

**OP : SCENES FROM
THE BIRDS OF
ARISTOPHANES**

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Op : Scenes from the Birds of Aristophanes by Aristophanes

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ARISTOPHANES

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ΟΡΝΙΘΩΝ ΕΚΛΟΓΑΙ

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SCENES

FROM THE

BIRDS OF ARISTOPHANES

THE TRANSLATION
BY
ISAAC FLAGG

BERKELEY
THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1903



THE MASKS.

PISTHETAERUS

IRIS

POSEIDON

EUELPIDES

PROMETHEUS

HERACLES

MESSENGERS

TRIBALLUS

CHORUS OF BIRDS

THE ARGUMENT.

Two Athenians, PISTHETAEERUS (Chickwin) and EPELPIDES (Hopegood), tired of the humdrum life in their native city, choose to migrate and cast in their lot with the birds. By the eloquence of Chickwin the birds have been persuaded to build a city in the air, declare themselves independent of both gods and men, and assert their ancient prerogative of the sovereignty of the universe. While the two men are occupied in the inner sanctuary, whither they have withdrawn to be *fledged*, the bird-chorus, in the "Parabasis," present their manifesto to the public.

PARABASIS.

(Translated by ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.)

Come on then ye dwellers by nature in darkness, and like to the
leaves' generations,
That are little of might, that are moulded of mire, unending and
shadow-like nations,
Poor plumeless ephemerals, comfortless mortals, as visions of shadows
fast fleeing,
Lift up your mind unto us that are deathless, and dateless the date of
our being:

Us, children of heaven, ageless for aye, us, all of whose thoughts are eternal;
That ye may from henceforth, having heard of us all things aright as to matters supernal,
Of the being of birds, and beginning of gods, and of streams, and the dark beyond reaching,
Truthfully knowing aright, in my name bid Prodicus pack with his preaching.
It was Chaos and Night at the first, and the blackness of darkness, and Hell's broad border,
Earth was not, nor air, neither heaven; when in depths of the womb of the dark without order
First thing first-born of the black-plumed night was a wind-egg hatched in her bosom,
Whence timely with seasons revolving again sweet Love burst out as a blossom,
Gold wings gleaming forth of his back, like whirlwinds gustily turning. He, after his wedlock with Chaos, whose wings are of darkness, in Hell broad-burning,
For his nestlings begat him the race of us first, and upraised us to light new-lighted,
And before this was not the race of the gods, until all things by Love were united:
And of kind united with kind in communion of nature the sky and the sea are
Brought forth, and the earth and the race of the gods everlasting and blest. So that we are
Far away the most ancient of all things blest. And that we are of Love's generation
There are manifest manifold signs. We have wings, and with us have the Loves habitation;
And manifold fair young folk that foreswore love once, ere the bloom of them ended,

Have the men that pursued and desired them subdued, by the help of
 us only befriended,
 With such baits as a quail, a flamingo, a goose, or a cock's comb
 staring and splendid.
 All best good things that befall men come from us birds, as is plain
 to all reason;
 For first we proclaim and make known to them spring, and the winter
 and autumn in season:
 Bid sow, when the crane starts clanging for Afric, in shrill-voiced
 emigrant number,
 And calls to the pilot to hang up his rudder again for the season, and
 slumber;
 And then weave cloak for Orestes the thief, lest he strip men of theirs
 if it freezes.
 And again thereafter the kite reappearing announces a change in the
 breezes,
 And that here is the season for shearing your sheep of their spring
 wool. Then does the swallow
 Give you notice to sell your greatcoat, and provide something light
 for the heat that's to follow.
 Thus are we as Ammon or Delphi unto you, Dodona, nay, Phœbus
 Apollo.
 For, as first ye come all to get auguries of birds, even such is in all
 things your carriage,
 Be the matter a matter of trade or of earning your bread, or of any
 one's marriage.
 And all things we lay to the charge of a bird that belongs to discerning
 prediction:
 Winged fame is a bird, as you reckon; you sneeze, and the sign 's as
 a bird for conviction:
 All tokens are 'birds' with you—sounds too, and lackeys, and
 donkeys. Then must it not follow
 That we ARE to you all as the manifest godhead that speaks in
 prophetic Apollo!

In the following scenes and songs, from the latter part of the comedy of the Birds, Aristophanes, while holding constantly to the fanciful dramatic illusion of a winged community and a city in the air, has introduced, after his usual manner, a great many witty allusions of a local and personal character, besides reminiscences and travesties of the famous literature of his time. Such passages cannot, of course, impress the modern reader as forcibly as they must have impressed the contemporaries of the poet in the Dionysiac theatre at Athens; still less can their effect be adequately conveyed by means of a translation into a modern tongue.

IRIS, personification of the rainbow, messenger of the gods of Heaven, is a familiar figure to readers of the *Iliad* of Homer. We can well understand the surprise and indignation manifested by the goddess, when in Scene IV. she is intercepted on her flight down to Earth, informed that she is guilty of trespass, and called upon to show her passport.

PROMETHEUS, a god of the fallen dynasty of the Titans, sentenced by Zeus, for stealing fire and bestowing it as a gift upon mortals, to be chained to a cliff of Mt. Caucasus and preyed upon eternally by a ravenous vulture, is known to readers of Aeschylus as a type of lofty courage, sublime endurance, and a proudly defiant spirit. As he appears in Scene V. Prometheus has clearly deteriorated in respect to some of the nobler qualities of the soul, while his hatred for the gods of the Zeus administration, and his love for men—and birds, remain undiminished.

POSEIDON, god of the sea, and HERACLES, the mighty hero and demi-god, introduced in Scene VI. as ambassadors of Zeus to the birds, are typical, in the comic representation, the former of the elegant Athenian aristocracy, the latter of a class that would include the professional athlete and the sporting man.—*Triballus*, the third member of the divine commission, supposed to represent a hitherto unknown race of foreign gods, is a pure invention of Aristophanes; the name being taken from the Triballoi, a semi-barbarous people inhabiting lands near the Danube, the district of the modern Servia and Bulgaria.