

# **THE PLUTUS OF ARISTOPHANES**

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**W. C. GREEN**

**THE PLUTUS OF  
ARISTOPHANES**



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THE

PLUTUS OF ARISTOPHANES,

*CLOSELY TRANSLATED,*

FROM THE TEXT OF H. A. HOLDEN,

WITH NOTES.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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ARISTOPHANES exhibited two plays of the same name *Plutus*: the first B.C. 408, the second B.C. 388. Several things show our *Plutus* to be the later play: the absence of choric interludes, and of personalities; also two or three allusions to events subsequent to the first *Plutus*, e.g. in lines 173 and 1146. The licence of Comedy had been checked by law: the *Plutus* may be marked as belonging to New Comedy or nearly so. It deals with the general question of the anomalies in the distribution of wealth, whether riches or poverty do the most good. An insoluble question this is, barely stated, for without poverty there could be no riches. The imagination of the poet however puts before us the result in a limited way at Athens, by restoring to sight the blind god of wealth *Plutus*, that he may give his favours to the deserving. Whether the result is a success, even for the few persons concerned, may be doubted: the difficulties on the whole attending anything like the general distribution of wealth which *Chremylus* contemplated are not grappled with at all. The following is an outline of the play:—

*Chremylus*, a poor old man but honest, seeing many rogues prosper and many worthy men in want, consults *Apollo* on the matter. What is he to do? what is his son to do? is he to go in for knavery? *Apollo* tells him to take home with him the first man he meets on leaving the temple. He meets an old blind beggarly fellow; and, with his slave *Carion*, follows him. Hardly will the old man say who he is: at last he says that he is *Plutus*. They ask him about his blindness; and *Chremylus* proposes to get him his sight again. At first

Plutus is in terror, for Zeus who had made him blind will (he thinks) destroy him. They laugh at that, show that he Plutus is more powerful than Zeus; and Carion is sent to fetch Chremylus' friends, poor honest countrymen, who form the Chorus, to help them in their plans. Chremylus and Plutus then enter Chremylus' house. (ll. 1—241.)

Carion finds and brings the Chorus; and on the way tells them about Plutus. They exchange jeers and chaff till they reach the house, where Carion goes in to refresh himself.

(ll. 242—309.)

Chremylus comes out and welcomes them: they promise ready help. And now comes Blepsidemus, having got wind of Chremylus' good fortune. Chremylus explains that he is not rich yet, but hopes to be so: and Blepsidemus imagines that his wealth must come by theft or some knavery, and after a little sham moralising proposes to go shares and hold his tongue. Hardly can he be convinced of the truth about Plutus, but when he is, he agrees to his friend's plan of restoring him to sight by the help of Asclepius, god of medicine. At this point in rushes Poverty in a rage, threatening destruction. At first they chaff her: but, when she tells her name, Blepsidemus prepares to run. Chremylus calls him back, says they can defeat her by the help of Plutus, and asks Poverty why she abuses them so. She complains that they mean to restore Plutus' sight and expel her. This is a good thing, Chremylus says; but Poverty replies that it is a very bad thing, that she, Poverty, will argue the case and prove that she is the cause of all good. They debate the question. Chremylus points out the unfairness of things at present, whereas if Plutus recovers sight, his gifts will go to the deserving. Poverty shows that by a general distribution of wealth all trade will be paralysed, all invention and enterprise checked. To Chremylus' list of the hardships and squalor of the poor she replies that he is confounding thriftless beggary



with poverty. Then she shows how riches lead to luxury, and weaken the body, and corrupt the morals, while poverty does the opposite. Her facts Chremylus cannot deny, but says riches must be better than poverty, for all men flee from poverty. Because they do not know what is best for them, she replies. After a few more arguments Chremylus says he does not mean to be convinced, becomes abusive, and drives her away. Then he calls Carion, and with Plutus they start for Asclepius' temple. (ll. 310—614.)

Carion returns and reports to the Chorus that they have well sped, that Plutus has got his sight. Chremylus' wife hearing their cries of joy comes out: and to her Carion tells the whole tale. They went to the temple, made Plutus lie down among other patients. The priest went round during the night and bagged the offerings: Carion appropriated some porridge. Soon Asclepius went his round, treated a rogue as he deserved, but cured Plutus. Plutus with Chremylus and a rejoicing crowd will soon arrive. The wife is delighted.

(ll. 615—753.)

Plutus comes with Chremylus: he is ashamed of his former plight and resolved to give henceforth to the deserving. The wife welcomes them and they go in. (ll. 754—784.)

Carion comes out, and describes the scene within; how all is plenty, splendour and magnificence. A just man approaches, to make a thank-offering to Plutus for the sudden change in his fortunes: it is his old doublet and shoes that he brings. But an informer comes with a different tale; his occupation is gone. He complains, blusters, threatens, accuses them of theft. They laugh at him, question him about his trade, and, when he refuses to change it for an honest one, they strip him and put on him the ragged doublet and the shoes, and send him off threatening vengeance. Then they go in. (ll. 785—938.)

Next comes an old woman, asking for Chremylus. When he comes out, she tells him how she when rich had a young lover who was poor, but now he is rich and will none of her. Chremylus pretends sympathy, but laughs at her: and, while they talk, the young man comes rollicking in. There is more jeering at the old woman: but in the end they all three go indoors. (ll. 939—1052.)

Hermes comes and knocks at the closed door: which brings Carion out. Hermes threatens destruction from Zeus to the whole household, because the gods no longer get any sacrifices. But he says he does not care much for any good but himself, and appeals to Carion to let him join them. But in what capacity? Being a god of many titles he at last finds one to suit, and is set to work. (ll. 1053—1126.)

The priest of Zeus reports much the same: no sacrifices, no feasting, no perquisites for priests. Carion advises him to stay with them: Plutus is a better 'Preserver' than Zeus. This he consents to do. They are to enthrone Plutus in the treasury behind the Parthenon; so they form a procession, the old woman bearing on her head some pots, the chorus singing and bringing up the rear. (ll. 1127—1165.)

## THE PLUTUS.

CARION, CHREMYLUS, PLUTUS.

CARION. How terrible a thing it is, O Zeus and ye gods, to become the slave of a crazy master! For if the servant happen to have spoken<sup>1</sup> the best *advice*, but appear not to do so to his owner, 'tis necessity<sup>2</sup> that the servant share<sup>3</sup> the *resulting* mischief. For fate does not allow its natural-lord to rule his body, but the purchaser.<sup>4</sup> And this indeed is thus. But Loxias,<sup>5</sup> who chants oracles<sup>6</sup> from his golden tripod, I blame with this just blame, in that he, a healer, and as they say, a wise prophet, sent away my master raving-mad; who follows behind a blind man, doing the opposite to what<sup>7</sup> it behoved him to do. For we that see lead the blind; but

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1. The verb *συγγέλω* is commonly thus constructed with a participle.

2. Supply *έστιν*, as must often be done with this word, and in other cases: e.g. in l. 8.

3. The word 'share' shows that Carion means that slaves who give good advice which their masters will not follow come in for part of the punishment which overtakes the master. As in the proverb 'Quicquid delirant reges plectuntur Achivi.' 'the princes' folly works the people's harm.'

4. Perf. part. from *ἀνάσσειν*.

5. *Λοξία* dative after *μέμφομαι* which also takes accusative of kindred meaning.

6. The different type in Holden's text marks supposed quotations. Sometimes the Greek note-writers tell us whence come these quotations; sometimes it is mere guess-work whether Aristophanes is quoting, or using mock-heroic of his own.

7. *ἤ* is a conjunction, 'than' after comparatives, but needs a different rendering after *ἄλλοιῶν*. Had the word before been 'other' or 'otherwise,' the usual 'than' would have done.