by its force attracts the sap of the mind to itself. It's just the same with the watercress.

STREPSIADES

What? Does the mind attract the sap of the watercress? Ah! my dear little Socrates, come down to me! I have come to ask you for lessons.

SOCRATES *descending*

And for what lessons?

STREPSIADES

I want to learn how to speak. I have borrowed money, and my merciless creditors do not leave me a moment's peace; all my goods are at stake.

SOCRATES

And how was it you did not see that you were getting so much into debt?

STREPSIADES

My ruin has been the madness for horses, a most rapacious evil; but teach me one of your two methods of reasoning, the one whose object is not to repay anything, and, may the gods bear witness, that I am ready to pay any fee you may name.

SOCRATES

By which gods will you swear? To begin with, the gods are not a coin current with us.

STREPSIADES

But what do you swear by then? By the iron money of Byzantium?

SOCRATES

Do you really wish to know the truth of celestial matters?

STREPSIADES

Why, yes, if it's possible.

SOCRATES

....and to converse with the clouds, who are our genii?

STREPSIADES

Without a doubt.

SOCRATES

Then be seated on this sacred couch.

STREPSIADES *sitting down*

I am seated.

SOCRATES

Now take this chaplet.

STREPSIADES

Why a chaplet? Alas! Socrates, would you sacrifice me, like Athamas?

SOCRATES

No, these are the rites of initiation.

STREPSIADES

And what is it I am to gain?

SOCRATES

You will become a thorough rattle-pate, a hardened old stager, the fine flour of the talkers....But come, keep quiet.

STREPSIADES

By Zeus! That's no lie! Soon I shall be nothing but wheat-flour, if you powder me in that fashion.

SOCRATES

Silence, old man, give heed to the prayers.

In an hierophantic tone

Oh! most mighty king, the boundless air, that keepest the earth suspended in space, thou bright Aether and ye venerable goddesses, the Clouds, who carry in your loins the thunder and the lightning, arise, ye sovereign powers and manifest yourselves in the celestial spheres to the eyes of your sage.

STREPSIADES

Not yet! Wait a bit, till I fold my mantle double, so as not to get wet. And to think that I did not even bring my travelling cap! What a misfortune!

SOCRATES *ignoring this*

Come, oh! Clouds, whom I adore, come and show yourselves to this man, whether you be resting on the sacred summits of Olympus, crowned with hoar-frost, or tarrying in the gardens of Ocean, your father, forming sacred choruses with the Nymphs; whether you be gathering the waves of the Nile in golden vases or dwelling in the Maeotic marsh or on the snowy rocks of Mimas, hearken to my prayer and accept my offering. May these sacrifices be pleasing to you.

Amidst rumblings of thunder the CHORUS OF CLOUDS appears.

CHORUS *singing*

Eternal Clouds, let us appear; let us arise from the roaring depths of Ocean, our father; let us fly towards the lofty mountains, spread our damp wings over their forest-laden summits, whence we will dominate the distant valleys, the harvest fed by the sacred earth, the murmur of the divine streams and the resounding waves of the sea, which the unwearying orb lights up with its glittering beams. But let us shake off the rainy fogs, which hide our immortal beauty and sweep the earth from afar with our gaze.

SOCRATES

Oh, venerated goddesses, yes, you are answering my call!

To STREPSIADES.

Did you hear their voices mingling with the awful growling of the thunder?

STREPSIADES

Oh! adorable Clouds, I revere you and I too am going to let off my thunder, so greatly has your own affrighted me.

He farts.

Faith! whether permitted or not, I must, I must crap!

SOCRATES

No scoffing; do not copy those damned comic poets. Come, silence! a numerous host of goddesses approaches with songs.

CHORUS *singing*

Virgins, who pour forth the rains, let us move toward Attica, the rich country of Pallas, the home of the brave; let us visit the dear land of Cecrops, where the secret rites are celebrated, where the mysterious sanctuary flies open to the initiate.... What victims are offered there to the deities of heaven! What glorious temples! What statues! What holy prayers to the rulers of Olympus! At every season nothing but sacred festivals, garlanded victims, is to be seen. Then Spring brings round again the joyous feasts of Dionysus, the harmonious contests of the choruses and the serious melodies of the flute.

STREPSIADES

By Zeus! Tell me, Socrates, I pray you, who are these women, whose language is so solemn; can they be demi-goddesses?

SOCRATES

Not at all. They are the Clouds of heaven, great goddesses for the lazy; to them we owe all, thoughts, speeches, trickery, roguery, boasting, lies, sagacity.

STREPSIADES

Ah! that was why, as I listened to them, my mind spread out its wings; it burns to babble about trifles, to maintain worthless arguments, to voice its petty reasons, to contradict, to tease some opponent. But are they not going to show themselves? I should like to see them, were it possible.

SOCRATES

Well, look this way in the direction of Parnes; I already see those who are slowly descending.

STREPSIADES

But where, where? Show them to me.

SOCRATES

They are advancing in a throng, following an oblique path across the dales and thickets.

STREPSIADES

Strange! I can see nothing.

SOCRATES

There, close to the entrance.

STREPSIADES

Hardly, if at all, can I distinguish them.

SOCRATES

You must see them clearly now, unless your eyes are filled with gum as thick as pumpkins.

STREPSIADES

Aye, undoubtedly! Oh! the venerable goddesses! Why, they fill up the entire stage.

SOCRATES

And you did not know, you never suspected, that they were goddesses?

STREPSIADES

No, indeed; I thought the Clouds were only fog, dew and vapor.

SOCRATES

But what you certainly do not know is that they are the support of a crowd of quacks, the diviners, who were sent to Thuriium, the notorious physicians, the well-combed fops, who load their fingers with rings down to the nails, and the braggarts, who write dithyrambic verses, all these are idlers whom the Clouds provide a living for, because they sing them in their verses.

STREPSIADES

It is then for this that they praise "the rapid flight of the moist clouds, which veil the brightness of day" and "the waving locks of the hundred-headed Typho" and "the impetuous tempests, which float through the heavens, like birds of prey with aerial wings loaded with mists" and "the rains, the dew, which the clouds outpour." As a reward for these fine phrases they bolt well-grown, tasty mullet and delicate thrushes.

SOCRATES

Yes, thanks to these. And is it not right and meet?

STREPSIADES

Tell me then why, if these really are the Clouds, they so very much resemble mortals. This is not their usual form.

SOCRATES

What are they like then?

STREPSIADES

I don't know exactly; well, they are like great packs of wool, but not like women-no, not in the least....And these have noses.

SOCRATES

Answer my questions.

STREPSIADES

Willingly! Go on, I am listening.

SOCRATES

Have you not sometimes seen clouds in the sky like a centaur, a leopard, a wolf or a bull?

STREPSIADES

Why, certainly I have, but what of that?

SOCRATES

They take what metamorphosis they like. If they see a debauchee with long flowing locks and hairy as a beast, like the son of Xenophantes, they take the form of a Centaur in derision of his shameful passion.

STREPSIADES

And when they see Simon, that thief of public money, what do they do then?

SOCRATES

To picture him to the life, they turn at once into wolves.

STREPSIADES

So that was why yesterday, when they saw Cleonymus, who cast away his buckler because he is the veriest poltroon amongst men, they changed into deer.

SOCRATES

And to-day they have seen Clisthenes; you see....they are women

STREPSIADES

Hail, sovereign goddesses, and if ever you have let your celestial voice be heard by mortal ears, speak to me, oh! speak to me, ye all-powerful queens.

CHORUS-LEADER

Hail! veteran of the ancient times, you who burn to instruct yourself in fine language. And you, great high-priest of subtle nonsense, tell us; your desire. To you and Prodicus alone of all the hollow orationers of to-day have we lent an ear-to Prodicus, because of his knowledge and his great wisdom, and to you, because you walk with head erect, a confident look, barefooted, resigned to everything and proud of our protection.

STREPSIADES

Oh! Earth! What august utterances! how sacred! how wondrous!

SOCRATES

That is because these are the only goddesses; all the rest are pure myth.

STREPSIADES

But by the Earth! is our father, Zeus, the Olympian, not a god?

SOCRATES

Zeus! what Zeus! Are you mad? There is no Zeus.

STREPSIADES

What are you saying now? Who causes the rain to fall? Answer me that!

SOCRATES

Why, these, and I will prove it. Have you ever seen it raining without clouds? Let Zeus then cause rain with a clear sky and without their presence!

STREPSIADES

By Apollo! that is powerfully argued! For my own part, I always thought it was Zeus pissing into a sieve. But tell me, who is it makes the thunder, which I so much dread?

SOCRATES

These, when they roll one over the other.

STREPSIADES

But how can that be? you most daring among men!

SOCRATES

Being full of water, and forced to move along, they are of necessity precipitated in rain, being fully distended with moisture from the regions where they have been floating; hence they bump each other heavily and burst with great noise.

STREPSIADES

But is it not Zeus who forces them to move?

SOCRATES

Not at all; it's the aerial Whirlwind.

STREPSIADES

The Whirlwind! ah! I did not know that. So Zeus, it seems, has no existence, and it's the Whirlwind that reigns in his stead? But you have not yet told me what makes the roll of the thunder?

SOCRATES

Have you not understood me then? I tell you, that the Clouds, when full of rain, bump against one another, and that, being inordinately swollen out, they burst with a great noise.

STREPSIADES

How can you make me credit that?

SOCRATES

Take yourself as an example. When you have heartily gorged on stew at the Panathenaea, you get throes of stomach-ache and then suddenly your belly resounds with prolonged rumbling.

STREPSIADES

Yes, yes, by Apollo I suffer, I get colic, then the stew sets to rumbling like thunder and finally bursts forth with a terrific noise. At first, it's but a little gurgling pappax, pappax! then it increases, papapappax! and when I take my crap, why, it's thunder indeed, papapappax! pappax!! papapappax!!! just like the clouds.

SOCRATES

Well then, reflect what a noise is produced by your belly, which is but small. Shall not the air, which is boundless, produce these mighty claps of thunder?

STREPSIADES

And this is why the names are so much alike: crap and clap. But tell me this. Whence comes the lightning, the dazzling flame, which at times consumes the man it strikes, at others hardly singes him. Is it not plain, that Zeus is hurling it at the perjurers?

SOCRATES

Out upon the fool! the driveller! he still savours of the golden age! If Zeus strikes at the perjurers, why has he not blasted Simon, Cleonymus and Theorus? Of a surety, greater perjurers cannot exist. No, he strikes his own temple, and Sunium, the promontory of Athens, and the towering oaks. Now, why should he do that? An oak is no perjurer.

STREPSIADES

I cannot tell, but it seems to me well argued. What is the lightning then?

SOCRATES

When a dry wind ascends to the Clouds and gets shut into them, it blows them out like a bladder; finally, being too confined, it bursts them, escapes with fierce violence and a roar to flash into flame by reason of its own impetuosity.

STREPSIADES

Ah, that's just what happened to me one day. It was at the feast of Zeus! I was cooking a sow's belly for my family and I had forgotten to slit it open. It swelled out and, suddenly bursting, discharged itself right into my eyes and burnt my face.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh, mortal, you who desire to instruct yourself in our great wisdom, the Athenians, the Greeks will envy you your good fortune. Only you must have the memory and ardour for study, you must know how to stand the tests, hold your own, go forward without feeling fatigue, caring but little for food, abstaining

from wine, gymnastic exercises and other similar follies, in fact, you must believe as every man of intellect should, that the greatest of all blessings is to live and think more clearly than the vulgar herd, to shine in the contests of words.

STREPSIADES

If it be a question of hardiness for labour, of spending whole nights at work, of living sparingly, of fighting my stomach and only eating chickpease, rest assured, I am as hard as an anvil.

SOCRATES

Henceforward, following our example, you will recognize no other gods but Chaos, the Clouds and the Tongue, these three alone.

STREPSIADES

I would not speak to the others, even if I met them in the street; not a single sacrifice, not a libation, not a grain of incense for them!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Tell us boldly then what you want of us; you cannot fail to succeed. If you honour and revere us and if you are resolved to become a clever man.

STREPSIADES

Oh, sovereign goddesses, it is only a very small favour that I ask of you; grant that I may outdistance all the Greeks by a hundred stadia in the art of speaking.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We grant you this, and henceforward no eloquence shall more often succeed with the people than your own.

STREPSIADES

May the gods shield me from possessing great eloquence! That's not what I want. I want to be able to turn bad law-suits to my own advantage and to slip through the fingers of my creditors.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

It shall be as you wish, for your ambitions are modest. Commit yourself fearlessly to our ministers, the sophists.

STREPSIADES

This I will do, for I trust in you. Moreover there is no drawing back, what with these cursed horses and this marriage, which has eaten up my vitals.

More and more volubly from here to the end of speech

So let them do with me as they will; I yield my body to them. Come blows, come hunger, thirst, heat or cold, little matters it to me; they may flay me, if I only escape my debts, if only I win the reputation of being a bold rascal, a fine speaker, impudent, shameless, a braggart, and adept at stringing lies, an old stager at quibbles, a complete table of laws, a thorough rattle, a fox to slip through any hole; supple as a

leathern strap, slippery as an eel, an artful fellow, a blusterer, a villain; a knave with a hundred faces, cunning, intolerable, a gluttonous dog. With such epithets do I seek to be greeted; on these terms they can treat me as they choose, and, if they wish, by Demeter! they can turn me into sausages and serve me up to the philosophers.

CHORUS *singing*

Here have we a bold and well-disposed pupil indeed. When we have taught you, your glory among the mortals will reach even to the skies.

STREPSIADES *singing*

Wherein will that profit me?

CHORUS *singing*

You will pass your whole life among us and will be the most envied of men.

STREPSIADES *singing*

Shall I really ever see such happiness?

CHORUS *singing*

Clients will be everlastingly besieging your door in crowds, burning to get at you, to explain their business to you and to consult you about their suits, which, in return for your ability, will bring you in great sums.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But, Socrates, begin the lessons you want to teach this old man; rouse his mind, try the strength of his intelligence.

SOCRATES

Come, tell me the kind of mind you have; it's important that I know this, that I may order my batteries against you in the right fashion.

STREPSIADES

Eh, what! in the name of the gods, are you purposing to assault me then?

SOCRATES

No. I only wish to ask you some questions. Have you any memory?

STREPSIADES

That depends: if anything is owed me, my memory is excellent, but if I owe, alas! I have none whatever.

SOCRATES

Have you a natural gift for speaking?

STREPSIADES

For speaking, no; for cheating, yes.

SOCRATES

How will you be able to learn then?

STREPSIADES

Very easily, have no fear.

SOCRATES

Thus, when I throw forth some philosophical thought anent things celestial., you will seize it in its very flight?

STREPSIADES

Then I am to snap up wisdom much as a dog snaps up a morsel?

SOCRATES *aside*

Oh! the ignoramus! the barbarian!

to STREPSIADES

I greatly fear, old man, it will be necessary for me to have recourse to blows. Now, let me hear what you do when you are beaten.

STREPSIADES

I receive the blow, then wait a moment, take my witnesses and finally summon my assailant at law.

SOCRATES

Come, take off your cloak.

STREPSIADES

Have I robbed you of anything?

SOCRATES

No. but the usual thing is to enter the school without your cloak.

STREPSIADES

But I have not come here to look for stolen goods.

SOCRATES

Off with it, fool!

STREPSIADES *He obeys.*

Tell me, if I prove thoroughly attentive and learn with zeal, which O; your disciples shall I resemble, do you think?

SOCRATES

You will be the image of Chaerephon.

STREPSIADES

Ah! unhappy me! Shall I then be only half alive?

SOCRATES

A truce to this chatter! follow me and no more of it.

STREPSIADES

First give me a honey-cake, for to descend down there sets me all a-tremble; it looks like the cave of Trophonius.

SOCRATES

But get in with you! What reason have you for thus dallying at the door?

They go into the Thoughtery.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Good luck! you have courage; may you succeed, you, who, though already so advanced in years, wish to instruct your mind with new studies and practise it in wisdom!

The CHORUS turns and faces the Audience.

Spectators! By Bacchus, whose servant I am, I will frankly tell you the truth. May I secure both victory and renown as certainly as I hold you for adept critics and as I regard this comedy as my best. I wished to give you the first view of a work, which had cost me much trouble, but which I withdrew, unjustly beaten by unskilful rivals. It is you, oh, enlightened public, for whom I have prepared my piece, that I reproach with this. Nevertheless I shall never willingly cease to seek the approval of the discerning. I have not forgotten the day, when men, whom one is happy to have for an audience, received my Virtuous Young Man and my Paederast with so much favour in this very place. Then as yet virgin, my Muse had not attained the age for maternity; she had to expose her first-born for another to adopt, and it has since grown up under your generous patronage. Ever since you have as good as sworn me your faithful alliance. Thus, like the Electra of the poets, my comedy has come to seek you to-day, hoping again to encounter such enlightened spectators. As far away as she can discern her Orestes, she will be able to recognize him by his curly head. And note her modest demeanour! She has not sewn on a piece of hanging leather, thick and reddened at the end, to cause laughter among the children; she does not rail at the bald, neither does she dance the cordax; no old man is seen, who, while uttering his lines, batters his questioner with a stick to make his poor jests pass muster. She does not rush upon the scene carrying a torch and screaming, 'lou! lou!' No, she relies upon herself and her verses....My value is so well known, that I take no further pride in it. I do not seek to deceive you, by reproducing the same subjects two or three times; I always invent fresh themes to present before you, themes that have no relation to each other and that are all clever. I attacked Cleon to his face and when he was all-powerful; but he has fallen, and now I have no desire to kick him when he is down. My rivals, on the contrary, now that this wretched Hyperbolus has given them the cue, have never ceased setting upon both him and his mother. First Eupolis presented his 'Maricas'; this was simply my 'Knights,' whom this plagiarist had clumsily furbished up again by adding to the piece an old drunken woman, so that she might dance the cordax. It was an old idea, taken from Phrynichus, who caused his old hag to be devoured by a monster of the deep. Then Hermippus fell foul of Hyperbolus and now all the others fall upon him and repeat my

comparison of the eels. May those who find amusement in their pieces not be pleased with mine, but as for you, who love and applaud my inventions, why, posterity will praise your good taste.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS *singing*

Oh, ruler of Olympus, all-powerful king of the gods, great Zeus, it is thou whom I first invoke; protect this chorus; and thou too, Posidon, whose dread trident upheaves at the will of thy anger both the bowels of the earth and the salty waves of the ocean. I invoke my illustrious father, the divine Aether, the universal sustainer of life, and Phoebus, who, from the summit of his chariot, sets the world aflame with his dazzling rays, Phoebus, a mighty deity amongst the gods and adored amongst mortals.

LEADER OF FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Most wise spectators, lend us all your attention. Give heed to our just reproaches. There exist no gods to whom this city owes more than it does to us, whom alone you forget. Not a sacrifice, not a libation is there for those who protect you! Have you decreed some mad expedition? Well! we thunder or we fall down in rain. When you chose that enemy of heaven, the Paphlagonian tanner, for a general, we knitted our brow, we caused our wrath to break out; the lightning shot forth, the thunder pealed, the moon deserted her course and the sun at once veiled his beam threatening, no longer to give you light, if Cleon became general. Nevertheless you elected him; it is said, Athens never resolves upon some fatal step but the gods turn these errors into her greatest gain. Do you wish that his election should even now be a success for you? It is a very simple thing to do; condemn this rapacious gull named Cleon for bribery and extortion, fit a wooden collar tight round his neck, and your error will be rectified and the commonweal will at once regain its old prosperity.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS *singing*

Aid me also, Phoebus, god of Delos, who reignest on the cragged peaks of Cynthia; and thou, happy virgin, to whom the Lydian damsels offer pompous sacrifice in a temple; of gold; and thou, goddess of our country, Athene, armed with the aegis, the protectress of Athens; and thou, who, surrounded by the bacchantes of Delphi; roamest over the rocks of Parnassus shaking the flame of thy resinous torch, thou, Bacchus, the god of revel and joy.

LEADER OF SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

As we were preparing to come here, we were hailed by the Moon and were charged to wish joy and happiness both to the Athenians and to their allies; further, she said that she was enraged and that you treated her very shamefully, her, who does not pay you in words alone, but who renders you all real benefits. Firstly, thanks to her, you save at least a drachma each month for lights, for each, as he is leaving home at night, says, "Slave, buy no torches, for the moonlight is beautiful,"-not to name a thousand other benefits. Nevertheless you do not reckon the days correctly and your calendar is naught but confusion. Consequently the gods load her with threats each time they get home and are disappointed of their meal, because the festival has not been kept in the regular order of time. When you should be sacrificing, you are putting to the torture or administering justice. And often, we others, the gods, are fasting in token of mourning for the death of Memnon or Sarpedon, while you are devoting yourselves to joyous libations. It is for this, that last year, when the lot would have invested Hyperbolus with the duty of Amphictyon, we took his crown from him, to teach him that time must be divided according to the phases of the moon.

SOCRATES *coming out*

By Respiration, the Breath of Life! By Chaos! By the Air! I have never seen a man so gross, so inept, so stupid, so forgetful. All the little quibbles, which I teach him, he forgets even before he has learnt them. Yet I will not give it up, I will make him come out here into the open air. Where are you, Strepsiades? Come, bring your couch out here.

STREPSIADES *from within*

But the bugs will not allow me to bring it.

SOCRATES

Have done with such nonsense! place it there and pay attention.

STREPSIADES *coming out, with the bed*

Well, here I am.

SOCRATES

Good! Which science of all those you have never been taught, do you wish to learn first? The measures, the rhythms or the verses?

STREPSIADES

Why, the measures; the flour dealer cheated me out of two choenixes the other day.

SOCRATES

It's not about that I ask you, but which, according to you, is the best measure, the trimeter or the tetrameter?

STREPSIADES

The one I prefer is the semisextarius.

SOCRATES

You talk nonsense, my good fellow.

STREPSIADES

I will wager your tetrameter is the semisextarius.

SOCRATES

Plague seize the dunce and the fool! Come, perchance you will learn the rhythms quicker.

STREPSIADES

Will the rhythms supply me with food?

SOCRATES

First they will help you to be pleasant in company, then to know what is meant by enhoplian rhythm and what by the dactylic.

STREPSIADES

Of the dactyl? I know that quite well.

SOCRATES

What is it then, other than this finger here?

STREPSIADES

Formerly, when a child, I used this one.

SOCRATES

You are as low-minded as you are stupid.

STREPSIADES

But, wretched man, I do not want to learn all this.

SOCRATES

Then what do you want to know?

STREPSIADES

Not that, not that, but the art of false reasoning.

SOCRATES

But you must first learn other things. Come, what are the male quadrupeds?

STREPSIADES

Oh! I know the males thoroughly. Do you take me for a fool then? The ram, the buck, the bull, the dog, the pigeon.

SOCRATES

Do you see what you are doing; is not the female pigeon called the same as the male?

STREPSIADES

How else? Come now!

SOCRATES

How else? With you then it's pigeon and pigeon!

STREPSIADES

That's right, by Posidon! but what names do you want me to give them?

SOCRATES

Term the female pigeonette and the male pigeon.

STREPSIADES

Pigeonette! hah! by the Air! That's splendid! for that lesson bring out your kneading-trough and I will fill him with flour to the brim.

SOCRATES

There you are wrong again; you make trough masculine and it should be feminine.

STREPSIADES

What? if I say, him, do I make the trough masculine?

SOCRATES

Assuredly! would you not say him for Cleonymus?

STREPSIADES

Well?

SOCRATES

Then trough is of the same gender as Cleonymus?

STREPSIADES

My good man! Cleonymus never had a kneading-trough; he used a round mortar for the purpose. But come, tell me what I should say!

SOCRATES

For trough you should say her as you would for Sostrate.

STREPSIADES

Her?

SOCRATES

In this manner you make it truly female.

STREPSIADES

That's it! Her for trough and her for Cleonymus.

SOCRATE,"

Now I must teach you to distinguish the masculine proper names from those that are feminine.

STREPSIADES

Ah! I know the female names well.

SOCRATES

Name some then.

STREPSIADES

Lysilla, Philinna, Clitagora, Demetria.

SOCRATES

And what are masculine names?

STREPSIADES

They are are countless-Philoxenus, Melesias, Amynias.

SOCRATES

But, wretched man, the last two are not masculine.

STREPSIADES

You do not count them as masculine?

SOCRATES

Not at all. If you met Amynias, how would you hail him?

STREPSIADES

How? Why, I should shout, "Hi, there, Amynia!

SOCRATES

Do you see? it's a female name that you give him.

STREPSIADES

And is it not rightly done, since he refuses military service? But what use is there in learning what we all know?

SOCRATES

You know nothing about it. Come, lie down there.

STREPSIADES

What for?

SOCRATES

Ponder awhile over matters that interest you.

STREPSIADES

Oh! I pray you, not there but, if I must lie down and ponder, let me lie on the ground.

SOCRATES

That's out of the question. Come! on the couch!

STREPSIADES *as he lies down*

What cruel fate! What a torture the bugs will this day put me to!

Socrates turns aside.

CHORUS *singing*

Ponder and examine closely, gather your thoughts together, let your mind turn to every side of things; if you meet with a difficulty, spring quickly to some other idea; above all, keep your eyes away from all gentle sleep.

STREPSIADES *singing*

Ow, Wow, Wow, Wow is me!

CHORUS *singing*

What ails you? why do you cry so?

STREPSIADES

Oh! I am a dead man! Here are these cursed Corinthians advancing upon me from all corners of the couch; they are biting me, they are gnawing at my sides, they are drinking all my blood, they are yanking of my balls, they are digging into my arse, they are killing me!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Not so much wailing and clamour, if you please.

STREPSIADES

How can I obey? I have lost my money and my complexion, my blood and my slippers, and to cap my misery, I must keep awake on this couch, when scarce a breath of life is left in me.

A brief interval of silence ensues.

SOCRATES

Well now! what are you doing? are you reflecting?

STREPSIADES

Yes, by Posidon!

SOCRATES

What about?

STREPSIADES

Whether the bugs will entirely devour me.

SOCRATES

May death seize you, accursed man!

He turns aside again.

STREPSIADES

Ah it has already.

SOCRATES

Come, no giving way! Cover up your head; the thing to do is to find an ingenious alternative.

STREPSIADES

An alternative! ah! I only wish one would come to me from within these coverlets!

Another interval of silence ensues.

SOCRATES

Wait! let us see what our fellow is doing! Ho! are you asleep?

STREPSIADES

No, by Apollo!

SOCRATES

Have you got hold of anything?

STREPSIADES

No, nothing whatever.

SOCRATES

Nothing at all?

STREPSIADES

No, nothing except my tool, which I've got in my hand.

SOCRATES

Aren't you going to cover your head immediately and ponder?

STREPSIADES

On what? Come, Socrates, tell me.

SOCRATES

Think first what you want, and then tell me.

STREPSIADES

But I have told you a thousand times what I want. Not to pay any of my creditors.

SOCRATES

Come, wrap yourself up; concentrate your mind, which wanders to lightly; study every detail, scheme and examine thoroughly.

STREPSIADES

Alas! Alas!

SOCRATES

Keep still, and if any notion troubles you, put it quickly aside, then resume it and think over it again.

STREPSIADES

My dear little Socrates!

SOCRATES

What is it, old greybeard?

STREPSIADES

I have a scheme for not paying my debts.

SOCRATES

Let us hear it.

STREPSIADES

Tell me, if I purchased a Thessalian witch, I could make the moon descend during the night and shut it, like a mirror, into a round box and there keep it carefully....

SOCRATES

How would you gain by that?

STREPSIADES

How? why, if the moon did not rise, I would have no interest to pay.

SOCRATES

Why so?

STREPSIADES

Because money is lent by the month.

SOCRATES

Good! but I am going to propose another trick to you. If you were condemned to pay five talents, how would you manage to quash that verdict? Tell me.

STREPSIADES

How? how? I don't know, I must think.

SOCRATES

Do you always shut your thoughts within yourself? Let your ideas fly in the air, like a may-bug, tied by the foot with a thread.

STREPSIADES

I have found a very clever way to annul that conviction; you will admit that much yourself.

SOCRATES

What is it?

STREPSIADES

Have you ever seen a beautiful, transparent stone at the druggists', with which you may kindle fire?

SOCRATES

You mean a crystal lens.

STREPSIADES

That's right. Well, now if I placed myself with this stone in the sun and a long way off from the clerk, while he was writing out the conviction, I could make all the wax, upon which the words were written, melt.

SOCRATES

Well thought out, by the Graces!

STREPSIADES

Ah! I am delighted to have annulled the decree that was to cost me five talents.

SOCRATES

Come, take up this next question quickly.

STREPSIADES

Which?

SOCRATES

If, when summoned to court, you were in danger of losing your case for want of witnesses, how would you make the conviction fall upon your opponent?

STREPSIADES

That's very simple and easy.

SOCRATES

Let me hear.

STREPSIADES

This way. If another case had to be pleaded before mine was called, I should run and hang myself.

SOCRATES

You talk rubbish!

STREPSIADES

Not so, by the gods! if I were dead, no action could lie against me.

SOCRATES

You are merely beating the air. Get out! I will give you no more lessons.

STREPSIADES *imploringly*

Why not? Oh! Socrates! in the name of the gods!

SOCRATES

But you forget as fast as you learn. Come, what was the thing I taught you first? Tell me.

STREPSIADES

Ah let me see. What was the first thing? What was it then? Ah! that thing in which we knead the bread, oh! my god! what do you call it?

SOCRATES

Plague take the most forgetful and silliest of old addlepates!

STREPSIADES

Alas! what a calamity! what will become of me? I am undone if I do not learn how to ply my tongue. Oh! Clouds! give me good advice.

CHORUS-LEADER

Old man, we counsel you, if you have brought up a son, to send him to learn in your stead.

STREPSIADES

Undoubtedly I have a son, as well endowed as the best, but he is unwilling to learn. What will become of me?

CHORUS-LEADER

And you don't make him obey you?

STREPSIADES

You see, he is big and strong; moreover, through his mother he is a descendant of those fine birds, the race of Coesyra. Nevertheless, I will go and find him, and if he refuses, I will turn him out of the house. Go in, Socrates, and wait for me awhile.

SOCRATES goes into the Thoughtery, STREPSIADES into his own house.

CHORUS *singing*

Do you understand, Socrates, that thanks to us you will be loaded with benefits? Here is a man, ready to obey you in all things. You see how he is carried away with admiration and enthusiasm. Profit by it to clip him as short as possible; fine chances are all too quickly gone.

STREPSIADES *coming out of his house and pushing his son in front of him*

No, by the Clouds! you stay here no longer; go and devour the ruins of your uncle Megacles' fortune.

PHIDIPIDES

Oh! my poor father! what has happened to you? By the Olympian Zeus! You are no longer in your senses!

STREPSIADES

Look! "the Olympian Zeus." Oh! you fool! to believe in Zeus at your age!

PHIDIPIDES

What is there in that to make you laugh?

STREPSIADES

You are then a tiny little child, if you credit such antiquated rubbish! But come here, that I may teach you; I will tell you something very necessary to know to be a man; but do not repeat it to anybody.

PHIDIPIDES

Tell me, what is it?

STREPSIADES

Just now you swore by Zeus.

PHIDIPIDES

Sure I did.

STREPSIADES

Do you see how good it is to learn? Phidippides, there is no Zeus.

PHIDIPPIDES

What is there then?

STREPSIADES

The Whirlwind has driven out Zeus and is King now.

PHIDIPPIDES

What drive!

STREPSIADES

You must realize that it is true.

PHIDIPPIDES

And who says so?

STREPSIADES

Socrates, the Melian, and Chaerephon, who knows how to measure the jump of a flea.

PHIDIPPIDES

Have you reached such a pitch of madness that you believe those bilious fellows?

STREPSIADES

Use better language, and do not insult men who are clever and full of wisdom, who, to economize, never shave, shun the gymnasia and never go to the baths, while you, you only await my death to eat up my wealth. But come, come as quickly as you can to learn in my stead.

PHIDIPPIDES

And what good can be learnt of them?

STREPSIADES

What good indeed? Why, all human knowledge. Firstly, you will know yourself grossly ignorant. But await me here awhile.

He goes back into his house.

PHIDIPPIDES

Alas! what is to be done? Father has lost his wits. Must I have him certificated for lunacy, or must I order his coffin?

STREPSIADES *returning with a bird in each hand*

Come! what kind of bird is this? Tell me.

PHIDIPIDES

A pigeon.

STREPSIADES

Good! And this female?

PHIDIPIDES

A pigeon.

STREPSIADES

The same for both? You make me laugh! In the future you must call this one a pigeonette and the other a pigeon.

PHIDIPIDES

A pigeonette! These then are the fine things you have just learnt at the school of these sons of Earth!

STREPSIADES

And many others; but what I learnt I forgot at once, because I am too old.

PHIDIPIDES

So this is why you have lost your cloak?

STREPSIADES

I have not lost it, I have consecrated it to Philosophy.

PHIDIPIDES

And what have you done with your sandals, you poor fool?

STREPSIADES

If I have lost them, it is for what was necessary, just as Pericles did. But come, move yourself, let us go in; if necessary, do wrong to obey your father. When you were six years old and still lisped, I was the one who obeyed you. I remember at the feasts of Zeus you had a consuming wish for a little chariot and I bought it for you with the first obolus which I received as a juryman in the courts.

PHIDIPIDES

You will soon repent of what you ask me to do.

STREPSIADES

Oh! now I am happy! He obeys.

loudly

Come, Socrates, come! Come out quick! Here I am bringing you my son; he refused, but I have persuaded him.

SOCRATES

Why, he is but a child yet. He is not used to these baskets, in which we suspend our minds.

PHIDIPIDES

To make you better used to them, I would you were hung.

STREPSIADES

A curse upon you! you insult your master!

SOCRATES

"I would you were hung!" What a stupid speech! and so emphatically spoken! How can one ever get out of an accusation with such a tone, summon witnesses or touch or convince? And yet when we think, Hyperbolus learnt all this for one talent!

STREPSIADES

Rest undisturbed and teach him. He has a most intelligent nature. Even when quite little he amused himself at home with making houses, carving boats, constructing little chariots of leather, and understood wonderfully how to make frogs out of pomegranate rinds. Teach him both methods of reasoning, the strong and also the weak, which by false arguments triumphs over the strong; if not the two, at least the false, and that in every possible way.

SOCRATES

The Just and Unjust Discourse themselves shall instruct him. I shall leave you.

STREPSIADES

But forget it not, he must always, always be able to confound the true.

Socrates enters the Thoughtery; a moment later the JUST and the UNJUST DISCOURSE come out; they are quarrelling violently.

JUST DISCOURSE

Come here! Shameless as you may be, will you dare to show your face to the spectators?

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Take me where you will. I seek a throng, so that I may the better annihilate you.

JUST DISCOURSE

Annihilate me! Do you forget who you are?

UNJUST DISCOURSE

I am Reasoning.

JUST DISCOURSE

Yes, the weaker Reasoning."

UNJUST DISCOURSE

But I triumph over you, who claim to be the stronger.

JUST DISCOURSE

By what cunning shifts, pray?

UNJUST DISCOURSE

By the invention of new maxims.

JUST DISCOURSE

... which are received with favour by these fools.

He points to the audience.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Say rather, by these wise men.

JUST DISCOURSE

I am going to destroy you mercilessly.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

How pray? Let us see you do it.

JUST DISCOURSE

By saying what is true.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

I shall retort and shall very soon have the better of you. First, maintain that justice has no existence.

JUST DISCOURSE

Has no existence?

UNJUST DISCOURSE

No existence! Why, where is it?

JUST DISCOURSE

With the gods.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

How then, if justice exists, was Zeus not put to death for having put his father in chains?

JUST DISCOURSE

Bah! this is enough to turn my stomach! A basin, quick!

UNJUST DISCOURSE

You are an old driveller and stupid withal.

JUST DISCOURSE

And you a degenerate and shameless fellow.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Hah! What sweet expressions!

JUST DISCOURSE

An impious buffoon.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

You crown me with roses and with lilies.

JUST DISCOURSE

A parricide.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Why, you shower gold upon me.

JUST DISCOURSE

Formerly it was a hailstorm of blows.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

I deck myself with your abuse.

JUST DISCOURSE

What impudence!

UNJUST DISCOURSE

What tomfoolery!

JUST DISCOURSE

It is because of you that the youth no longer attends the schools. The Athenians will soon recognize what lessons you teach those who are fools enough to believe you.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

You are overwhelmed with wretchedness.

JUST DISCOURSE

And you, you prosper. Yet you were poor when you said, "I am the Mysian Telephus," and used to stuff your wallet with maxims of Pandeletus to nibble at.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Oh! the beautiful wisdom, of which you are now boasting!

JUST DISCOURSE

Madman! But yet madder the city that keeps you, you, the corrupter of its youth!

UNJUST DISCOURSE

It is not you who will teach this young man; you are as old and out of date at Cronus.

JUST DISCOURSE

Nay, it will certainly be I, if he does not wish to be lost and to practise verbosity only.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

(to PHIDIPPIDES) Come here and leave him to beat the air.

JUST DISCOURSE

You'll regret it, if you touch him.

CHORUS-LEADER

(stepping between them as they are about to come to blows) A truce to your quarrellings and abuse! But you expound what you taught us formerly, and you, your new doctrine. Thus, after hearing each of you argue, he will be able to choose betwixt the two schools.

JUST DISCOURSE

I am quite agreeable.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

And I too.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Who is to speak first?

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Let it be my opponent, he has my full consent; then I shall follow upon the very ground he shall have chosen and shall shatter him with a hail of new ideas and subtle fancies; if after that he dares to breathe another word, I shall sting him in the face and in the eyes with our maxims, which are as keen as the sting of a wasp, and he will die.

CHORUS

(singing) Here are two rivals confident in their powers of oratory and in the thoughts over which they have pondered so long. Let us see which will come triumphant out of the contest. This wisdom, for which my friends maintain such a persistent fight, is in great danger.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Come then, you, who crowned men of other days with so many virtues, plead the cause dear to you, make yourself known to us.

JUST DISCOURSE

Very well, I will tell you what was the old education, when I used to teach justice with so much success and when modesty was held in veneration. Firstly, it was required of a child, that it should not utter a word. In the street, when they went to the music-school, all the youths of the same district marched lightly clad and ranged in good order, even when the snow was falling in great flakes. At the master's house they had to stand with their legs apart and they were taught to sing either, "Pallas, the Terrible, who overturneth cities," or "A noise resounded from afar" in the solemn tones of the ancient harmony. If anyone indulged in buffoonery or lent his voice any of the soft inflexions, like those which to-day the disciples of Phrynis take so much pains to form, he was treated as an enemy of the Muses and belaboured with blows. In the wrestling school they would sit with outstretched legs and without display of any indecency to the curious. When they rose, they would smooth over the sand, so as to leave no trace to excite obscene thoughts. Never was a child rubbed with oil below the belt; the rest of their bodies thus retained its fresh bloom and down, like a velvety peach. They were not to be seen approaching a lover and themselves rousing his passion by soft modulation of the voice and lustful gaze. At table, they would not have dared, before those older than themselves, to have taken a radish, an aniseed or a leaf of parsley, and much less eat fish or thrushes or cross their legs.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

What antiquated rubbish! Have we got back to the days of the festivals of Zeus Polieus, to the Buphonia, to the time of the poet Cecides and the golden cicadas?

JUST DISCOURSE

Nevertheless by suchlike teaching I built up the men of Marathon-But you, you teach the children of to-day to bundle themselves quickly into their clothes, and I am enraged when I see them at the Panathenaea forgetting Athene while they dance, and covering their tools with their bucklers. Hence, young man, dare to range yourself beside me, who follow justice and truth; you will then be able to shun the public place, to refrain from the baths, to blush at all that is shameful, to fire up if your virtue is mocked at, to give place to your elders, to honour your parents, in short, to avoid all that is evil. Be modesty itself, and do not run to applaud the dancing girls; if you delight in such scenes, some courtesan will cast you her apple and your reputation will be done for. Do not bandy words with your father, nor treat him as a dotard, nor reproach the old man, who has cherished you, with his age.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

If you listen to him, by Bacchus! you will be the image of the sons of Hippocrates and will be called mother's big ninny.

JUST DISCOURSE

No, but you will pass your days at the gymnasia, glowing with strength and health; you will not go to the public place to cackle and wrangle as is done nowadays; you will not live in fear that you may be dragged before the courts for some trifle exaggerated by quibbling. But you will go down to the Academy to run beneath the sacred olives with some virtuous friend of your own age, your head encircled with the white reed, enjoying your ease and breathing the perfume of the yew and of the fresh sprouts of the poplar, rejoicing in the return of springtide and gladly listening to the gentle rustle of the plane tree and the elm. (With greater warmth from here on) If you devote yourself to practising my precepts, your chest will be stout, your colour glowing, your shoulders broad, your tongue short, your hips muscular, but your tool small. But if you follow the fashions of the day, you will be pallid in hue, have narrow shoulders, a narrow chest, a long tongue, small hips and a big thing; you will know how to spin forth long-winded arguments on law. You will be persuaded also to regard as splendid everything that is shameful and as shameful everything that is honourable; in a word, you will wallow in degeneracy like Antimachus.

CHORUS

(singing) How beautiful, high-souled, brilliant is this wisdom that you practise! What a sweet odour of honesty is emitted by your discourse! Happy were those men of other days who lived when you were honoured! And you, seductive talker, come, find some fresh arguments, for your rival has done wonders.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

You will have to bring out against him all the battery of your wit, if you desire to beat him and not to be laughed out of court.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

At last! I was choking with impatience, I was burning to upset his arguments! If I am called the Weaker Reasoning in the schools, it is just because I was the first to discover the means to confute the laws and the decrees of justice. To invoke solely the weaker arguments and yet triumph is an art worth more than a hundred thousand drachmae. But see how I shall batter down the sort of education of which he is so proud. Firstly, he forbids you to bathe in hot water. What grounds have you for condemning hot baths?

JUST DISCOURSE

Because they are baneful and enervate men.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Enough said! Oh! you poor wrestler! From the very outset I have seized you and hold you round the middle; you cannot escape me. Tell me, of all the sons of Zeus, who had the stoutest heart, who performed the most doughty deeds?

JUST DISCOURSE

None, in my opinion, surpassed Heracles.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Where have you ever seen cold baths called 'Bath of Heracles'? And yet who was braver than he?

JUST DISCOURSE

It is because of such quibbles, that the baths are seen crowded with young folk, who chatter there the livelong day while the gymnasia remain empty.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Next you condemn the habit of frequenting the market-place, while I approve this. If it were wrong Homer would never have made Nestor speak in public as well as all his wise heroes. As for the art of speaking, he tells you, young men should not practise it; I hold the contrary. Furthermore he preaches chastity to them. Both precepts are equally harmful. Have you ever seen chastity of any use to anyone? Answer and try to confute me.

JUST DISCOURSE

To many; for instance, Peleus won a sword thereby.

UNJUST DISCOURSE A

sword! Ah! what a fine present to make him! Poor wretch! Hyperbolus, the lamp-seller, thanks to his villainy, has gained more than....do not know how many talents, but certainly no sword.

JUST DISCOURSE

Peleus owed it to his chastity that he became the husband of Thetis.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

.... who left him in the lurch, for he was not the most ardent; in those nocturnal sports between the sheets, which so please women, he possessed but little merit. Get you gone, you are but an old fool. But you, young man, just consider a little what this temperance means and the delights of which it deprives you-young fellows, women, play, dainty dishes, wine, boisterous laughter. And what is life worth without these? Then, if you happen to commit one of these faults inherent in human weakness, some seduction or adultery, and you are caught in the act, you are lost, if you cannot speak. But follow my teaching and you will be able to satisfy your passions, to dance, to laugh, to blush at nothing. Suppose you are caught in the act of adultery. Then up and tell the husband you are not guilty, and recall to him the example of Zeus, who allowed himself to be conquered by love and by women. Being but a mortal, can you be stronger than a god?

JUST DISCOURSE

Suppose your pupil, following your advice, gets the radish rammed up his arse and then is depilated with a hot coal; how are you going to prove to him that he is not a broad-arse?

UNJUST DISCOURSE

What's the matter with being a broad-arse?

JUST DISCOURSE

Is there anything worse than that?

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Now what will you say, if I beat you even on this point?

JUST DISCOURSE

I should certainly have to be silent then.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Well then, reply! Our advocates, what are they?

JUST DISCOURSE

Sons of broad-arses.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Nothing is more true. And our tragic poets?

JUST DISCOURSE

Sons of broad-arses.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Well said again. And our demagogues?

JUST DISCOURSE

Sons of broad-arses.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

You admit that you have spoken nonsense. And the spectators, what are they for the most part? Look at them.

JUST DISCOURSE

I am looking at them.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Well! What do you see?

JUST DISCOURSE

By the gods, they are nearly all broad-arses. (pointing) See, this one I know to be such and that one and that other with the long hair.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

What have you to say, then?

JUST DISCOURSE

I am beaten. Debauchees! in the name of the gods, receive my cloak; I pass over to your ranks. (He goes back into the Thoughtery.)

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Well then! Are you going to take away your son or do you wish me to teach him how to speak?

STREPSIADES

Teach him, chastise him and do not fail to sharpen his tongue well, on one side for petty law-suits and on the other for important cases.

UNJUST DISCOURSE

Don't worry, I shall return him to you an accomplished sophist.

PHIDIPIDES

Very pale then and thoroughly hang-dog-looking.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Take him with you. (The UNJUST DISCOURSE and **PHIDIPIDES** go into the THOUGHTERY. To STREPSIADES, who is just going into his own house.) I think you will regret this. (The CHORUS turns and faces the audience.) judges, we are all about to tell you what you will gain by awarding us the crown as equity requires of you. In spring, when you wish to give your fields the first dressing, we will rain upon you first; the others shall wait. Then we will watch over your corn and over your vineyards; they will have no excess to fear, neither of heat nor of wet. But if a mortal dares to insult the goddesses of the Clouds, let him think of the ills we shall pour upon him. For him neither wine nor any harvest at all! Our terrible slings will mow down his young olive plants and his vines. If he is making bricks, it will rain, and our round hailstones will break the tiles of his roof. If he himself marries or any of his relations or friends, we shall cause rain to fall the whole night long. Verily, he would prefer to live in Egypt than to have given this iniquitous verdict.

STREPSIADES

(coming out again) Another four, three, two days, then the eve, then the day, the fatal day of payment! I tremble, I quake, I shudder, for it's the day of the old moon and the new. Then all my creditors take the oath, pay their deposits, I swear my downfall and my ruin. As for me, I beseech them to be reasonable, to be just, "My friend, do not demand this sum, wait a little for this other and give me time for this third one." Then they will pretend that at this rate they will never be repaid, will accuse me of bad faith and will threaten me with the law. Well then, let them sue me! I care nothing for that, if only Phidippides has learnt to speak fluently. I am going to find out; I'll knock at the door of the school. (He knocks.) Ho! slave, slave!

SOCRATES

(coming out) Welcome! Strepsiades!

STREPSIADES

Welcome! Socrates! But first take this sack; (offers him a sack of flour) it is right to reward the master with some present. And my son, whom you took off lately, has he learnt this famous reasoning? Tell me.

SOCRATES

He has learnt it.

STREPSIADES

Wonderful! Oh! divine Knavery!

SOCRATES

You will win just as many causes as you choose.

STREPSIADES

Even if I have borrowed before witnesses?

SOCRATES

So much the better, even if there are a thousand of them!

STREPSIADES

(bursting into song) Then I am going to shout with all my might. "Woe to the usurers, woe to their capital and their interest and their compound interest! You shall play me no more bad turns. My son is being taught there, his tongue is being sharpened into a double-edged weapon; he is my defender, the saviour of my house, the ruin of my foes! His poor father was crushed down with misfortune and he delivers him." Go and call him to me quickly. Oh! my child! my dear little one! run forward to your father's voice!

SOCRATES

(singing) Lo, the man himself!

STREPSIADES

(singing) Oh, my friend, my dearest friend!

SOCRATES

(singing) Take your son, and get you gone.

STREPSIADES

(as PHIDIPPIDES appears) Oh, my son! oh! oh! what a pleasure to see your pallor! You are ready first to deny and then to contradict; it's as clear as noon. What a child of your country you are! How your lips quiver with the famous, "What have you to say now?" How well you know, I am certain, to put on the look of a victim, when it is you who are making both victims and dupes! And what a truly Attic glance! Come, it's for you to save me, seeing it is you who have ruined me.

PHIDIPPIDES

What is it you fear then?

STREPSIADES

The day of the old and the new.

PHIDIPPIDES

Is there then a day of the old and the new?

STREPSIADES

The day on which they threaten to pay deposit against me.

PHIDIPPIDES

Then so much the worse for those who have deposited! for it's not possible for one day to be two.

STREPSIADES

What?

PHIDIPPIDES

Why, undoubtedly, unless a woman can be both old and young at the same time.

STREPSIADES

But so runs the law.

PHIDIPPIDES

I think the meaning of the law is quite misunderstood.

STREPSIADES

What does it mean?

PHIDIPPIDES

Old Solon loved the people.

STREPSIADES

What has that to do with the old day and the new?

PHIDIPPIDES

He has fixed two days for the summons, the last day of the old moon and the first day of the new; but the deposits must only be paid on the first day of the new moon.

STREPSIADES

And why did he also name the last day of the old?

PHIDIPPIDES

So, my dear sir, that the debtors, being there the day before, might free themselves by mutual agreement, or that else, if not, the creditor might begin his action on the morning of the new moon.

STREPSIADES

Why then do the magistrates have the deposits paid on the last of the month and not the next day?

PHIDIPPIDES

I think they do as the gluttons do, who are the first to pounce upon the dishes. Being eager to carry off these deposits, they have them paid in a day too soon.

STREPSIADES

Splendid! (to the audience) Ah! you poor brutes, who serve for food to us clever folk! You are only down here to swell the number, true blockheads, sheep for shearing, heap of empty pots! Hence I will sing a song of victory for my son and myself. "Oh! happy, Strepsiades! what cleverness is thine! and what a son thou hast here!" Thus my friends and my neighbours will say, jealous at seeing me gain all my suits. But come in, I wish to regale you first. (They both go in. A moment later a creditor arrives, with his witness.)

PASIAS

(to the WITNESS) A man should never lend a single obolus. It would be better to put on a brazen face at the outset than to get entangled in such matters. I want to see my money again and I bring you here today to attest the loan. I am going to make a foe of a neighbour; but, as long as I live, I do not wish my country to have to blush for me. Come, I am going to summon Strepsiades....

STREPSIADES

(coming out of his house) Who is this?

PASIAS

....for the old day and the new.

STREPSIADES

(to the WITNESS) I call you to witness, that he has named two days. What do you want of me?

PASIAS

I claim of you the twelve minae, which you borrowed from me to buy the dapple-grey horse.

STREPSIADES A

horse! do you hear him? I, who detest horses, as is well known.

PASIAS

I call Zeus to witness, that you swore by the gods to return them to me.

STREPSIADES

Because at that time, by Zeus! Phidippides did not yet know the irrefutable argument.

PASIAS

Would you deny the debt on that account?

STREPSIADES

If not, what use is his science to me?

PASIAS

Will you dare to swear by the gods that you owe me nothing?

STREPSIADES

By which gods?

PASIAS

By Zeus, Hermes and Posidon!

STREPSIADES

Why, I would give three obols for the pleasure of swearing by them.

PASIAS

Woe upon you, impudent knave!

STREPSIADES

Oh! what a fine wine-skin you would make if flayed!

PASIAS

Heaven! he jeers at me!

STREPSIADES

It would hold six gallons easily.

PASIAS

By great Zeus! by all the gods! you shall not scoff at me with impunity,

STREPSIADES

Ah! how you amuse me with your gods! how ridiculous it seems to a sage to hear Zeus invoked.

PASIAS

Your blasphemies will one day meet their reward. But, come, will you repay me my money, yes or no? Answer me, that I may go.

STREPSIADES

Wait a moment, I am going to give you a distinct answer. (He goes indoors and returns immediately with a kneading-trough.)

PASIAS

(to the WITNESS) What do you think he will do? Do you think he will pay?

STREPSIADES

Where is the man who demands money? Tell me, what is this?

PASIAS

Him? Why, he is your kneading-trough.

STREPSIADES

And you dare to demand money of me, when you are so ignorant? I will not return an obolus to anyone who says him instead of her for a kneading-trough.

PASIAS

You will not repay?

STREPSIADES

Not if I know it. Come, an end to this, pack off as quick as you can.

PASIAS

I go, but, may I die, if it be not to pay my deposit for a summons. (Exit)

STREPSIADES

Very well! It will be so much more loss to add to the twelve minae. But truly it makes me sad, for I do pity a poor simpleton who says him for a kneading-trough (Another creditor arrives.)

AMYNIAS

Woe! ah woe is me!

STREPSIADES

Wait! who is this whining fellow? Can it be one of the gods of Carcinus?

AMYNIAS

Do you want to know who I am? I am a man of misfortune!

STREPSIADES

Get on your way then.

AMYNIAS

(in tragic style) Oh! cruel god! Oh Fate, who hast broken the wheels of my chariot! Oh, Pallas, thou hast undone me!

STREPSIADES

What ill has Tlepolemus done you?

AMYNIAS

Instead of jeering me, friend, make your son return me the money he has had of me; I am already unfortunate enough.

STREPSIADES

What money?

AMYNIAS

The money he borrowed of me.

STREPSIADES

You have indeed had misfortune, it seems to me.

AMYNIAS

Yes, by the gods! I have been thrown from a chariot.

STREPSIADES

Why then drivell as if you had fallen off an ass?

AMYNIAS

Am I drivelling because I demand my money?

STREPSIADES

No, no, you cannot be in your right senses.

AMYNIAS

Why?

STREPSIADES

No doubt your poor wits have had a shake.

AMYNIAS

But by Hermes! I will sue you at law, if you do not pay me.

STREPSIADES

Just tell me; do you think it is always fresh water that Zeus lets fall every time it rains, or is it always the same water that the sun pumps over the earth?

AMYNIAS

I neither know, nor care.

STREPSIADES

And actually you would claim the right to demand your money, when you know not an iota of these celestial phenomena?

AMYNIAS

If you are short, pay me the interest anyway.

STREPSIADES

What kind of animal is interest?

AMYNIAS

What? Does not the sum borrowed go on growing, growing every month, each day as the time slips by?

STREPSIADES

Well put. But do you believe there is more water in the sea now than there was formerly?

AMYNIAS

No, it's just the same quantity. It cannot increase.

STREPSIADES

Thus, poor fool, the sea, that receives the rivers, never grows, and yet you would have your money grow? Get you gone, away with you, quick! Slave! bring me the ox-goad!

AMYNIAS

I have witnesses to this.

STREPSIADES

Come, what are you waiting for? Will you not budge, old nag!

AMYNIAS

What an insult!

STREPSIADES

Unless you start trotting, I shall catch you and stick this in your arse, you sorry packhorse! (AMYNIAS runs off.) Ah! you start, do you? I was about to drive you pretty fast, I tell you-you and your wheels and your chariot! (He enters his house.)

CHORUS

(singing) Whither does the passion of evil lead! here is a perverse old man, who wants to cheat his creditors; but some mishap, which will speedily punish this rogue for his shameful schemings, cannot fail to overtake him from to-day. For a long time he has been burning to have his son know how to fight against all justice and right and to gain even the most iniquitous causes against his adversaries every one. I think this wish is going to be fulfilled. But mayhap, mayhap, will he soon wish his son were dumb rather!

STREPSIADES

(rushing out With PHIDIPIDES after him) Oh! oh! neighbours, kinsmen, fellow-citizens, help! help! to the rescue, I am being beaten! Oh! my head! oh! my jaw! Scoundrel! Do you beat your own father?

PHIDIPIDES

(calmly) Yes, father, I do.

STREPSIADES

See! he admits he is beating me.

PHIDIPIDES

Of course I do.

STREPSIADES

You villain, you parricide, you gallows-bird!

PHIDIPIDES

Go on, repeat your epithets, call me a thousand other names, if it please you. The more you curse, the greater my amusement!

STREPSIADES

Oh! you ditch-arsed cynic!

PHIDIPIDES

How fragrant the perfume breathed forth in your words.

STREPSIADES

Do you beat your own father?

PHIDIPIDES

Yes, by Zeus! and I am going to show you that I do right in beating you.

STREPSIADES

Oh, wretch! can it be right to beat a father?

PHIDIPPIDES

I will prove it to you, and you shall own yourself vanquished.

STREPSIADES

Own myself vanquished on a point like this?

PHIDIPPIDES

It's the easiest thing in the world. Choose whichever of the two reasonings you like.

STREPSIADES

Of which reasonings?

PHIDIPPIDES

The Stronger and the Weaker.

STREPSIADES

Miserable fellow! Why, I am the one who had you taught how to refute what is right. and now you would persuade me it is right a son should beat his father.

PHIDIPPIDES

I think I shall convince you so thoroughly that, when you have heard me, you will not have a word to say.

STREPSIADES

Well, I am curious to hear what you have to say.

CHORUS

(singing) Consider well, old man, how you can best triumph over him. His brazenness shows me that he thinks himself sure of his case; he has some argument which gives him nerve. Note the confidence in his look!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But how did the fight begin? tell the Chorus; you cannot help doing that much.

STREPSIADES

I will tell you what was the start of the quarrel. At the end of the meal, as you know, I bade him take his lyre and sing me the air of Simonides, which tells of the fleece of the ram. He replied bluntly, that it was stupid, while drinking, to play the lyre and sing, like a woman when she is grinding barley.

PHIDIPPIDES

Why, by rights I ought to have beaten and kicked you the very moment you told me to sing.

STREPSIADES

That is just how he spoke to me in the house, furthermore he added, that Simonides was a detestable poet. However, I mastered myself and for a while said nothing. Then I said to him, 'At least, take a myrtle branch and recite a passage from Aeschylus to me.'-'For my own part,' he at once replied, 'I look upon Aeschylus as the first of poets, for his verses roll superbly; they're nothing but incoherence, bombast and turgidity.' Yet still I smothered my wrath and said, 'Then recite one of the famous pieces from the modern poets.' Then he commenced a piece in which Euripides shows, oh! horror! a brother, who violates his own uterine sister. Then I could not longer restrain myself, and attacked him with the most injurious abuse; naturally he retorted; hard words were hurled on both sides, and finally he sprang at me, broke my bones, bore me to earth, strangled and started killing me!

PHIDIPPIDES

I was right. What! not praise Euripides, the greatest of our poets?

STREPSIADES

He the greatest of our poets? Ah! if I but dared to speak! but the blows would rain upon me harder than ever.

PHIDIPPIDES

Undoubtedly and rightly too.

STREPSIADES

Rightly! Oh! what impudence! to me, who brought you up! when you could hardly lisp, I guessed what you wanted. If you said broo, broo, well, I brought you your milk; if you asked for mam mam, I gave you bread; and you had no sooner said, caca, than I took you outside and held you out. And just now, when you were strangling me, I shouted, I bellowed that I was about to crap; and you, you scoundrel, had not the heart to take me outside, so that, though almost choking, I was compelled to do my crapping right there.

CHORUS

(singing) Young men, your hearts must be panting with impatience. What is Phidippides going to say? If, after such conduct, he proves he has done well, I would not give an obolus for the hide of old men.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Come, you, who know how to brandish and hurl the keen shafts of the new science, find a way to convince us, give your language an appearance of truth.

PHIDIPPIDES

How pleasant it is to know these clever new inventions and to be able to defy the established laws! When I thought only about horses, I was not able to string three words together without a mistake, but now that the master has altered and improved me and that I live in this world of subtle thought, of reasoning and of meditation, I count on being able to prove satisfactorily that I have done well to thrash my father.

STREPSIADES

Mount your horse! By Zeus! I would rather defray the keep of a four-in-hand team than be battered with blows.

PHIDIPIDES

I revert to what I was saying when you interrupted me. And first, answer me, did you beat me in my childhood?

STREPSIADES

Why, assuredly, for your good and in your own best interest.

PHIDIPIDES

Tell me, is it not right, that in turn I should beat you for your good, since it is for a man's own best interest to be beaten? What! must your body be free of blows, and not mine? am I not free-born too? the children are to weep and the fathers go free? You will tell me, that according to the law, it is the lot of children to be beaten. But I reply that the old men are children twice over and that it is far more fitting to chastise them than the young, for there is less excuse for their faults.

STREPSIADES

But the law nowhere admits that fathers should be treated thus.

PHIDIPIDES

Was not the legislator who carried this law a man like you and me? In those days be got men to believe him; then why should not I too have the right to establish for the future a new law, allowing children to beat their fathers in turn? We make you a present of all the blows which were received before his law, and admit that you thrashed us with impunity. But look how the cocks and other animals fight with their fathers; and yet what difference is there betwixt them and ourselves, unless it be that they do not propose decrees?

STREPSIADES

But if you imitate the cocks in all things, why don't you scratch up the dunghill, why don't you sleep on a perch?

PHIDIPIDES

That has no bearing on the case, good sir; Socrates would find no connection, I assure you.

STREPSIADES

Then do not beat at all, for otherwise you have only yourself to blame afterwards.

PHIDIPIDES

What for?

STREPSIADES

I have the right to chastise you, and you to chastise your son, if you have one.

PHIDIPIDES

And if I have not, I shall have cried in vain, and you will die laughing in my face.

STREPSIADES

What say you, all here present? It seems to me that he is right, and I am of opinion that they should be accorded their right. If we think wrongly, it is but just we should be beaten.

PHIDIPIDES

Again, consider this other point.

STREPSIADES

It will be the death of me.

PHIDIPIDES

But you will certainly feel no more anger because of the blows I have given you.

STREPSIADES

Come, show me what profit I shall gain from it.

PHIDIPIDES

I shall beat my mother just as I have you.

STREPSIADES

What do you say? what's that you say? Hah! this is far worse still.

PHIDIPIDES

And what if I prove to you by our school reasoning, that one ought to beat one's mother?

STREPSIADES

Ah! if you do that, then you will only have to throw yourself, along with Socrates and his reasoning, into the Barathrum. Oh! Clouds! all our troubles emanate from you, from you, to whom I entrusted myself, body and soul.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

No, you alone are the cause, because you have pursued the path of evil.

STREPSIADES

Why did you not say so then, instead of egging on a poor ignorant old man?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We always act thus, when we see a man conceive a passion for what is evil; we strike him with some terrible disgrace, so that he may learn to fear the gods.

STREPSIADES

Alas! oh Clouds! that's hard indeed, but it's just! I ought not to have cheated my creditors....But come, my dear son, come with me to take vengeance on this wretched Chaerephon and on Socrates, who have deceived us both.

PHIDIPIDES

I shall do nothing against our masters.

STREPSIADES

Oh show some reverence for ancestral Zeus!

PHIDIPIDES

Mark him and his ancestral Zeus! What a fool you are! Does any such being as Zeus exist?

STREPSIADES

Why, assuredly.

PHIDIPIDES

No, a thousand times no! The ruler of the world is the Whirlwind, that has unseated Zeus.

STREPSIADES

He has not dethroned him. I believed it, because of this whirligig here. Unhappy wretch that I am! I have taken a piece of clay to be a god.

PHIDIPIDES

Very well! Keep your stupid nonsense for your own consumption. (He goes back into STREPSIADES' house.)

STREPSIADES

Oh! what madness! I had lost my reason when I threw over the gods through Socrates' seductive phrases. (Addressing the statue of Hermes) Oh! good Hermes, do not destroy me in your wrath. Forgive me; their babbling had driven me crazy. Be my counselor. Shall I pursue them at law or shall I....? Order and I obey.-You are right, no law-suit; but up! let us burn down the home of those praters. Here, Xanthias, here! take a ladder, come forth and arm yourself with an axe; now mount upon the Thoughtery, demolish the roof, if you love your master, and may the house fall in upon them. Ho! bring me a blazing torch! There is more than one of them, arch-impostors as they are, on whom I am determined to have vengeance.

A DISCIPLE

(from within) Oh! oh!

STREPSIADES

Come, torch, do your duty! Burst into full flame!

DISCIPLE

What are you up to?

STREPSIADES

What am I up to? Why, I am entering upon a subtle argument with the beams of the house.

SECOND DISCIPLE

(from within) Hullo! hullo who is burning down our house?

STREPSIADES

The man whose cloak you have appropriated.

SECOND DISCIPLE

You are killing us!

STREPSIADES

That is just exactly what I hope, unless my axe plays me false, or I fall and break my neck.

SOCRATES

(appearing at the window) Hi! you fellow on the roof, what are you doing up there?

STREPSIADES

(mocking SOCRATES' manner) I am traversing the air and contemplating the sun.

SOCRATES

Ah! ah! woe is upon me! I am suffocating!

SECOND DISCIPLE

And I, alas, shall be burnt up!

STREPSIADES

Ah! you insulted the gods! You studied the face of the moon! Chase them, strike and beat them down! Forward! they have richly deserved their fate-above all, by reason of their blasphemies.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

So let the Chorus file off the stage. Its part is played.

THE END -----