

425 BC

THE ACHARNIANS

by Aristophanes

anonymous translator

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

DICAEOPOLIS
HERALD
AMPHITHEUS
AMBASSADORS
PSEUDARTABAS
THEORUS
DAUGHTER OF DICAEOPOLIS
SLAVE OF EURIPIDES
EURIPIDES
LAMACHUS
A MEGARIAN
TWO YOUNG GIRLS, daughters of the Megarian
AN INFORMER
A BOEOTIAN
NICARCHUS
SLAVE OF LAMACHUS
A HUSBANDMAN
A WEDDING GUEST
CHORUS OF ACHARNIAN CHARCOAL BURNERS

THE ACHARNIANS

(SCENE: The Orchestra represents the Pnyx at Athens; in the background are the usual houses, this time three in number, belonging to Dicaeopolis, Euripides, and Lamachus respectively.)

DICAEOPOLIS (alone)

What cares have not gnawed at my heart and how few have been the pleasures in my life! Four, to be exact, while my troubles have been as countless as the grains of sand on the shore! Let me see! of what value to me have been these few pleasures? Ah! I remember that I was delighted in soul when Cleon had to cough up those five talents; I was in ecstasy and I love the Knights for this deed; "it is an honour to Greece." But the day when I was impatiently awaiting a piece by Aeschylus, what tragic despair it caused me when the herald called, "Theognis, introduce your Chorus!" Just imagine how this blow struck straight at my heart! On the other hand, what joy Dexitheus caused me at the musical competition, when right after Moschus he played a Boeotian melody on the lyre! But this year by contrast! Oh! what deadly torture to hear Chaeris perform the prelude in the Orthian mode! Never, however, since I began to bathe, has the dust hurt my eyes as it does today. Still it is the day of assembly; all should be here at daybreak, and yet the Pnyx is still deserted. They are gossiping in the marketplace, slipping hither and thither to avoid the vermilioned rope. The Prytanes even do not come; they will be late, but when they come they will push and fight each other for a seat in the front row. They will never trouble themselves with the

question of peace. Oh! Athens! Athens! As for myself, I do not fail to come here before all the rest, and now, finding myself alone, I groan, yawn, stretch, fart, and know not what to do; I make sketches in the dust, pull out my loose hairs, muse, think of my fields, long for peace, curse town life and regret my dear country home, which never told me to "buy fuel, vinegar or oil"; there the word "buy," which cuts me in two, was unknown; I harvested everything at will. Therefore I have come to the assembly fully prepared to bawl, interrupt and abuse the speakers, if they talk of anything but peace. (The Orchestra begins to fill with people.) But here come the Prytanes, and high time too, for it is midday! There, just as I said, they are pushing and fighting for the front seats.

HERALD (officially)

Step forward, step forward; get within the consecrated area.

AMPHITHEUS (rising)

Has anyone spoken yet?

HERALD

Who asks to speak?

AMPHITHEUS

I do.

HERALD

Your name?

AMPHITHEUS

Amphitheus.

HERALD

Are you not a man?

AMPHITHEUS

No! I am an immortal! Amphitheus was the son of Ceres and Triptolemus; of him was born Celeus, Celeus wedded Phaenerete, my grandmother, whose son was Lycinus, and, being born of him I am an immortal; it is to me alone that the gods have entrusted the duty of treating with the Lacedaemonians. But, citizens, though I am immortal, I am dying of hunger; the Prytanes give me nothing.

HERALD (calling)

Officers!

AMPHITHEUS (as the Scythian policemen seize him)

Oh, Triptolemus and Celeus, do ye thus forsake your own blood?

DICAEOPOLIS (rising)

Prytanes, in expelling this citizen, you are offering an outrage to the Assembly. He only desired to secure peace for us and to sheathe the sword.

(The Scythians release Amphitheus.)

HERALD

Sit down! Silence!

DICAEOPOLIS

No, by Apollo, I will not, unless you are going to discuss the question of peace.

HERALD (ignoring this; loudly)

The ambassadors, who are returned from the Court of the King!

DICAEOPOLIS

Of what King? I am sick of all those fine birds, the peacock ambassadors and their swagger.

HERALD

Silence!

DICAEOPOLIS (as he perceives the entering ambassadors dressed in the Persian mode)

Oh! oh! By Ecbatana, what a costume!

AMBASSADOR (pompously)

During the archonship of Euthymenes, you sent us to the Great King on a salary of two drachmae per diem.

DICAEOPOLIS (aside)

Ah! those poor drachmae!

AMBASSADOR

We suffered horribly on the plains of the Cayster, sleeping under a tent, stretched deliciously on fine chariots, half dead with weariness.

DICAEOPOLIS (aside)

And I was very much at ease, lying on the straw along the battlements!

AMBASSADOR

Everywhere we were well received and forced to drink delicious wine out of golden or crystal flagons....

DICAEOPOLIS (aside)

Oh, city of Cranaus, thy ambassadors are laughing at thee!

AMBASSADOR

For great feeders and heavy drinkers are alone esteemed as men by the barbarians.

DICAEOPOLIS (aside)

Just as here in Athens, we only esteem the wenchers and pederasts.

AMBASSADOR

At the end of the fourth year we reached the King's Court, but he had left with his whole army to take a crap, and for the space of eight months he was thus sitting on the can in the midst of the golden mountains.

DICAEOPOLIS (aside)

And how long did it take him to close his arse? A month?

AMBASSADOR

After this he returned to his palace; then he entertained us and had us served with oxen roasted whole in an oven.

DICAEOPOLIS (aside)

Who ever saw an ox roasted in an oven? What a lie!

AMBASSADOR

And one day, by Zeus, he also had us served with a bird three times as large as Cleonymus, and called the Hoax.

DICAEOPOLIS (aside)

And do we give you two drachmae, that you should hoax us thus?

AMBASSADOR

We are bringing to you Pseudartabas, the King's Eye.

DICAEOPOLIS

I would a crow might pluck out yours with his beak, you cursed ambassador!

HERALD (loudly)

The King's Eye!

(Enter PSEUDARTABAS, in Persian costume; his mask is one great eye; he is accompanied by two eunuchs.)

DICAEOPOLIS (as he sees him)

Good God! Friend, with your great eye, round like the hole through which the oarsman passes his sweep, you have the air of a galley doubling a cape to gain port.

AMBASSADOR

Come, Pseudartabas, give forth the message for the Athenians with which you were charged by the Great King.

PSEUDARTABAS

I artamane Xarxas apiaona satra.

AMBASSADOR (to DICAEOPOLIS)

Do you understand what he says?

DICAEOPOLIS

God, no!

AMBASSADOR (to the PRYTANES)

He says that the Great King will send you gold. (to PSEUDARTABAS) Come, utter the word 'gold' louder and more distinctly.

PSEUDARTABAS

Thou shalt not have gold, thou gapingarsed Ionian.

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! God help us, but (r)that's clear enough!

AMBASSADOR

What does he say?

DICAEOPOLIS

That the Ionians are gapingarsed, if they expect to receive gold from the barbarians.

AMBASSADOR

Not so, he speaks of bushels of gold.

DICAEOPOLIS

What bushels? You're nothing but a windbag; get out of the way; I will find out the truth by myself. (to PSEUDARTABAS) Come now, answer me clearly, if you do not wish me to dye your skin red. Will the Great King send us gold? (PSEUDARTABAS makes a negative sign.) Then our ambassadors are seeking to deceive us? (PSEUDARTABAS signs affirmatively.) These fellows make signs like any Greek; I am sure that they are nothing but Athenians. Oh! ho! I recognize one of these eunuchs; it is Clisthenes, the son of Sibyrtilus. Behold the effrontery of this shaven and provocative arse! How, you big baboon, with such a beard do you seek to play the eunuch to us? And this other one? Is it not Straton?

HERALD

Silence! Sit down! The Senate invites the King's Eye to the Prytaneum.

(The AMBASSADORS and PSEUDARTABAS depart.)

DICAEOPOLIS

Is this not sufficient to drive a man to hang himself? Here I stand chilled to the bone, whilst the doors of the Prytaneum fly wide open to lodge such rascals. But I will do something great and bold. Where is Amphitheus? Come and speak with me.

AMPHITHEUS

Here I am.

DICAEOPOLIS

Take these eight drachmae and go and conclude a truce with the Lacedaemonians for me, my wife and my children; I leave you free, my dear Prytanee, to send out embassies and to stand gaping in the air.

(AMPHITHEUS rushes out.)

HERALD

Bring in Theorus, who has returned from the Court of Sitalces.

THEORUS (rising; he wears a Thracian costume.)

I am here.

DICAEOPOLIS (aside)

Another humbug!

THEORUS

We should not have remained long in Thrace...

DICAEOPOLIS

...if you had not been well paid.

THEORUS

...if the country had not been covered with snow; the rivers were icebound...

DICAEOPOLIS (aside)

That was when Theognis produced his tragedy.

THEORUS

...during the whole of that time I was holding my own with Sitalces cup in hand; and, in truth, he adored you to such a degree that he wrote on the walls, "How beautiful are the Athenians!" His son, to whom we gave the freedom of the city, burned with desire to come here and eat sausages at the feast of the Apaturia; he prayed his father to come to the aid of his new country and Sitalces swore on his goblet that he would succour us with such a host that the Athenians would exclaim, "What a cloud of grasshoppers!"

DICAEOPOLIS (aside)

Damned if I believe a word of what you tell us! Excepting the grasshoppers, there is not a grain of truth in it all!

THEORUS

And he has sent you the most warlike soldiers of all Thrace.

DICAEOPOLIS (aside)

Now we shall begin to see clearly.

HERALD

Come hither, Thracians, whom Theorus brought.

(A few Thracians are ushered in; they have a most unwarlike appearance; the most striking feature of their costume is the circumcised phallus.)

DICAEOPOLIS

What plague have we here?

THEORUS

The host of the Odomanti.

DICAEOPOLIS

Of the Odomanti? Tell me what it means. Who sliced their tools like that?

THEORUS

If they are given a wage of two drachmae, they will put all Boeotia to fire and sword.

DICAEOPOLIS

Two drachmae to those circumcised hounds! Groan aloud, ye people of rowers, bulwark of Athens! (The Odomanti steal his sack) Ah! great gods! I am undone; these Odomanti are robbing me of my garlic! Give me back my garlic.

THEORUS

Oh! wretched man! do not go near them; they have eaten garlic.

DICAEOPOLIS

Prytanes, will you let me be treated in this manner, in my own country and by barbarians? But I oppose the discussion of paying a wage to the Thracians; I announce an omen; I have just felt a drop of rain.

HERALD

Let the Thracians withdraw and return the day after tomorrow; the Prytanes declare the sitting at an end.

(All leave except DICAEOPOLIS.)

DICAEOPOLIS

Ye gods, what garlic I have lost! But here comes Amphitheus returned from Lacedaemon. Welcome, Amphitheus.

(AMPHITHEUS enters, very much out of breath.)

AMPHITHEUS

No, there is no welcome for me and I fly as fast as I can, for I am pursued by the Acharnians.

DICAEOPOLIS

Why, what has happened?

AMPHITHEUS

I was hurrying to bring your treaty of truce, but some old dotards from Acharnae got scent of the thing; they are veterans of Marathon, tough as oak or maple, of which they are made for sure rough and ruthless. They all started shouting: "Wretch! you are the bearer of a treaty, and the enemy has only just cut our vines!" Meanwhile they were gathering stones in their cloaks, so I fled and they ran after me shouting.

DICAEOPOLIS

Let 'em shout as much as they please! But have you brought me a treaty?

AMPHITHEUS

Most certainly, here are three samples to select from, this one is five years old; taste it.

(He hands DICAEOPOLIS a bottle.)

DICAEOPOLIS

Faugh!

AMPHITHEUS

What's the matter?

DICAEOPOLIS

I don't like it; it smells of pitch and of the ships they are fitting out.

AMPHITHEUS (handing him another bottle)

Here is another, ten years old; taste it.

DICAEOPOLIS

It smells strongly of the delegates, who go around the towns to chide the allies for their slowness.

AMPHITHEUS (handing him a third bottle)

This last is a truce of thirty years, both on sea and land.

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh! by Bacchus! what a bouquet! It has the aroma of nectar and ambrosia; this does not say to us, "Provision yourselves for three days." But it lisps the gentle numbers, "Go whither you will." I accept it, ratify it, drink it at one draught and consign the Acharnians to limbo. Freed from the war and its ills, I shall celebrate the rural Dionysia.

AMPHITHEUS

And I shall run away, for I'm mortally afraid of the Acharnians.

(AMPHITHEUS runs off. DICAEOPOLIS goes into his house, carrying his truce. The CHORUS of ACHARNIAN CHARCOAL BURNERS enters, in great haste and excitement.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This way all! Let us follow our man; we will demand him of everyone we meet; the public weal makes his seizure imperative. Ho, there! tell me which way the bearer of the truce has gone.

CHORUS (singing)

He has escaped us, he has disappeared. Damn old age! When I was young, in the days when I followed Phayllus, running with a sack of coals on my back, this wretch would not have eluded my pursuit, let him be as swift as he will.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But now my limbs are stiff; old Lacratides feels his legs are weighty and the traitor escapes me. No, no, let us follow him; old Acharnians like our selves shall not be set at naught by a scoundrel...

CHORUS (singing)

...who has dared, by Zeus, to conclude a truce when I wanted the war continued with double fury in order to avenge my ruined lands. No mercy for our foes until I have pierced their hearts like a sharp reed, so that they dare never again ravage my vineyards.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Come, let us seek the rascal; let us look everywhere, carrying our stones in our hands; let us hunt him from place to place until we trap him; could never, never tire of the delight of stoning him.

DICAEOPOLIS (from within)

Peace! profane men!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Silence all! Friends, do you hear the sacred formula? Here is he, whom we seek! This way, all! Get out of his way, surely he comes to offer an oblation.

(The CHORUS withdraws to one side.)

DICAEOPOLIS (comes out with a pot in his hand; he is followed by his

wife, his daughter, who carries a basket, and two slaves, who carry the phallus.)

Peace, profane men! Let the basketbearer come forward, and thou Xanthias, hold the phallus well upright. Daughter, set down the basket and let us begin the sacrifice.

DAUGHTER OF DICAEPOLIS (putting down the basket and taking out the sacred cake)

Mother, hand me the ladle, that I may spread the sauce on the cake.

DICAEPOLIS

It is well! Oh, mighty Bacchus, it is with joy that, freed from military duty, I and all mine perform this solemn rite and offer thee this sacrifice; grant that I may keep the rural Dionysia without hindrance and that this truce of thirty years may be propitious for me. Come, my child, carry the basket gracefully and with a grave, demure face. Happy he who shall be your possessor and embrace you so firmly at dawn, that you fart like a weasel. Go forward, and have a care they don't snatch your jewels in the crowd. Xanthias, walk behind the basketbearer and hold the phallus well erect; I will follow, singing the Phallic hymn; thou, wife, look on from the top of the terrace. Forward!

(He sings)

Oh, Phales, companion of the orgies of Bacchus, night reveller, god of adultery and of pederasty, these past six years I have not been able to invoke thee. With what joy I return to my farmstead, thanks to the truce I have concluded, freed from cares, from fighting and from Lamachuses! How much sweeter, oh Phales, Phales, is it to surprise Thratta, the pretty woodmaid, Strymodorus' slave, stealing wood from Mount Phelleus, to catch her under the arms, to throw her, on the ground and lay her, Oh, Phales, Phales! If thou wilt drink and bemuse thyself with me, we shall tomorrow consume some good dish in honour of the peace, and I will hang up my buckler over the smoking hearth.

(The procession reaches the place where the CHORUS is hiding.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

That's the man himself. Stone him, stone him, stone him, strike the wretch. All, all of you, pelt him, pelt him!

DICAEPOLIS (using his pot for a shield)

What is this? By Heracles, you will smash my pot.

(The daughter and the two slaves retreat.)

CHORUS (singing excitedly)

It is you that we are stoning, you miserable scoundrel.

DICAEPOLIS

And for what sin, Acharnian elders, tell me that!

CHORUS (singing, with greater excitement)

You ask that, you impudent rascal, traitor to your country; you alone amongst us all have concluded a truce, and you dare to look us in the face!

DICAEPOLIS

But you do not know (r)why I have treated for peace. Listen!

CHORUS (singing fiercely)

Listen to you? No, no, you are about to die, we will annihilate you with our stones.

DICAEOPOLIS

But first of all, listen. Stop, my friends.

CHORUS (singing; with intense hatred)

I will hear nothing; do not address me; I hate you more than I do Cleon, whom one day I shall flay to make sandals for the Knights. Listen to your long speeches, after you have treated with the Laconians? No, I will punish you.

DICAEOPOLIS

Friends, leave the Laconians out of debate and consider only whether I have not done well to conclude my truce.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Done well! when you have treated with a people who know neither gods, nor truth, nor faith.

DICAEOPOLIS

We attribute too much to the Laconians; as for myself, I know that they are not the cause of all our troubles.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh, indeed, rascal! You dare to use such language to me and then expect me to spare you!

DICAEOPOLIS

No, no, they are not the cause of all our troubles, and I who address you claim to be able to prove that they have much to complain of in us.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This passes endurance; my heart bounds with fury. Thus you dare to defend our enemies.

DICAEOPOLIS

Were my head on the block I would uphold what I say and rely on the approval of the people.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Comrades, let us hurl our stones and dye this fellow purple.

DICAEOPOLIS

What black firebrand has inflamed your heart! You will not hear me? You really will not, Acharnians?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

No, a thousand times, no.

DICAEOPOLIS

This is a hateful injustice.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

May I die if I listen.

DICAEOPOLIS

Nay, nay! have mercy, have mercy, Acharnians.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

You shall die.

DICAEOPOLIS

Well, blood for blood! I will kill your dearest friend. I have here the hostages of Acharnae; I shall disembowel them.

(He goes into the house.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Acharnians, what means this threat? Has he got one of our children in his house? What gives him such audacity?

DICAEOPOLIS (coming out again)

Stone me, if it please you; I shall avenge myself on this. (He shows them a basket.) Let us see whether you have any love for your coals.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Great Gods! this basket is our fellowcitizen. Stop, stop, in heaven's name!

DICAEOPOLIS

I shall dismember it despite your cries; I will listen to nothing.

CHORUS (singing; tragically)

How, will you kill this coalbasket, my beloved comrade?

DICAEOPOLIS

Just now you would not listen to me.

CHORUS (singing; plaintively)

Well, speak now, if you will; tell us, tell us you have a weakness for the Lacedaemonians. I consent to anything; never will I forsake this dear little basket.

DICAEOPOLIS

First, throw down your stones.

CHORUS (singing; meekly)

There! it's done. And you put away your sword.

DICAEOPOLIS

Let me see that no stones remain concealed in your cloaks.

CHORUS (singing; petulantly)

They are all on the ground; see how we shake our garments. Come, no haggling, lay down your sword; we threw away everything while crossing from one side of the Orchestra to the other.

DICAEOPOLIS

What cries of anguish you would have uttered had these coals of Parnes been dismembered, and yet it came very near it; had they

perished, their death would have been due to the folly of their fellowcitizens. The poor basket was so frightened, look, it has shed a thick black dust over me, the same as a cuttlefish does. What an irritable temper! You shout and throw stones, you will not hear my arguments not even when I propose to speak in favour of the Lacedaemonians with my head on the block; and yet I cling to life.
(He goes into the house.)

CHORUS (singing; belligerently again)

Well then, bring out a block before your door, scoundrel, and let us hear the good grounds you can give us; I am curious to know them. Now mind, as you proposed yourself, place your head on the block and speak.

DICAEOPOLIS (coming out of his house, carrying a block)

Here is the block; and, though I am but a very sorry speaker, I wish nevertheless to talk freely of the Lacedaemonians and without the protection of my buckler. Yet I have many reasons for fear. I know our rustics; they are delighted if some braggart comes, and rightly or wrongly, loads both them and their city with praise and flattery; they do not see that such toadeaters are traitors, who sell them for gain. As for the old men, I know their weakness; they only seek to overwhelm the accused with their votes. Nor have I forgotten how Cleon treated me because of my comedy last year; he dragged me before the Senate and there he uttered endless slanders against me; it was a tempest of abuse, a deluge of lies. Through what a slough of mud he dragged me! I almost perished. Permit me, therefore, before I speak, to dress in the manner most likely to draw pity.

CHORUS (singing; querulously)

What evasions, subterfuges and delays! Wait! here is the sombre helmet of Pluto with its thick bristling plume; Hieronymus lends it to you; then open Sisyphus' bag of wiles; but hurry, hurry, for discussion does not admit of delay.

DICAEOPOLIS

The time has come for me to manifest my courage, so I will go and seek Euripides. (Knocking on EURIPIDES' door) Ho! slave, slave!

SLAVE (opening the door and poking his head out)

Who's there?

DICAEOPOLIS

Is Euripides at home?

SLAVE

He is and he isn't; understand that, if you can.

DICAEOPOLIS

What's that? He is and he (r)isn't!

SLAVE

Certainly, old man; busy gathering subtle fancies here and there, his mind is not in the house, but he himself is; perched aloft, he is composing a tragedy.

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh, Euripides, you are indeed happy to have a slave so quick at repartee! Now, fellow, call your master.

SLAVE

Impossible! (He slams the door.)

DICAEOPOLIS

Too bad. But I will not give up. Come, let us knock at the door again. Euripides, my little Euripides, my darling Euripides, listen; never had man greater right to your pity. It is Dicaeopolis of the Chollidan Deme who calls you. Do you hear?

EURIPIDES (from within)

I have no time to waste.

DICAEOPOLIS

Very well, have yourself wheeled out here.

EURIPIDES

Impossible.

DICAEOPOLIS

Nevertheless...

EURIPIDES

Well, let them roll me out; as to coming down, I have not the time.

(The eccyclema turns and presents the interior of the house.

EURIPIDES is lying on a bed, his slave beside him. On the back wall are hung up tragic costumes of every sort and a multitude of accessories is piled up on the floor.)

DICAEOPOLIS

Euripides...

EURIPIDES

What words strike my ear?

DICAEOPOLIS

You perch aloft to compose tragedies, when you might just as well do them on the ground. No wonder you introduce cripples on the stage. And why do you dress in these miserable tragic rags? No wonder your heroes are beggars. But, Euripides, on my knees I beseech you, give me the tatters of some old piece; for I have to treat the Chorus to a long speech, and if I do it badly it is all over with me.

EURIPIDES

What rags do you prefer? Those in which I rigged out Oeneus on the stage, that unhappy, miserable old man?

DICAEOPOLIS

No, I want those of some hero still more unfortunate.

EURIPIDES

Of Phoenix, the blind man?

DICAEOPOLIS

No, not of Phoenix, you have another hero more unfortunate than him.

EURIPIDES (to himself)

Now, what tatters (r)does he want? (to DICAEPOLIS) Do you mean those of the beggar Philoctetes?

DICAEPOLIS

No, of another far more beggarly.

EURIPIDES

Is it the filthy dress of the lame fellow, Bellerophon?

DICAEPOLIS

No, not Bellerophon; the one I mean was not only lame and a beggar, but boastful and a fine speaker.

EURIPIDES

Ah! I know, it is Telephus, the Mysian.

DICAEPOLIS

Yes, Telephus. Give me his rags, I beg of you.

EURIPIDES

Slave! give him Telephus' tatters; they are on top of the rags of Thyestes and mixed with those of Ino. There they are; take them.

DICAEPOLIS (holding up the costume for the audience to see)

Oh! Zeus, whose eye pierces everywhere and embraces all, permit me to assume the most wretched dress on earth. Euripides, cap your kindness by giving me the little Mysian hat, that goes so well with these tatters. I must today have the look of a beggar; "be what I am, but not appear to be"; the audience will know well who I am, but the Chorus will be fools enough not to, and I shall dupe them with my subtle phrases.

EURIPIDES

I will give you the hat; I love the clever tricks of an ingenious brain like yours.

DICAEPOLIS

Rest happy, and may it befall Telephus as I wish. Ah, I already feel myself filled with quibbles. But I must have a beggar's staff.

EURIPIDES (handing him a staff)

Here you are, and now get away from this porch.

DICAEPOLIS

Oh, my soul! You see how you are driven from this house, when I still need so many accessories. But let us be pressing, obstinate, importunate. Euripides, give me a little basket with a lamp lighted inside.

EURIPIDES

Whatever do you want such a thing as that for?

DICAEPOLIS

I do not need it, but I want it all the same.

EURIPIDES (handing him a basket)

You importune me; get out of here!

DICAEOPOLIS

Alas! may the gods grant you a destiny as brilliant as your mother's.

EURIPIDES

Leave me in peace.

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh, just a little broken cup.

EURIPIDES (handing him a cup)

Take it and go and hang yourself. (to himself) What a tiresome fellow!

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! you do not know all the pain you cause me. Dear, good Euripides, just a little pot with a sponge for a stopper.

EURIPIDES

Miserable man! You are stealing a whole tragedy. Here, take it and be off.

(He hands DICAEOPOLIS a pot.)

DICAEOPOLIS

I am going, but, great gods! I need one thing more; unless I have it, am a dead man. Hearken, my little Euripides, only give me this and I go, never to return. For pity's sake, do give me a few small herbs for my basket.

EURIPIDES

You wish to ruin me then. Here, take what you want; but it is all over with my plays!

(He hands him some herbs.)

DICAEOPOLIS

I won't ask another thing; I'm going. I am too importunate and forget that I rouse against me the hate of kings. (He starts to leave, then returns quickly) Ah! wretch that I am! I am lost! I have forgotten one thing, without which all the rest is as nothing. Euripides, my excellent Euripides, my dear little Euripides, may I die if I ask you again for the smallest present; only one, the last, absolutely the last; give me some of the chervil your mother left you in her will.

EURIPIDES

Insolent hound! Slave, lock the door! (The eccyclema turns back again.)

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh, my soul! we must go away without the chervil. Art thou sensible of the dangerous battle we are about to engage upon in defending the Lacedaemonians? Courage, my soul, we must plunge into

the midst of it. Dost thou hesitate and art thou fully steeped in Euripides? That's right! do not falter, my poor heart, and let us risk our head to say what we hold for truth. Courage and boldly to the front. I am astonished at my bravery.

(He approaches the block.)

CHORUS (singing; excitedly)

What do you purport doing? what are you going to say? What an impudent fellow! what a brazen heart! to dare to stake his head and uphold an opinion contrary to that of us all! And he does not tremble to face this peril! Come, it is you who desired it, speak!

DICAEOPOLIS

Spectators, be not angered if, although I am a beggar, I dare in comedy to speak before the people of Athens of the public weal; even Comedy can sometimes discern what is right. I shall not please, but I shall say what is true. Besides, Cleon shall not be able to accuse me of attacking Athens before strangers; we are by ourselves at the festival of the Lenaea; the time when our allies send us their tribute and their soldiers is not yet here. There is only the pure wheat without the chaff; as to the resident aliens settled among us, they and the citizens are one, like the straw and the ear.

I detest the Lacedaemonians with all my heart, and may Posidon, the god of Taenarus, cause an earthquake and overturn their dwellings! My vines too have been cut. But come (there are only friends who hear me), why accuse the Laconians of all our woes? Some men (I do not say the city, note particularly that I do not say the city), some wretches, lost in vices, bereft of honour, who were not even citizens of good stamp, but strangers, have accused the Megarians of introducing their produce fraudulently, and not a cucumber, a leveret, a suckling pig, a clove of garlic, a lump of salt was seen without its being said, "Halloa! these come from Megara," and their being instantly confiscated. Thus far the evil was not serious and we were the only sufferers. But now some young drunkards go to Megara and carry off the harlot Simaetha; the Megarians, hurt to the quick, run off in turn with two harlots of the house of Aspasia; and so for three whores Greece is set ablaze. Then Pericles, aflame with ire on his Olympian height, let loose the lightning, caused the thunder to roll, upset Greece and passed an edict, which ran like the song, "That the Megarians be banished both from our land and from our markets and from the sea and from the continent." Meanwhile the Megarians, who were beginning to die of hunger, begged the Lacedaemonians to bring about the abolition of the decree, of which those harlots were the cause; several times we refused their demand; and from that time there was horrible clatter of arms everywhere. You will say that Sparta was wrong, but what should she have done? Answer that. Suppose that a Lacedaemonian had seized a little Seriphian dog on any pretext and had sold it, would you have endured it quietly? Far from it, you would at once have sent three hundred vessels to sea, and what an uproar there would have been through all the city! there it's a band of noisy soldiery, here a brawl about the election of a Trierarch; elsewhere pay is being distributed, the Pallas figureheads are being regilded, crowds are surging under the market porticos, encumbered with wheat that is being measured, wineskins, oarleathers, garlic, olives, onions in nets; everywhere are chaplets, sprats, flutegirls, black eyes; in the arsenal bolts are being noisily driven home, sweeps are being made and fitted with leathers; we hear nothing but the sound of

whistles, of flutes and fifes to encourage the workers. That is what you assuredly would have done, and would not Telephus have done the same? So I come to my general conclusion; we have no common sense.

LEADER OF FIRST SEMICHORUS

Oh! wretch! oh! infamous man! You are naught but a beggar and yet you dare to talk to us like this! you insult their worships the informers!

LEADER OF SECOND SEMICHORUS

By Posidon! he speaks the truth; he has not lied in a single detail.

LEADER OF FIRST SEMICHORUS

But though it be true, need he say it? But you'll have no great cause to be proud of your insolence!

LEADER OF SECOND SEMICHORUS

Where are you running to? Don't you move; if you strike this man, I shall be at you.

FIRST SEMICHORUS (bursting into song)

Oh! Lamachus, whose glance flashes lightning, whose plume petrifies thy foes, help! Oh! Lamachus, my friend, the hero of my tribe and all of you, both officers and soldiers, defenders of our walls, come to my aid; else is it all over with me!

(LAMACHUS comes out of his house armed from head to foot.)

LAMACHUS

Whence comes this cry of battle? where must I bring my aid? where must I sow dread? who wants me to uncase my dreadful Gorgon's head?

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh, Lamachus, great hero! Your plumes and your cohorts terrify me.

CHORUSLEADER

This man, Lamachus, incessantly abuses Athens.

LAMACHUS

You are but a mendicant and you dare to use language of this sort?

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh, brave Lamachus, forgive a beggar who speaks at hazard.

LAMACHUS

But what have you said? Let us hear.

DICAEOPOLIS

I know nothing about it; the sight of weapons makes me dizzy. Oh! I adjure you, take that fearful Gorgon somewhat farther away.

LAMACHUS

There.

DICAEOPOLIS

Now place it face downwards on the ground.

LAMACHUS

It is done.

DICAEOPOLIS

Give me a plume out of your helmet.

LAMACHUS

Here is a feather.

DICAEOPOLIS

And hold my head while I vomit; the plumes have turned my stomach.

LAMACHUS

Hah! what are you proposing to do? do you want to make yourself vomit with this feather?

DICAEOPOLIS

Is it a feather? what bird's? a braggart's?

LAMACHUS

Hah! I will rip you open.

DICAEOPOLIS

No, no, Lamachus! Violence is out of place here! But as you are so strong, why did you not circumcise me? You have all the tools you need for the operation there.

LAMACHUS

A beggar dares thus address a general!

DICAEOPOLIS

How? Am I a beggar?

LAMACHUS

What are you then?

DICAEOPOLIS

Who am I? A good citizen, not ambitious; a soldier, who has fought well since the outbreak of the war, whereas you are but a vile mercenary.

LAMACHUS

They elected me...

DICAEOPOLIS

Yes, three cuckoos did! If I have concluded peace, it was disgust that drove me; for I see men with hoary heads in the ranks and young fellows of your age shirking service. Some are in Thrace getting an allowance of three drachmae, such fellows as Tisamenophaenippus and Panurgipparchides. The others are with Chares or in Chaonia, men like Geretotheodorus and Diomialazon; there are some of the same kidney, too, at Camarina, at Gela, and at Catagela.

LAMACHUS

They were elected.

DICAEOPOLIS

And why do you always receive your pay, when none of these others ever gets any? Speak, Marilades, you have grey hair; well then, have you ever been entrusted with a mission? See! he shakes his head. Yet he is an active as well as a prudent man. And you, Anthracyllus or Euphorides or Prinides, have you knowledge of Ecbatana or Chaonia? You say no, do you not? Such offices are good for the son of Coesyra and Lamachus, who, but yesterday ruined with debt, never pay their shot, and whom all their friends avoid as foot passengers dodge the folks who empty their slops out of window.

LAMACHUS

Oh! in freedom's name! are such exaggerations to be borne?

DICAEOPOLIS

Not unless Lamachus gets paid for it.

LAMACHUS

But I propose always to war with the Peloponnesians, both at sea, on land and everywhere to make them tremble, and trounce them soundly.
(He goes back into his house.)

DICAEOPOLIS

For my own part, I make proclamation to all Peloponnesians, Megarians and Boeotians, that to them my markets are open; but I debar Lamachus from entering them.

(He goes into his house.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Convinced by this man's speech, the folk have changed their view and approve him for having concluded peace. But let us prepare for the recital of the parabasis.

(The CHORUS moves forward and faces the audience.)

Never since our poet presented comedies, has he praised himself upon the stage; but, having been slandered by his enemies amongst the volatile Athenians, accused of scoffing at his country and of insulting the people, today he wishes to reply and regain for himself the inconstant Athenians. He maintains that he has done much that is good for you; if you no longer allow yourselves to be too much hoodwinked by strangers or seduced by flattery, if in politics you are no longer the ninnies you once were, it is thanks to him. Formerly, when delegates from other cities wanted to deceive you, they had but to style you, "the people crowned with violets," and at the word "violets" you at once sat erect on the tips of your bums. Or if, to tickle your vanity, someone spoke of "rich and sleek Athens," in return for that "sleekness" he would get anything he wanted, because he spoke of you as he would have of anchovies in oil. In cautioning you against such wiles, the poet has done you great service as well as in forcing you to understand what is really the democratic principle. Thus the strangers, who came to pay their tributes, wanted to see this great poet, who had dared to speak the truth to Athens. And so far has the fame of his boldness reached that one day the Great King, when questioning the Lacedaemonian delegates, first asked them which of the two rival cities was the superior at sea, and then immediately demanded at which it was that the comic poet directed his biting satire. "Happy that city," he added, "if it listens to his counsel; it will grow in power, and its victory is assured." This is why the Lacedaemonians offer you peace, if you will cede them Aegina; not that

they care for the isle, but they wish to rob you of your poet. As for you, never lose him, who will always fight for the cause of justice in his comedies; he promises you that his precepts will lead you to happiness, though he uses neither flattery, nor bribery, nor intrigue, nor deceit; instead of loading you with praise, he will point you to the better way. I scoff at Cleon's tricks and plotting; honesty and justice shall fight my cause; never will you find me a political poltroon, a prostitute to the highest bidder.

FIRST SEMICHORUS (singing)

I invoke thee, Acharnian Muse, fierce and fell as the devouring fire; sudden as the spark that bursts from the crackling oaken coal when roused by the quickening fan to fry little fishes, while others knead the dough or whip the sharp Thasian pickle with rapid hand, so break forth, my Muse, and inspire thy tribesmen with rough, vigorous, stirring strains.

LEADER OF FIRST SEMICHORUS

We others, now old men and heavy with years, we reproach the city; so many are the victories we have gained for the Athenian fleets that we well deserve to be cared for in our declining life; yet far from this, we are illused, harassed with lawsuits, delivered over to the scorn of stripling orators. Our minds and bodies being ravaged with age, Posidon should protect us, yet we have no other support than a staff. When standing before the judge, we can scarcely stammer forth the fewest words, and of justice we see but its barest shadow, whereas the accuser, desirous of conciliating the younger men, overwhelms us with his ready rhetoric; he drags us before the judge, presses us with questions, lays traps for us; the onslaught troubles, upsets and ruins poor old Tithonus, who, crushed with age, stands tongue-tied; sentenced to a fine, he weeps, he sobs and says to his friend, "This fine robs me of the last trifle that was to have bought my coffin."

SECOND SEMICHORUS (singing)

Is this not a scandal? What! the clepsydra is to kill the white-haired veteran, who, in fierce fighting, has so oft covered himself with glorious sweat, whose valour at Marathon saved the country! We were the ones who pursued on the field of Marathon, whereas now it is wretches who pursue us to the death and crush us. What would Marpsias reply to this?

LEADER OF SECOND SEMICHORUS

What an injustice that a man, bent with age like Thucydides, should be browbeaten by this braggart advocate, Cephisodemus, who is as savage as the Scythian desert he was born in! I wept tears of pity when I saw a Scythian maltreat this old man, who, by Ceres, when he was young and the true Thucydides, would not have permitted an insult from Ceres herself! At that date he would have floored ten orators like Euathlus, he would have terrified three thousand Scythians with his shouts; he would have pierced the whole line of the enemy with his shafts. Ah! but if you will not leave the aged in peace, decree that the advocates be matched; thus the old man will only be confronted with a toothless greybeard, the young will fight with the braggart, the ignoble with the son of Clinias; make law that in the future, the old man can only be summoned and convicted at the courts by the aged and the young man by the youth.

DICAEOPOLIS (coming out of his house and marking out a square in front of it)

These are the confines of my marketplace. All Peloponnesians, Megarians, Boeotians, have the right to come and trade here, provided they sell their wares to me and not to Lamachus. As marketinspectors I appoint these three whips of Leprean leather, chosen by lot. Warned away are all informers and all men of Phasis. They are bringing me the pillar on which the treaty is inscribed and I shall erect it in the centre of the market, well in sight of all.

(He goes back into the house just as a Megarian enters from the left, carrying a sack on his shoulder and followed by his two little little daughters.)

MEGARIAN

Hail! market of Athens, beloved of Megarians. Let Zeus, the patron of friendship, witness, I regretted you as a mother mourns her son. Come, poor little daughters of an unfortunate father, try to find something to eat; listen to me with the full heed of an empty belly. Which would you prefer? To be sold or to cry with hunger?

DAUGHTERS

To be sold, to be sold!

MEGARIAN

That is my opinion too. But who would make so sorry a deal as to buy you? Ah! I recall me a Megarian trick; I am going to disguise you as little porkers, that I am offering for sale. Fit your hands with these hoofs and take care to appear the issue of a sow of good breed, for, if I am forced to take you back to the house, by Hermes! you will suffer cruelly of hunger! Then fix on these snouts and cram yourselves into this sack. Forget not to grunt and to say weewee like the little pigs that are sacrificed in the Mysteries. I must summon Dicaeopolis. Where is he? (Loudly) Dicaeopolis, do you want to buy some nice little porkers?

DICAEOPOLIS (coming out of his house)

Who are you? a Megarian?

MEGARIAN

I have come to your market.

DICAEOPOLIS

Well, how are things at Megara?

MEGARIAN

We are crying with hunger at our firesides.

DICAEOPOLIS

The fireside is jolly enough with a piper. But what else is doing at Megara?

MEGARIAN

What else? When I left for the market, the authorities were taking steps to let us die in the quickest manner.

DICAEOPOLIS

That is the best way to get you out of all your troubles.

MEGARIAN

True.

DICAEOPOLIS

What other news of Megara? What is wheat selling at?

MEGARIAN

With us it is valued as highly as the very gods in heaven!

DICAEOPOLIS

Is it salt that you are bringing?

MEGARIAN

Aren't you the ones that are holding back the salt?

DICAEOPOLIS

Is it garlic then?

MEGARIAN

What! garlic! do you not at every raid like mice grub up the ground with your pikes to pull out every single head?

DICAEOPOLIS

What (r)are you bringing then?

MEGARIAN

Little sows, like those they immolate at the Mysteries.

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! very well, show me them.

MEGARIAN

They are very fine; feel their weight. See! how fat and fine.

DICAEOPOLIS (feeling around in the sack)

Hey! what's (r)this?

MEGARIAN

A sow.

DICAEOPOLIS

A (r)sow, you say? Where from, then?

MEGARIAN

From Megara. What! isn't it a sow then?

DICAEOPOLIS (feeling around in the sack again)

No, I don't believe it is.

MEGARIAN

This is too much! what an incredulous man! He says it's not a sow; but we will stake, if you will, a measure of salt ground up with thyme, that in good Greek this is called a sow and nothing else.

DICAEOPOLIS

But a sow of the human kind.

MEGARIAN

Without question, by Diocles! of my own breed! Well! What think you? would you like to hear them squeal?

DICAEOPOLIS

Yes, I would.

MEGARIAN

Cry quickly, wee sowlet; squeak up, hussy, or by Hermes! I take you back to the house.

DAUGHTERS

Weewee, weewee!

MEGARIAN

Is that a little sow, or not?

DICAEOPOLIS

Yes, it seems so; but let it grow up, and it will be a fine fat thing.

MEGARIAN

In five years it will be just like its mother.

DICAEOPOLIS

But it cannot be sacrificed.

MEGARIAN

And why not?

DICAEOPOLIS

It has no tail.

MEGARIAN

Because it is quite young, but in good time it will have a big one, thick and red. But if you are willing to bring it up you will have a very fine sow.

DICAEOPOLIS

The two are as like as two peas.

MEGARIAN

They are born of the same father and mother; let them be fattened, let them grow their bristles, and they will be the finest sows you can offer to Aphrodite.

DICAEOPOLIS

But sows are not immolated to Aphrodite.

MEGARIAN

Not sows to Aphrodite! Why, she's the only goddess to whom they are offered! the flesh of my sows will be excellent on your spit.

DICAEOPOLIS

Can they eat alone? They no longer need their mother?

MEGARIAN

Certainly not, nor their father.

DICAEOPOLIS

What do they like most?

MEGARIAN

Whatever is given them; but ask for yourself.

DICAEOPOLIS

Speak! little sow.

DAUGHTERS

Weewee, weewee!

DICAEOPOLIS

Can you eat chickpease?

DAUGHTERS

Weewee, weewee, weewee!

DICAEOPOLIS

And Attic figs?

DAUGHTERS

Weewee, weewee!

DICAEOPOLIS

What sharp squeaks at the name of figs. Come, let some figs be brought for these little pigs. Will they eat them? Goodness! how they munch them, what a grinding of teeth, mighty Heracles! I believe those pigs hail from the land of the Voracians.

MEGARIAN (aside)

But they have not eaten all the figs; I took this one myself.

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! what curious creatures! For what sum will you sell them?

MEGARIAN

I will give you one for a bunch of garlic, and the other, if you like, for a quart measure of salt.

DICAEOPOLIS

I'll buy them. Wait for me here.

(He goes into the house.)

MEGARIAN

The deal is done. Hermes, god of good traders, grant I may sell both my wife and my mother in the same way!

(An INFORMER enters.)

INFORMER

Hi! fellow, what country are you from?

MEGARIAN

I am a pigmerchant from Megara.

INFORMER

I shall denounce both your pigs and yourself as public enemies.

MEGARIAN

Ah! here our troubles begin afresh!

INFORMER

Let go of that sack. I'll teach you to talk Megarian!

MEGARIAN (loudly)

Dicaeopolis, Dicaeopolis, they want to denounce me.

DICAEOPOLIS (from within)

Who dares do this thing? (He comes out of his house.) Inspectors, drive out the informers. Ah! you offer to enlighten us without a lamp!

INFORMER

What! I may not denounce our enemies?

DICAEOPOLIS (With a threatening gesture)

Watch out for yourself, and go off pretty quick and denounce elsewhere.

(The INFORMER runs away.)

MEGARIAN

What a plague to Athens!

DICAEOPOLIS

Be reassured, Megarian. Here is the price for your two sowlets, the garlic and the salt. Farewell and much happiness!

MEGARIAN

Ah! we never have that amongst us.

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh, I'm sorry if I said the wrong thing.

MEGARIAN

Farewell, dear little sows, and seek, far from your father, to munch your bread with salt, if they give you any.

(He departs and DICAEOPOLIS takes the "sows" into his house.)

CHORUS (singing)

Here is a man truly happy. See how everything succeeds to his wish. Peacefully seated in his market, he will earn his living; woe to Ctesias, and all other informers who dare to enter there! You will not be cheated as to the value of wares, you will not again see Prepis wiping his big arse, nor will Cleonymus jostle you; you will take your walks, clothed in a fine tunic, without meeting Hyperbolus and his unceasing quibblings, without being accosted on the public place by any importunate fellow, neither by Cratinus, shaven in the fashion of the adulterers, nor by this musician, who plagues us with his silly improvisations, that hyperrogue Artemo, with his armpits stinking as foul as a goat, like his father before him. You will not be the butt of the villainous Pauson's jeers, nor of Lysistratus, the disgrace of the Cholargian deme, who is the incarnation of all the vices, and

endures cold and hunger more than thirty days in the month.

(A BOEOTIAN enters, followed by his slave, who is carrying a large assortment of articles of food, and by a troop of flute players.)

BOEOTIAN

By Heracles! my shoulder is quite black and blue. Ismenias, put the pennyroyal down there very gently, and all of you, musicians from Thebes, strike up on your bone flutes "The Dog's Arse."

(The Musicians immediately begin an atrocious rendition of a vulgar tune.)

DICAEOPOLIS

Enough, damn you; get out of here! Rascally hornets, away with you! Whence has sprung this accursed swarm of Chaeris fellows which comes assailing my door?

(The Musicians depart.)

BOEOTIAN

Ah! by Iolas! Drive them off, my dear host, you will please me immensely; all the way from Thebes, they were there piping behind me and they have completely stripped my pennyroyal of its blossom. But will you buy anything of me, some chickens or some locusts?

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! good day, Boeotian, eater of good round loaves. What do (r)you bring?

BOEOTIAN

All that is good in Boeotia, marjoram, pennyroyal, rushmats, lampwicks, ducks, jays, woodcocks, waterfowl, wrens, divers.

DICAEOPOLIS

A regular hail of birds is beating down on my market.

BOEOTIAN

I also bring geese, hares, foxes, moles, hedgehogs, cats, lyres, martins, otters and eels from the Copaic lake.

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! my friend, you, who bring me the most delicious of fish, let me salute your eels.

BOEOTIAN (in tragic style)

Come, thou, the eldest of my fifty Copaic virgins, come and complete the joy of our host.

DICAEOPOLIS (likewise)

Oh! my wellbeloved, thou object of my long regrets, thou art here at last then, thou, after whom the comic poets sigh, thou, who art dear to Morychus. Slaves, hither with the stove and the bellows. Look at this charming eel, that returns to us after six long years of absence. Salute it, my children; as for myself, I will supply coal to do honour to the stranger. Take it into my house; death itself could not separate me from her, if cooked with beet leaves.

BOEOTIAN

And what will you give me in return?

DICAEOPOLIS

It will pay for your market dues. And as to the rest, what do you wish to sell me?

BOEOTIAN

Why, everything.

DICAEOPOLIS

On what terms? For readymoney or in wares from these parts?

BOEOTIAN

I would take some Athenian produce, that we have not got in Boeotia.

DICAEOPOLIS

Phaleric anchovies, pottery?

BOEOTIAN

Anchovies, pottery? But these we have. I want produce that is wanting with us and that is plentiful here.

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! I have the very thing; take away an informer, packed up carefully as crockeryware.

BOEOTIAN

By the twin gods! I should earn big money, if I took one; I would exhibit him as an ape full of spite.

DICAEOPOLIS (as an informer enters)

Hah! here we have Nicarchus, who comes to denounce you.

BOEOTIAN

How small he is!

DICAEOPOLIS

But all pure evil.

NICARCHUS

Whose are these goods?

DICAEOPOLIS

Mine, they come from Boeotia, I call Zeus to witness.

NICARCHUS

I denounce them as coming from an enemy's country.

BOEOTIAN

What! you declare war against birds?

NICARCHUS

And I am going to denounce you too.

BOEOTIAN

What harm have I done you?

NICARCHUS

I will say it for the benefit of those that listen; you introduce lampwicks from an enemy's country.

DICAEOPOLIS

Then you even denounce a wick.

NICARCHUS

It needs but one to set an arsenal afire.

DICAEOPOLIS

A wick set an arsenal ablaze! But how, great gods?

NICARCHUS

Should a Boeotian attach it to an insect's wing, and, taking advantage of a violent north wind, throw it by means of a tube into the arsenal and the fire once get hold of the vessels, everything would soon be devoured by the flames.

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! wretch! an insect and a wick devour everything!
(He strikes him.)

NICARCHUS (to the CHORUS)

You will bear witness, that he mishandles me.

DICAEOPOLIS (to the BOEOTIAN)

Shut his mouth. Give me some hay; I am going to pack him up like a vase, that he may not get broken on the road.
(The INFORMER is bound and gagged and packed in hay.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Pack up your goods carefully, friend; that the stranger may not break it when taking it away.

DICAEOPOLIS

I shall take great care with it. (He hits the INFORMER on the head and a stifled cry is heard.) One would say he is cracked already; he rings with a false note, which the gods abhor.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But what will be done with him?

DICAEOPOLIS

This is a vase good for all purposes; it will be used as a vessel for holding all foul things, a mortar for pounding together lawsuits, a lamp for spying upon accounts, and as a cup for the mixing up and poisoning of everything.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

None could ever trust a vessel for domestic use that has such a ring about it.

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh! it is strong, my friend, and will never get broken, if care is taken to hang it head downwards.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (to the BOEOTIAN)

There! it is well packed now!

BOEOTIAN

Well then, I will proceed to carry off my bundle.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Farewell, worthiest of strangers, take this informer, good for anything, and fling him where you like.

DICAEOPOLIS

Bah! this rogue has given me enough trouble to pack! Here! Boeotian, pick up your pottery.

BOEOTIAN

Stoop, Ismenias, that I may put it on your shoulder, and be very careful with it.

DICAEOPOLIS

You carry nothing worth having; however, take it, for you will profit by your bargain; the informers will bring you luck.

(The BOEOTIAN and his slave depart; DICAEOPOLIS goes into his house; a slave comes out of LAMACHUS' house.)

SLAVE

Dicaeopolis!

DICAEOPOLIS (from within)

What's the matter? Why are you calling me?

SLAVE

Lamachus wants to keep the Feast of Cups, and I come by his order to bid you one drachma for some thrushes and three more for a Copaic eel.

DICAEOPOLIS (coming out)

And who is this Lamachus, who demands an eel?

SLAVE (in tragic style)

He is the terrible, indefatigable Lamachus, who is always brandishing his fearful Gorgon's head and the three plumes which o'ershadow his helmet.

DICAEOPOLIS

No, no, he will get nothing, even though he gave me his buckler. Let him eat salt fish while he shakes his plumes, and, if he comes here making any din, I shall call the inspectors. As for myself, I shall take away all these goods; (in tragic style) I go home on thrushes' wings and blackbirds' pinions. (He goes into his house.)

FIRST SEMICHORUS (singing)

You see, citizens, you see the good fortune which this man owes to his prudence, to his profound wisdom. You see how, since he has concluded peace, he buys what is useful in the household and good to eat hot. All good things flow towards him unsought. Never will I welcome the god of war in (r)my house; never shall (r)he sing the "Harmodius" at my table; he is a sot, who comes feasting with those

who are overflowing with good things and brings all manner of mischief in his train. He overthrows, ruins, rips open; it is vain to make him a thousand offers, to say "be seated, pray, and drink this cup, proffered in all friendship"; he burns our vinestocks and brutally spills on the ground the wine from our vineyards.

SECOND SEMICHORUS (singing)

This man, on the other hand, covers his table with a thousand dishes; proud of his good fortunes, he has had these feathers cast before his door to show us how he lives. (A woman appears, bearing the attributes of Peace.) Oh, Peace! companion of fair Aphrodite and of the sweet Graces, how charming are thy features and yet I never knew it! Would that Eros might join me to thee, Eros crowned with roses as Zeuxis shows him to us! Do I seem somewhat old to thee? I am yet able to make thee a threefold offering; despite my age I could plant a long row of vines for you; then beside these some tender cuttings from the fig; finally a young vinestock, loaded with fruit, and all around the field olive trees, to furnish us with oil wherewith to anoint us both at the New Moons.

(A HERALD enters.)

HERALD

Oyez, oyez! As was the custom of your forebears, empty a full pitcher of wine at the call of the trumpet; he who first sees the bottom shall get a wineskin as round and plump as Ctesiphon's belly.

DICAEOPOLIS (coming out of the house; to his family within)

Women, children, have you not heard? Faith! do you not heed the herald? Quick! let the hares boil and roast merrily; keep them turning; withdraw them from the flame; prepare the chaplets; reach me the skewers that I may spit the thrushes.

LEADER OF FIRST SEMICHORUS

I envy you your wisdom and even more your good cheer.

DICAEOPOLIS

What then will you say when you see the thrushes roasting?

LEADER OF FIRST SEMICHORUS

Ah! true indeed!

DICAEOPOLIS

Slave! stir up the fire.

LEADER OF FIRST SEMICHORUS

See, how he knows his business, what a perfect cook! How well he understands the way to prepare a good dinner!

(A HUSBANDMAN enters in haste.)

HUSBANDMAN

Ah! woe is me!

DICAEOPOLIS

Heracles! What have we here?

HUSBANDMAN

A most miserable man.

DICAEOPOLIS

Keep your misery for yourself.

HUSBANDMAN

Ah! friend! since you alone are enjoying peace, grant me a part of your truce, were it but five years.

DICAEOPOLIS

What has happened to you?

HUSBANDMAN

I am ruined; I have lost a pair of steers.

DICAEOPOLIS

How?

HUSBANDMAN

The Boeotians seized them at Phyle.

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! poor wretch! and do you still wear white?

HUSBANDMAN

Their dung made my wealth.

DICAEOPOLIS

What can I do in the matter?

HUSBANDMAN

Crying for my beasts has lost me my eyesight. Ah! if you care for poor Dercetes of Phyle, anoint mine eyes quickly with your balm of peace.

DICAEOPOLIS

But, my poor fellow, I do not practise medicine.

HUSBANDMAN

Come, I adjure you; perhaps I shall recover my steers.

DICAEOPOLIS

Impossible; away, go and whine to the disciples of Pittalus.

HUSBANDMAN

Grant me but one drop of peace; pour it into this little reed.

DICAEOPOLIS

No, not a particle; go and weep somewhere else.

HUSBANDMAN (as he departs)

Oh! oh! oh! my poor beasts!

LEADER OF SECOND SEMICHORUS

This man has discovered the sweetest enjoyment in peace; he will share it with none.

DICAEOPOLIS (to a slave)

Pour honey over this tripe; set it before the fire to dry.

LEADER OF SECOND SEMICHORUS

What lofty tones he uses! Did you hear him?

DICAEOPOLIS (to the slaves inside the house)

Get the eels on the gridiron!

LEADER OF SECOND SEMICHORUS

You are killing me with hunger; your smoke is choking your neighbours, and you split our ears with your bawling.

DICAEOPOLIS

Have this fried and let it be nicely browned.

(He goes back into the house. A WEDDING GUEST enters, carrying a package.)

WEDDING GUEST

Dicaeopolis! Dicaeopolis!

DICAEOPOLIS

Who are you?

WEDDING GUEST

A young bridegroom sends you these viands from the marriage feast.

DICAEOPOLIS

Whoever he be, I thank him.

WEDDING GUEST

And in return, he prays you to pour a glass of peace into this vase, that he may not have to go to the front and may stay at home to make love to his young wife.

DICAEOPOLIS

Take back, take back your viands; for a thousand drachmae I would not give a drop of peace. (A young woman enters) But who is she?

WEDDING GUEST

She is the matron of honour; she wants to say something to you from the bride privately.

DICAEOPOLIS

Come, what do you wish to say? (The MATRON OF HONOUR whispers in his ear.) (r)Ah! what a ridiculous demand! The bride burns with longing to keep her husband's tool at home. Come! bring hither my truce; to her alone will I give some of it, for she is a woman, and, as such, should not suffer under the war. Here, friend, hand me your vial. And as to the manner of applying this balm, tell the bride, when a levy of soldiers is made, to rub some in bed on her husband, where most needed. (The MATRON OF HONOUR and the WEDDING GUEST depart.) There, slave, take away my truce! Now, quick, bring me the wineflagon, that I may fill up the drinking bowls!

(The slave leaves. A HERALD enters.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (in tragic style)

I see a man, "striding along apace, with knitted brows; he seems

to us the bearer of terrible tidings."

HERALD (in tragic style)

Oh! toils and battles and Lamachus!

(He knocks on LAMACHUS' door.)

LAMACHUS (from within; in tragic style)

What noise resounds around my dwelling, where shines the glint of arms.

(He comes out of his house.)

HERALD

The Generals order you forthwith to take your battalions and your plumes, and, despite the snow, to go and guard our borders. They have learnt that a band of Boeotians intend taking advantage of the Feast of Cups to invade our country.

LAMACHUS

Ah! the Generals! they are numerous, but not good for much! It's cruel, not to be able to enjoy the feast!

DICAEOPOLIS

Oh! warlike host of Lamachus!

LAMACHUS

Wretch! do you dare to jeer me?

DICAEOPOLIS

Do you want to fight this fourwinged Geryon?

LAMACHUS

Oh! oh! what fearful tidings!

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah! ah! I see another herald running up; what news does he bring me?

(Another HERALD enters.)

HERALD

Dicaeopolis!

DICAEOPOLIS

What is the matter?

HERALD

Come quickly to the feast and bring your basket and your cup; it is the priest of Bacchus who invites you. But hasten, the guests have been waiting for you a long while. All is ready couches, tables, cushions, chaplets, perfumes, dainties and whores to boot; biscuits, cakes, sesamebread, tarts, lovely dancing women, and the "Harmodius." But come with all speed.

LAMACHUS

Oh! hostile gods!

DICAEOPOLIS

This is not astounding; you have chosen this great ugly Gorgon's

head for your patron. (To a slave) You, shut the door, and let someone get ready the meal.

LAMACHUS

Slave! slave! my knapsack!

DICAEOPOLIS

Slave! slave! a basket!

LAMACHUS

Take salt and thyme, slave, and don't forget the onions.

DICAEOPOLIS

Get some fish for me; I cannot bear onions.

LAMACHUS

Slave, wrap me up a little stale salt meat in a figleaf.

DICAEOPOLIS

And for me some nice fat tripe in a figleaf; I will have it cooked here.

LAMACHUS

Bring me the plumes for my helmet.

DICAEOPOLIS

Bring me wild pigeons and thrushes.

LAMACHUS

How white and beautiful are these ostrich feathers!

DICAEOPOLIS

How fat and well browned is the flesh of this woodpigeon!

LAMACHUS (to DICAEOPOLIS)

My friend, stop scoffing at my armour.

DICAEOPOLIS (to LAMACHUS)

My friend, stop staring at my thrushes.

LAMACHUS (to his slave)

Bring me the case for my triple plume.

DICAEOPOLIS (to his slave)

Pass me over that dish of hare.

LAMACHUS

Alas! the moths have eaten the hair of my crest.

DICAEOPOLIS

Shall I eat my hare before dinner?

LAMACHUS

My friend, will you kindly not speak to me?

DICAEOPOLIS

I'm not speaking to you; I'm scolding my slave. (To the slave)

Shall we wager and submit the matter to Lamachus, which of the two is the best to eat, a locust or a thrush?

LAMACHUS
Insolent hound!

DICAEOPOLIS
He much prefers the locusts.

LAMACHUS
Slave, unhook my spear and bring it to me.

DICAEOPOLIS
Slave, slave, take the sausage from the fire and bring it to me.

LAMACHUS
Come, let me draw my spear from its sheath. Hold it, slave, hold it tight.

DICAEOPOLIS
And you, slave, grip well hold of the skewer.

LAMACHUS
Slave, the bracings for my shield.

DICAEOPOLIS
Pull the loaves out of the oven and bring me these bracings of my stomach.

LAMACHUS
My round buckler with the Gorgon's head.

DICAEOPOLIS
My round cheesecake.

LAMACHUS
What clumsy wit!

DICAEOPOLIS
What delicious cheesecake!

LAMACHUS
Pour oil on the buckler. Hah! hah! I can see reflected there an old man who will be accused of cowardice.

DICAEOPOLIS
Pour honey on the cake. Hah! hah! I can see an old man who makes Lamachus of the Gorgon's head weep with rage.

LAMACHUS
Slave, full war armour.

DICAEOPOLIS
Slave, my beaker; that is my armour.

LAMACHUS
With this I hold my ground with any foe.

DICAEOPOLIS

And I with this in any drinking bout.

LAMACHUS

Fasten the strappings to the buckler.

DICAEOPOLIS

Pack the dinner well into the basket.

LAMACHUS

Personally I shall carry the knapsack.

DICAEOPOLIS

Personally I shall carry the cloak.

LAMACHUS

Slave, take up the buckler and let's be off. It is snowing! God help us! A wintry business!

DICAEOPOLIS

Take up the basket, mine's a festive business.
(They depart in opposite directions.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We wish you both joy on your journeys, which differ so much. One goes to mount guard and freeze, while the other will drink, crowned with flowers, and then lie with a young beauty till he gets his tool all sore.

CHORUS (singing)

I say it freely; may Zeus confound Antimachus, the poethistorian, the son of Psacas! When Choregus at the Lenaea, alas! alas! he dismissed me dinnerless. May I see him devouring with his eyes a cuttlefish, just served, well cooked, hot and properly salted; and the moment that he stretches his hand to help himself, may a dog seize it and run off with it. Such is my first wish. I also hope for him a misfortune at night. That returning allfevered from horse practice, he may meet an Orestes, mad with drink, who will crack him over the head; that wishing to seize a stone, he, in the dark, may pick up a fresh turd, hurl, miss him and hit Cratinus.

(The slave of LAMACHUS enters.)

SLAVE OF LAMACHUS (knocking on the door of LAMACHUS' house, in tragic style)

Captives present within the house of Lamachus, water, water in a little pot! Make it warm, get ready cloths, cerate, greasy wool and bandages for his ankle. In leaping a ditch, the master has hurt himself against a stake; he has dislocated and twisted his ankle, broken his head by falling on a stone, while his Gorgon shot far away from his buckler. His mighty braggadocio plume rolled on the ground; at this sight he uttered these doleful words, "Radiant star, I gaze on thee for the last time; my eyes close to all light, I die." Having said this, he falls into the water, gets out again, meets some runaways and pursues the robbers with his spear at their backsides. But here he comes, himself. Get the door open.

(In this final scene all the lines are sung.)

LAMACHUS (limping in with the help of two soldiers and singing a song of woe)

Oh! heavens! oh! heavens! What cruel pain! I faint, I tremble!
Alas! I die! the foe's lance has struck me! But what would hurt me
most would be for Dicaeopolis to see me wounded thus and laugh at my
illfortune.

DICAEOPOLIS (enters with two courtesans, singing gaily)

Oh! my gods! what breasts! Swelling like quinces! Come, my
treasures, give me voluptuous kisses! Glue your lips to mine. Haha! I
was the first to empty my cup.

LAMACHUS

Oh! cruel fate! how I suffer! accursed wounds!

DICAEOPOLIS

Hah! hah! Hail! Lamachippus!

LAMACHUS

Woe is me!

DICAEOPOLIS (to the one girl)

Why do you kiss me?

LAMACHUS

Ah, wretched me!

DICAEOPOLIS (to the other girl)

And why do you bite me?

LAMACHUS

'Twas a cruel score I was paying back!

DICAEOPOLIS

Scores are not evened at the Feast of Cups!

LAMACHUS

Oh! Oh! Paeon, Paeon!

DICAEOPOLIS

But today is not the feast of Paeon.

LAMACHUS (to the soldiers)

Oh! take hold of my leg, do; ah! hold it tenderly, my friends!

DICAEOPOLIS (to the girls)

And you, my darlings, take hold of my tool, both of you!

LAMACHUS

This blow with the stone makes me dizzy; my sight grows dim.

DICAEOPOLIS

For myself, I want to get to bed; I've got an erection and I
want to make love in the dark.

LAMACHUS

Carry me to the surgeon Pittalus. Put me in his healing hands!

DICAEOPOLIS

Take me to the judges. Where is the king of the feast? The wineskin is mine!

LAMACHUS (as he is being carried away)

That spear has pierced my bones; what torture I endure!

DICAEOPOLIS (to the audience)

You see this empty cup! I triumph! I triumph!

CHORUS

Old man, I come at your bidding! You triumph! you triumph!

DICAEOPOLIS

Again I have brimmed my cup with unmixed wine and drained it at a draught!

CHORUS

You triumph then, brave champion; thine is the wineskin!

DICAEOPOLIS

Follow me, singing "Triumph! Triumph!"

CHORUS

Aye! we will sing of thee, thee and thy sacred wineskin, and we all, as we follow thee, will repeat in thine honour, "Triumph, Triumph!"

THE END