

Socrates

BY

VOLTAIRE

Translated and adapted by

Frank J. Morlock

C 2000

CHARACTERS:

SOCRATES

ANITUS, High Priest

MELITUS, Athenian Judge

XANTIPPE, Wife of Socrates

AGLAEA, a young Athenian girl raised by Socrates

SOPHRONINE, a young Athenian boy raised by Socrates

DRIXA, a merchant woman attached to Anitus

TERPANDRE, attached to Anitus

ACROS, attached to Anitus

JUDGES

DISCIPLES OF SOCRATES

NONOTI, a pedant protected by Anitus

BERTIOS, another

CHOMOS, another

ACT I

ANITUS:

My dear confidants, my dear agents, you know how much money I made you during the last festival of Ceres. I'm getting married and I hope you will do your duty on this grand occasion.

DRIXA:

Yes, without doubt, Milord, since you are going to make us earn yet more.

ANITUS:

Madame Drixa, I must have two beautiful Persian rugs. You, Terpandre, of you I only ask two large silver candelabra. And of you, Acros, a half dozen dresses of silk embroidered with gold.

TERPANDRE:

That's a bit much; but Milord there's nothing I won't do to deserve your holy protection.

ANITUS:

You will regain all that a hundred fold. It's the best way to deserve the favors of the gods and goddesses. Give much and you will receive much; and especially don't fail to arouse the people against all the people of quality who do not vow enough, and who do not present offerings.

ACROS:

We will never fail in that; it's too sacred a duty not to be faithful to it.

ANITUS:

Go, my dear friends. May the gods keep you in these sentiments, so pious and just! And count on prospering, yourselves, your children and your grandchildren.

TERPANDRE:

We are sure of that because you said it.

(Exit Terpandre and Acros)

ANITUS:

Well, my dear Madame Drixa, I think you don't find it ill that I am espousing Aglaea; but I don't love you any less. We will live together as usual.

DRIXA:

Oh! Milord, I am not jealous; and since business is going so well I am very satisfied. Since I have the honor of being one of your mistresses, I have enjoyed great consideration in Athens. If you love Aglaea, I love the young Sophronine. And Xantippe, the wife of Socrates has promised to give him to me in marriage. You will still have the same rights over me. I am only annoyed that this young man may be raised by that villainous Socrates, and that Aglaea may yet be in his clutches. They must be gotten out of them as quickly as possible. Xantippe will be enchanted to be rid of them. The handsome Sophronine and the beautiful Aglaea are very ill in Socrates hands.

ANITUS:

I really flatter myself, my dear Madame Drixa, that Melitus and I will ruin that dangerous man, who preaches nothing but virtue and divinity and who has dared to mock certain intrigues that happened at the Mysteries of Ceres. But Socrates is the tutor of Aglaea. Agathon, Aglaea's father, they say has left her great wealth. Aglaea is adorable. I idolize Aglaea. I must marry Aglaea and I must deal tactfully with Socrates while waiting to hang him.

DRIXA:

Deal tactfully with Socrates in order that I may have my young man. But why did Agathon allow his daughter into the clutches of that old, flat nosed Socrates, that insufferable fault-finder who corrupts the young and prevents them from frequenting courtesans and the holy mysteries?

ANITUS:

Agathon was infatuated with the same principles. He was one of those sober and serious types who have different morals from ours; who are from another country, and who are our sworn enemies, who think they've fulfilled all their duties when they've adored divinity, helped humanity, cultivated friendship and studied philosophy; one of those folks who insolently pretend that the gods have not inscribed the future in the liver of an ox; one of those pitiless dialecticians who find fault with priests for sacrificing their daughters or spending the night with them, as needs be. You feel they are monsters fit only to be choked. If there were only five or six sages in Athens who had as much credit as he, that would be enough to deprive me of most of my income and honors.

DRIXA:

The Devil! Now that's really serious.

ANITUS:

While waiting to strangle him, I am going to speak with him under the porticoes and conclude this business with him about my marriage.

DRIXA:

Here he is: you do him too much honor. I am going to leave you and I am going to speak about my young man to Xantippe.

ANITUS:

The gods accompany you, my darling Drixa. Serve them always and beware of believing in only one God, and don't forget my two beautiful Persian rugs.

(Enter Socrates)

Eh! Hello, my dear Socrates, the favorite of the gods and the wisest of mortals. I feel I am raised above myself every time I see you and in you, I respect Human Nature.

SOCRATES:

I am a simple man destitute of sciences and full of weakness like the rest. It's much if you support me.

ANITUS:

Support you! I admire you; I would like to resemble you if it were possible. And it is in order to be a more frequent witness to your virtues, to hear your lessons more often, that I wish to marry your beautiful pupil Aglaea whose destiny depends on you.

SOCRATES:

It's true that her father, Agathon, who was my friend, that is to say much more than just a relative, confided to me by his will this amiable and virtuous orphan.

ANITUS:

With considerable riches? For they say it's the best part of Athens.

SOCRATES:

On that subject, I can give you no enlightenment; her father, that kind friend whose wishes are sacred to me, forbade me by that same will, to divulge the condition of his daughter's fortune.

ANITUS:

That respect for the last wishes of a friend, and that discretion are worthy of your beautiful soul. But people know well enough that Agathon was a rich man.

SOCRATES:

He deserved to be, if riches are a favor of the Supreme Being.

ANITUS:

They say that a little hare-brain named Sophronine, is paying court to her on account of her fortune. But I am persuaded that you will show the door to such a character, and that a man like me won't have a rival.

SOCRATES:

I know what I must think of a man like you: but it's not for me to obstruct Aglaea's feelings. I serve her as her father; I am not her master. She must dispose of her heart. I regard constraint as a crime. Speak to her: If she listens to your propositions, I will consent to her will.

ANITUS:

I've already got the consent of Xantippe, your wife; without doubt she is informed of Aglaea's feelings; so I regard the thing as done.

SOCRATES:

I cannot regard things as done until they are.

(Aglaea enters)

Come beautiful Aglaea, come decide your fate. Here's a gentleman, priest of high rank, the leading priest in Athens, who offers himself to be your spouse. I leave you complete liberty to explain things with him. That liberty will not be constrained by my presence. Whatever choice you make I will approve. Xantippe will prepare everything for your wedding.

(Socrates leaves)

AGLAEA:

Ah, generous Socrates it's with great regret I see you leave.

ANITUS:

It seems, amiable Aglaea, that you have great confidence in the good Socrates.

AGLAEA:

I owe it to him; he's serving as my father and he forms my soul.

ANITUS:

Well! If he directs your feelings, could you tell me what you think of Ceres, of Cybele, of Venus?

AGLAEA:

Alas! I will; whatever you wish.

ANITUS:

That's well said: you will also do what I wish.

AGLAEA:

No. That's much different from the other.

ANITUS:

You see that the wise Socrates consents to our union. Xantippe, his wife, presses for this marriage. You know what feelings you have inspired in me. You know my rank and my reputation. You see that my happiness and perhaps yours depends on a word from your mouth.

AGLAEA:

I am going to respond to you with the truth which that great man who just left here instructed me never to dissemble, and with the liberty that he left me. I respect your dignity; I know little of your person and I cannot give myself to you.

ANITUS:

You cannot! You who are free! Ah, Aglaea, you don't wish it then?

AGLAEA:

It's true that I don't wish it.

ANITUS:

Are you really aware of the affront you are giving me? I see very clearly that Socrates has betrayed me. It's he who is dictating your response. It's he who is giving preference to this young Sophronine, to my unworthy rival, to that impious--

AGLAEA:

Sophronine is not impious; he's been attached to him since childhood. Socrates serves as a father to him as to me. Sophronine is full of grace and virtue. I love him and I am loved by him. He clings only to

me to be his wife. But I will no more have him than you.

ANITUS:

All that you tell me astonishes me. What! You dare to admit to me that you love Sophronine?

AGLAEA:

Yes, I dare confess to you because nothing is more true.

ANITUS:

And when he demands that you be happy with him, you refuse his hand?

AGLAEA:

Again, nothing is more true.

ANITUS:

Doubtless it's fear of displeasing me that delays your engagement to him?

AGLAEA:

Assuredly no. Never having sought to please you, I do not at all fear displeasing you.

ANITUS:

Then you fear to offend the gods by preferring a profane man like this Sophronine to a minister of the altars?

AGLAEA:

Not at all; I am persuaded that the Supreme Being cares very little whether I marry you or not.

ANITUS:

The Supreme Being! My dear girl, that's not the way you must speak. You must speak of gods and goddesses. Take care: I perceive in you dangerous sentiments and I know very well who inspired them. Know that Ceres, whose high priest I am, can punish you for having scorned her cult and her minister.

AGLAEA:

I scorn neither the one nor the other. They tell me that Ceres presides over wheat: I intend to believe it. But she doesn't meddle with my marriage.

ANITUS:

She meddles with everything. You know that very well; but still I hope to convert you. Are you really determined not to marry Sophronine?

AGLAEA:

Yes, I am very determined, and I'm very annoyed about it.

ANITUS:

I don't understand these contradictions at all. Listen: I love you. I wanted to make you happy and place you in a high rank. Believe me, don't offend me. Don't reject your fortune. Think that it is necessary to sacrifice everything to an advantageous establishment; that youth passes and that fortune remains. That riches and honors must be your only goal and that I speak to you on behalf of the Gods and Goddesses. I beg you to reflect on it. Goodbye, my dear girl. I am going to pray to Ceres that she may inspire you. And I hope that she will touch your heart. Goodbye, one more time. Remember you promised me not to marry Sophronine.

AGLAEA:

I promised that to myself not to you.

(Anitus leaves)

How that man increases my chagrin. I don't know why I never see that priest without trembling. But here's Sophronine. Alas, while his rival fills me with terror, this one increases my sorrows and my tenderness.

SOPHRONINE: (entering)

Darling Aglaea, I see Anitus, that priest of Ceres, that evil man, that sworn enemy of Socrates, is leaving you, and your eyes seem damp with tears.

AGLAEA:

Him! He's the enemy of our benefactor, Socrates? I am no longer astonished by the aversion that he inspired me with even before he spoke to me.

SOPHRONINE:

Alas, is it to him that I must impute the tears that darken your eyes?

AGLAEA:

He can only inspire me with disgust. No, Sophronine, only you can make my tears flow.

SOPHRONINE:

Me, great gods! I who would pay for them with my blood! I, who adore you, who flatter myself to be loved by you! I, who must reproach myself for having cast a moment of bitterness into your life? You are weeping and I am the cause of it? Then what have I done? What crime have I committed?

AGLAEA:

You didn't commit any. I am crying because you deserve all my tenderness; because you have it; and because I must renounce you.

SOPHRONINE:

What funereal words have you uttered? No, I cannot believe it; you love me, you cannot change. You promised me to be mine; you don't wish my death.

AGLAEA:

I want you to live happy, Sophronine, and I cannot make you happy. I hoped, but my fate misled me. I swear that, not being able to be yours, I will belong to no one. I declared it to that Anitus who is pursuing me, and whom I scorn. I declare to you my heart is full of the most acute sorrow and the most tender love.

SOPHRONINE:

Since you love me, I ought to live; but if you refuse me your hand, I must die. Dearest Aglaea, in the name of so much love, in the name of your charms and your virtues, explain this funereal mystery to me.

(Socrates enters)

O Socrates! my master! my father! I see myself here the most unlucky of men: between two beings through whom I breathe; it's you who taught me wisdom; it's Aglaea who taught me how to feel love. You've given your consent to our marriage; the beautiful Aglaea who seems to desire it refuses me and, as she tells me she loves me, plunges the dagger in my heart. She breaks off our marriage without explaining to me the reason for such a cruel caprice. Either prevent my pain, or teach me, if it is possible, to bear it.

SOCRATES:

Aglaea is the mistress of her will; her father made me her tutor and not her tyrant. I based my happiness on seeing you united together; if she has changed her mind, I am surprised by it, but we must hear her reasons. If they are just, we must submit to them.

SOPHRONINE:

They cannot be just.

AGLAEA:

They are, at least in my eyes. Condescend to listen to me, person to person. When you had accepted the secret testament of my father, wise and generous Socrates, you told me that it would leave me an honest fortune with which I could establish myself. From that time, I formed the plan of giving this fortune to your dear disciple, Sophronine, who has only your support and for his entire wealth possessed only his virtue. You entirely approved my resolution. You conceived that it was my good fortune to make the fortune of an Athenian that I regard as your son. Full of my happiness, carried away by a sweet joy, that my heart could not contain, I confided this delirious state my soul was in to your wife, Xantippe, and just as soon that condition disappeared. She treated me as a dreamer. She showed me the will of my father who died in poverty, who left me nothing, and who confided me to the friendship which united you. At that moment, awakened from my dream, I felt only sadness at being unable to make the fortune of Sophronine; I don't wish to overwhelm him with the weight of my misery.

SOPHRONINE:

Indeed, I told you Socrates that her reasons were valueless; if she loves me am I not rich enough? I've subsisted, it's true through your charity, but it's not a guilty employment that I embrace only to support my dear Aglaea. I must, it's true, make her the sacrifice of my love, to find for her, an advantageous role for myself. But I confess, I don't have the strength, and in that respect I am unworthy of her. But if she could be content with my conditions, if she could lower herself to me! No, I don't dare ask it; I don't dare wish it and I won't succumb to a misfortune that she suffers.

SOCRATES:

My children, Xantippe was really indiscreet to have shown you that will. But believe me, beautiful Aglaea, that she deceived you.

AGLAEA:

She didn't deceive me. I saw my misery with my own eyes. My father's handwriting is well known to me. Be sure, Socrates, that I know how to bear poverty; I know how to work with my hands. It's enough to live. That's all I need. But it's not enough for Sophronine.

SOPHRONINE:

It's a thousand times too much for me, tender, sublime soul, worthy of having been raised by Socrates. A noble and laborious poverty is the natural state of man. I would have wanted to offer you a throne. But if you deign to live with me, our respectable poverty is higher than the throne of Croesus,

SOCRATES:

Your feelings please me more than they soften me. With ecstasy, I see blooming in your hearts the virtue that I sowed there. Never have my cares been better rewarded; never have my hopes been better fulfilled. But, yet once more, Aglaea, believe me, my wife has ill informed you. You are richer than you can imagine. It was not in her but in me that your father confided. Can you not have wealth that Xantippe is ignorant of?

AGLAEA:

No, Socrates. It says exactly in his will that he is leaving me poor.

SOCRATES:

And as for me, I tell you that you are mistaken; that he left you wherewithal to live happily with the virtuous Sophronine, and that it is necessary that you both come to sign the contract now.

XANTIPPE (entering)

Come on, come on, my daughter. Don't amuse yourself with the dreams of my husband. Philosophy is all very fine when one is in easy circumstances, but you have nothing. One has to live. You will philosophize later. I have concluded your marriage with Anitus, a worthy priest, a man of credit, a powerful man. Come follow me. There must be neither delay nor contradiction; I like to be obeyed. And quickly, it's for your good. Don't argue and follow me.

SOPHRONINE:

Ah, heaven, ha! dearest Aglaea!

SOCRATES:

Let her talk and trust in me for your happiness.

XANTIPPE:

What do you mean, let me talk? Really, I mean to do so, and they'd better let me do it. It's really for you, with your wisdom, and your familiar demon, and your irony, and all your nonsense which is good for nothing, for you to meddle in the marriage of young girls! You are a good sort, but you don't understand anything about worldly affairs. And you are very lucky that I govern you. Come on, Aglaea, come so I can establish you. And you, who remain bewildered, I've got just the thing for you, too. Drixa is your thing. You will thank me, both of you. Everything will be concluded in no time; I am expeditious. Let's not waste time. All this should have been concluded already.

SOCRATES:

Don't offend her, my children. Show her all sorts of deference. It's necessary to humor her since one cannot correct her, It's the triumph of superior reason to live with folks who don't have any.

CURTAIN

ACT II

SOPHRONINE:

Divine Socrates, I cannot believe my luck: how can it be that Aglaea whose father died in extreme poverty has such a considerable dowry?

SOCRATES:

I already told you; she had more than she knew. I knew her father's resources better than she. May it suffice you both to enjoy a fortune you deserve; as for myself, I owe the dead a secret as well as the living.

SOPHRONINE:

I have only one fear; it's that that priest of Ceres, over whom you've preferred me will avenge Aglaea's refusals on you. He's a man really to be feared.

SOCRATES:

Eh! What can be feared when one is doing one's duty? I know the rage of my enemies. I know all their slanders; but when one only tries to

do good to men and when one does not offend heaven, one can fear nothing, neither during life, nor after death.

SOPHRONINE:

Nothing is more true; but I would die of sorrow if the happiness I owe you allowed your enemies to force you to put your heroic constancy to use.

AGLAEA: (entering)

My benefactor, my father, man above all men, I embrace your knees. Second me, Sophronine, it's he, it's Socrates who is marrying us at the expense of his fortune, who is paying my dowry, who is depriving himself of the greatest share of his wealth for us. No. We won't suffer it; we won't be rich at this price. The more grateful our heart, the more we must imitate the nobility of his.

SOPHRONINE:

Like Aglaea, I am throwing myself at your feet. I am seized as she is. We feel your benefactions equally. We love you too much, Socrates, to abuse it. Look at us as your children. But don't let your children be an expense to such a degree. Your friendship is the greatest of treasures; it's the only one that we want. What! You are not rich and you are doing what the powerful on earth don't do! If we were to accept your benefits we would be unworthy of them.

SOCRATES:

Rise, children. You are making me too weak. Listen, mustn't we respect the will of the dead? Aglaea, your father whom I regarded as the better part of myself, didn't he order me to treat you as my own daughter? I am obeying him. I would be betraying his friendship and confidence if I did less. I accepted his testament, and I will execute it. The little that I am giving you is useless to my old age which is without needs. Finally, as I have a duty to obey my friend, you must obey your father. It is I who in his sacred name order you not to overwhelm me with sorrow by refusing me. But retire; I observe Xantippe. I have my reasons for begging you to avoid her at this time.

AGLAEA:

Ah. What cruel orders you give us.

(Aglaea and Sophronine exit)

XANTIPPE (entering)

Truly, you've just made a fine masterpiece! My word, my dear husband, it's necessary to prevent you. See, if you please, these stupidities. I promised Aglaea to the priest Anitus who has much credit among the great. I promised Sophronine to that big business woman, Drixa who has great credit among the people, and you marry the two dummies to each other to make me break my word. It's not enough you are endowing them with the greatest share of your wealth. Twenty thousand drachmas, just gods! Twenty thousand drachmas! Aren't you ashamed? With what will you live at the age of seventy? Who will pay for your doctors when you become ill; your lawyers when you have a law suit? Finally, what will I do when this trickster, this hypocrite, Anitus and his party that you could have won over to yourself conspire to persecute you, as they've done so many times? Heaven confound philosophers and philosophy, and my stupid friendship for you! You meddle to direct others when you need to be led about. You argue endlessly and you have no common sense. If you weren't the best man in the world, you would be the most ridiculous and unbearable. Listen: Only one word will work. Instantly break off this impertinent bargain and do what your wife wishes.

SOCRATES:

My dear Xantippe, it's quite well to speak and with moderation; but listen to me in your turn. I didn't propose this marriage. Sophronine and Aglaea love each other and are worthy of each other. I've already given you all the wealth that I could grant you under the laws. I am giving almost all which remains to me to the daughter of my friend. The little I am keeping will suffice for me. I have neither doctors to pay, because I am sober, nor lawyers, because I have no debts. With regard to the philosophy for which you reproach me it teaches me how to suffer the indignities of Anitus and your reproaches. To love you despite your temper. (he leaves)

XANTIPPE:

The old fool! I have to respect him despite himself, for after all, there's I don't know what of grandeur in his folly. The calm of his extravagances enrages me. It's useless for me to scold him; I waste my efforts. I've been screaming at him for thirty years, and when I've really screamed he overawes me and I am really confounded. Could he have something in his soul superior to mine?

DRIXA: (entering)

Well, Madam Xantippe! See how you are mistress in your own house! Fie! How cowardly to allow oneself to be governed by one's husband! This cursed Socrates has carried off this handsome boy whose fortune I wanted to make! The traitor! He will pay me for that!

XANTIPPE:

My poor Madame Drixa, don't be angry with my husband. I am sufficiently angry with him. He's an imbecile, I know that very well. But at bottom, he's got the best heart in the world. There's no malice in him. He commits every possible stupidity without intending any trickery and with so much integrity that it's disarming. Anyway, he's headstrong like a mule. I've spent my life torturing him; I've even beaten him sometimes. Not only have I been unable to correct him, I haven't even been able to anger him. What do you expect me to do?

DRIXA:

I will avenge myself, I tell you. I notice under the porticoes his good friend Anitus and some of ours. Let me alone.

XANTIPPE:

My God! I fear that all these folks may play my husband some trick. Let's go quickly to warn him. for after all, one cannot help loving him.

(Exit Xantippe)

DRIXA:

Our insults are alike, respected Anitus. You are betrayed like me. This dishonest man, Socrates, is giving almost all his wealth to Aglaea only to drive you to despair. You must exact an exemplary vengeance.

ANITUS:

That's indeed my intention; heaven is concerned in it. Since he disdains me, this man doubtless scorns the gods. Accusations have already been brought against him; you must help me to renew them. We'll put him in danger of his life. Then I will offer him my protection on the condition that he gives me Aglaea and surrenders your handsome Sophronine to you. That way we will fulfill all our duties. He will be punished by the fright we have given him. I will obtain my mistress and you shall have your lover.

DRIXA:

You speak like wisdom itself. Some divinity must inspire you. Instruct

us: what must be done?

ANITUS:

The judges will soon pass here to go to the Tribunal; Melitus is at their head.

DRIXA:

But that Melitus is a little pedant; an evil man who is your enemy.

ANITUS:

Yes, but he's even more an enemy of Socrates. He's a hypocritical rogue who maintains the rights of the Areopagus against me. But we will join together when it's a question of ruining those false wise men who are capable of enlightening the people about our conduct. Listen, my dear Drixa, you are devout.

DRIXA:

Yes, assuredly, my lord. I love money and pleasure with all my heart, but as regards devotion, I will give place to no one.

ANITUS:

Go take some devout people with you and when the judges pass by, scream out against impiety.

TERPANDRE:

Will there be something to gain by it? We are ready.

ACROS:

Yes. But what kind of impiety?

ANITUS:

All types. You have only to accuse him boldly of not believing in the gods. That's the quickest way.

DRIXA:

Oh! Let me do it.

ANITUS:

You will be perfectly seconded. Go under these porticoes; stir up your friends. Meanwhile, I am going to instruct some newsmongers of the controversy, some hack scribblers who often come to dine with me. They are very despicable people, I admit. But, when they are carefully directed, on occasion, they can do harm. All means must be used to make the good cause triumph. Go, my dear friends. Commend yourselves to Ceres. You will shout on my given signal. It's the sure way of gaining hearers, and especially to live happily on earth.

(They leave; Nonoti, Chomos and Bertios enter)

ANITUS:

Tireless, Nonoti, deep Chomos, fastidious Bertios; have you prepared against this evil Socrates the little works I ordered?

NONOTI:

I have labored, Milord; he won't recover from it.

CHOMOS:

I have demonstrated the truth against him. He is confounded.

BERTIOS:

I said only one word in my paper: he is ruined.

ANITUS:

Take care, Nonoti. I forbade you to be prolix. You are naturally

boring; you could try the patience of the court.

NONOTI:

Milord, I've written only a page. There I prove that the soul is an infused quintessence; that tails are given to animals to shoo flies; that love works miracles, and that consequently Socrates is an enemy of the state who must be exterminated.

ANITUS:

You couldn't draw a better conclusion. Go bring your accusation to the second judge, who is an excellent philosopher. I will answer for it. You will soon defeat your enemy Socrates.

NONOTI:

Milord, I am not his enemy. I am only annoyed that he's got too great a reputation, and all that I am doing is for the glory of Ceres, and the good of the country.

ANITUS:

Go, I tell you. Hurry up. Well, wise Chomos, what have you done?

CHOMOS:

Milord, not having found anything to reprove in Socrates' writings, I've adroitly accused him of thinking contrary to what he says. I point out the venom in what he says.

ANITUS:

Marvelous. Take that piece to the fourth judge. He's a man who lacks common sense and will understand you perfectly. And you, Bertios?

BERTIOS:

Milord, here's my last paper on chaos. I show, cleverly passing from chaos to the Olympic games, that Socrates is perverting the youth.

ANITUS:

Admirable! Go on my behalf to the seventh judge and tell him that I commend Socrates to him. Fine, here's Melitus already, the Chief of the Eleven coming forward. There's no beating around the bush to be done with him. We know each other, too well.

(Exit Bertios and Chomos, enter Melitus.)

ANITUS:

Your honor, the judge, a word. Socrates must be destroyed.

MELITUS:

Your Reverence, the Priest, I've been pondering it for a long while. Let's unite on this point and we will be less embroiled on the rest.

ANITUS:

I know quite well we hate each other. But while detesting each other, we must unite to govern the republic.

MELITUS:

Agreed. No one can hear us here. I know that you are a fraud. You don't look on me as an honest man. I cannot injure you because you are a high priest. You cannot ruin me because I am the leading judge, But Socrates could hurt either of us by unmasking us. You and I must begin by compassing his death and then we will see how we can exterminate each other at the first opportunity.

ANITUS:

No one could say it better.

(Aside)

Hum! How I'd like to hold this rascal from the Areopagus on an altar, arms hanging on one side, legs over the other, so as to open his stomach with my golden knife and consult his liver at my ease.

MELITUS: (aside)

Will I ever get this gallows bird of a High Priest in jail and make him drink a pint of Hemlock at my pleasure?

ANITUS:

There now, my dear chap, there are your comrades who are coming forward. I've prepared the mood of the people.

MELITUS:

Very fine, my dear ally. Count on me as yourself at this moment. But the grudge still remains.

(Some judges pass through the porticoes. Anitus whispers in Melitus' ear.)

DRIXA, TERPANDRE, ACROS:

Justice! Justice! Scandal, impiety! Justice, justice! Irreligion, impiety! Justice!

ANITUS:

What's all this, my friends? Of what are you complaining?

DRIXA, TERPANDRE, ACROS:

Justice! In the name of the people.

MELITUS:

Against whom?

DRIXA, TERPANDRE, ACROS:

Against Socrates.

MELITUS:

Ah! ah! Against Socrates? It's not the first time he's been complained of. What's he done?

ACROS:

I don't know anything about it.

TERPANDRE:

They say that he gives money to girls to get married.

ACROS:

Yes. He's corrupting the youth.

DRIXA:

He's impious. He never offers gifts to Ceres. He says there's too much gold and too much useless money in the temples. That the poor are dying of hunger and that they must be helped.

ACROS:

Yes, he says that the priests of Ceres sometimes get drunk. It's true, he's impious.

DRIXA:

He's a heretic. He denies the plurality of the gods. He's a deist. He believes only in one God. He's an atheist.

MELITUS:

Now these are very grave accusations and very credible. They've

already informed me of all that you are telling us.

ANITUS:

If such horrors are allowed to go unpunished, the state is in danger. Minerva will withhold her aid from us.

DRIXA:

Yes, Minerva without doubt. I heard him make jokes about the owl of Minerva.

MELITUS:

About the owl of Minerva! Oh! Heavens! Aren't you of the opinion he should be put in prison immediately?

JUDGES: (together)

Yes, in prison. Right away. In prison!

MELITUS:

Ushers! Take Socrates to prison immediately.

DRIXA:

And there let him be burned without having been heard.

ONE OF THE JUDGES:

Ah! He must at least be heard! We cannot infringe the law.

ANITUS:

What this fine, pious man means is--he must be heard, but one cannot be surprised by what he says. For you know these philosophers are diabolically clever. Where we bring harmony, they disturb all the Estates.

MELITUS:

To prison! to prison!

(Xantippe, Sophronine, Aglaea enter. Then Socrates, enchained.)

XANTIPPE:

Ah, mercy! They are dragging my husband to prison. Honorable judges, aren't you ashamed to treat a man of his age thus? What evil could he do? He is incapable of it. Alas, he's more stupid than bad. Gentlemen, take pity on him. Indeed, I told you, my husband, that you would get yourself into some bad business. That's what comes of dowering girls. How unhappy I am!

SOPHRONINE:

Ah, gentlemen. Respect his age and his virtue. Put me in irons. I am ready to give my liberty and my life for his.

AGLAEA:

Yes. We will go to prison in place of him. We will die for him if need be. Don't seek the life of the greatest of men. Take us for your victims.

MELITUS:

You see how he corrupts the youth!

SOCRATES:

Cease, my wife; cease, my children to set yourselves up in opposition to the will of heaven. It is manifesting itself through the organ of the laws. Whoever resists the law is unworthy of being a citizen. God wished that I be put in irons; I submit to his decrees without a murmur. In my house, in Athens, in a prison cell, I am equally free. And in you I see so much sincere gratitude, so much friendship that I

am still happy. What does it matter whether Socrates sleeps in his room or in an Athenian prison? Everything is in the eternal order of things and my will must be there.

MELITUS:

Let them take away this dialectician. That's how they all are. They press you with arguments right under the gallows.

ANITUS:

Gentlemen, what has just been said touches me. This man shows good disposition. I flatter myself I am able to convert him. Let me speak to him a moment in private. And order his wife and these young people to retire.

A JUDGE:

We indeed wish it, venerable Anitus. You can speak to him before he appears before our tribunal.

(They exit leaving Socrates alone with Anitus.)

ANITUS:

Virtuous Socrates, my heart bleeds to see you in this condition.

SOCRATES:

You actually have a heart?

ANITUS:

Yes, and I am ready to do everything for you.

SOCRATES:

Really? I'm convinced you've done much already.

ANITUS:

Listen. Your situation is more dangerous than you think. It goes to your life.

SOCRATES:

Then it's a question of a little thing.

ANITUS:

It's little to your intrepid and sublime soul. To the eyes of those who cherish, as I do, your virtue, it's everything. Believe me, with whatever philosophy your souls may be armed, it is hard to perish by execution. That's not all: your reputation which must be dear to you will be tarnished throughout the centuries. Not only will all the bigots laugh over your death, they will insult you, light the pyre on which you will burn if they burn you, tighten the rope if they strangle you, grind the Hemlock if they poison you. But they will render your memory execrable to the entire future. You can easily avoid such a funereal end. I will answer for saving your life, and even will have you declared by the judges to be the wisest of men, as you were by the oracle of Apollo. It's only a question of giving me your pupil Aglaea. With the dowry you are giving her, understood. We can easily break off her marriage with Sophronine. You will enjoy a peaceable and honorable old age and the gods and goddesses will bless you.

SOCRATES:

Guards! Take me to prison without further delay.

(They lead him away.)

ANITUS:

This man is incorrigible. It's not my fault. I have nothing to

reproach myself with. He must be abandoned to his reprobate opinions and allowed to die unrepentant.

CURTAIN

ACT III

(The Judges are seated on a tribunal. Socrates is standing.)

A JUDGE: (to Anitus)
You mustn't sit here. You are a priest of Ceres.

ANITUS:
I am only here for edification.

MELITUS:
Silence. Listen, Socrates, you are accused of being a bad citizen; of corrupting the youth; of denying the plurality of the gods; of being a heretic, deist, atheist. Answer.

SOCRATES:
Athenian Judges, I exhort you always to be good citizens as I have always tried to be. To shed your blood for the country as I have done in more than one battle. Regarding the youth of which you speak, do not cease to guide them through your admonitions, and especially by your examples; teach them to love true virtue, and to flee the wretched philosophy of the school; the article of the plurality of the gods is a bit difficult to discuss, but you will easily understand me. Athenian Judges, there is only one God.

MELITUS AND ANOTHER JUDGE:
Oh, the knave.

SOCRATES:
There is only one God, I tell you. His nature is to be infinite. No being can share his infinity with him. Raise your eyes toward the celestial globes, turn them towards earth and the sea. All corresponds, all is made for each other. Each being is intimately linked to other beings. Everything is of the same design. There is only a single architect, a single master, a single guardian. Perhaps he's deigned to form some genies, some demons, more powerful and more enlightened than men. And if they exist they are creatures like you; they are his first subjects and not gods at all. But nothing in nature advertises to us that they exist, while all nature announces to us one God and one Father. This God has no need of Mercury and Iris to signify his orders. He has only to will it and that's enough. If by Minerva, you understand only the wisdom of God, if by Neptune you intend only his immutable laws which raise and lower the seas, I would say to you: He allows you to revere Neptune and Minerva, since under these emblems you are still adoring only the eternal Being, and so long as you are not giving occasion to people to misunderstand it.

ANITUS:
What impious balderdash.

SOCRATES:
Always beware of turning religion into metaphysics: Morality is its essence. Adore and stop disputing. If our ancestors had said that the Supreme God had descended into the arms of Alcmene, of Danae, of Semele, and that he had children with them, our ancestors were imagining dangerous fables. It's insulting to the Divinity to pretend that he had committed with a woman in whatever manner it might be what

we would call amongst men an adultery. That's discouraging to the rest of men to say that to be a great man, one must be born from the mysterious coupling with one of your wives or daughters. Miltiades, Cimon, Themistocles, Arisitides, that you persecuted were perhaps worth more than Perseus, Herakles and Bacchus. There being no other way to be the children of this God than by trying to please him, and by being just. Deserve that title by never rendering iniquitous judgments.

MELITUS:

What blasphemies and insolence!

ANOTHER JUDGE:

What absurdities! No one knows what he means.

MELITUS:

Socrates, if you always continue to argue, this is not what we need. Answer briefly and precisely. Did you make fun of the owl of Minerva?

SOCRATES:

Athenian judges, take care of your owls! When you propose ridiculous things to believe, too many men will choose to believe nothing at all. They have enough wit to see that your doctrine is impertinent, But they don't have enough to raise themselves to the true law. They know how to laugh at your little gods. They don't know how to adore the God of all beings, unique, incomprehensible, incommunicable, eternal, and all just as well as all powerful.

MELITUS:

Ah! The blasphemer! ah, the monster! He's said more than enough. I conclude for death.

SEVERAL JUDGES:

And we, too.

A JUDGE:

Several of us are not of that opinion. We think that Socrates spoke very well. We believe that men would be more just and more wise if they thought like him. And as for me, far from condemning him, I am of the opinion he ought to be rewarded.

SEVERAL JUDGES:

We think the same.

MELITUS:

The opinions seems to be divided.

ANITUS:

Gentlemen of the Areopagus, let me question Socrates. Do you think that the Sun turns and that the Areopagus is of Divine Right?

SOCRATES:

You have no right to ask me questions. But I have the right to show you what you are ignorant of. It matters little to society whether the earth may turn, but it matters greatly that men who turn with it be just. Virtue alone is of Divine Right. And you, the Areopagus have no other rights but those the nation has given you.

ANITUS:

Illustrious and equitable judges make Socrates leave.

(Melitus gives a sign. They lead Socrates out. Anitus continues.)

August Areopagus, instituted by heaven, you have heard him. This

dangerous man denies that the Sun turns, and that you are filled with Divine Right. If these horrible opinions spread, no more magistrates, no more Sun; you will no longer be those judges established by the fundamental laws of Minerva; you are no longer masters of the state, you must no longer judge except by following the laws. And if you depend on the laws, you are ruined. Punish the rebellion, avenge heaven and earth. I am leaving: Fear the anger of the gods if Socrates remains alive.

(Anitus leaves and the judges opine.)

A JUDGE:

I don't wish a quarrel with Anitus; he's a man much to be feared. If it were only a question of the gods it would still be overlooked.

A JUDGE: (to whom he just spoke)

Between ourselves, Socrates is right. But he's wrong to be right so publicly. I don't make more of the case of Ceres or Neptune than he does. But he ought not to say before the whole Areopagus what should only be whispered in the ear. Where, after all, is the evil in poisoning a philosopher, especially when he's old and ugly?

ANOTHER JUDGE:

If there is injustice in condemning Socrates, That's Anitus' affair. It's not mine. I put it all on his conscience. Anyway, it's late, we're wasting his time! To death, to death and no more discussion about it.

ANOTHER:

They say he's a heretic and an atheist. To death. To death.

MELITUS:

Let them call Socrates.

(Socrates is brought in)

The gods be blessed; the plurality is for death. Socrates, the gods condemn you through our mouth to drink Hemlock so that death will follow.

SOCRATES:

We are all mortal. Nature condemns you all to die in a short time. And probably you will all have an end sadder than mine. Diseases which lead to death are worse than a goblet of Hemlock. As to the rest, I owe praise to the judges who opined in favor of innocence. To the others, I owe only my pity.

ONE JUDGE: (leaving)

Certainly this man deserves a state pension rather than a bowl of Hemlock.

ANOTHER JUDGE:

That's true; but at the same time what's the point of getting embroiled with a priest of Ceres?

ANOTHER JUDGE:

I'm really quite comfortable in putting a philosopher to death. Those folk have a certain pride in wit which it's good to humble a little.

ONE JUDGE:

Gentlemen, one thing. While our shoulder is at the wheel, wouldn't we do better to put to death all the geometers who pretend that the three angles of a triangle add up to two right angles? They strangely scandalize the populace that reads their books.

ANOTHER JUDGE:

Yes, yes, we'll hang them at the next session. Let's go to dinner.

(Exit the judges.)

(There should be a scene change here to Socrates cell. But there is no indication in the text.)

SOCRATES:

I've been prepared for death for a long while. All that worries me now is that my wife, Xantippe may come trouble my last moments and interrupt the sweet composure of my soul: I mustn't be occupied except with the Supreme Being before whom I must soon appear. But here she is: I've got to be resigned to everything.

XANTIPPE: (entering)

Well! Poor man! What have these law folk concluded? Are you condemned to a fine? are you banished? Are you absolved? My God! How you've upset me! Try, I beg you, not to let this happen again.

SOCRATES:

No, my wife. I'll answer for that. It won't happen again. You won't be troubled by anything.

(Enter Disciples)

Be welcome, my dear disciples, my friends.

CRITO: (at the head of Socrates' Disciples)

You sees us as alarmed at your fate as your wife, Xantippe. We have obtained from the judges, permission to see you. Just heaven! Must we see Socrates burdened with chains? Allow us to kiss these irons that honor you and are the shame of Athens. Is it possible that Anitus and his accomplices have been able to put you in this condition?

SOCRATES:

My dear friends, let's not think of these trivia and let's continue the discussion we were having yesterday about the immortality of the soul. It seems to me we were saying that nothing is more probable than that idea. Indeed, matter changes and never perishes; why should the soul perish? Could it be made so that we, being elevated to consciousness of a God through the veil of the mortal body, would cease to know Him when the veil falls. No. Since we think, we will think forever; thought is the being of man. That being will appear before a just God who rewards virtue, who punishes crime and who excuses weakness.

XANTIPPE:

That's well said: I didn't understand any of it. To always think because one has thought! Does one always wipe one's nose because one has wiped it before. But who's this villainous man with his bowl?

JAILOR OR SERVANT OF THE ELEVEN: (bringing the cup of Hemlock)

Here! Socrates: this is what the Senate sends you.

XANTIPPE:

What! Cursed poisoner of the republic, you come here to kill my husband in my presence! I will disfigure you, monster!

SOCRATES:

My dear friend, I ask your pardon for my wife. She's always scolded her husband. She's treating you the same way. I beg you to excuse this little excitement. Give it to me. (taking the bowl)

ONE OF THE DISCIPLES:

Let it be permitted for us to take this poison, divine Socrates. By what horrible injustice are you ravished from us? Why? The criminals have condemned the just. The fanatics have proscribed the wise man! You are going to die.

SOCRATES:

No, I am going to live. Here's the brew of immortality. It's not the perishable body that you loved, that instructed you, it's my soul alone that lived with you. And it will love you forever. (wants to drink)

SERVANT OF THE ELEVEN:

First, I must remove your chains. That's the rule.

SOCRATES:

If it's the rule, remove them. (he scratches his leg a bit)

ONE OF HIS DISCIPLES:

What! You are smiling?

SOCRATES:

I am smiling. Reflecting that pleasure comes from pain. It's in this manner that Eternal Happiness will be born from the miseries of life. (Socrates drinks)

CRITO:

Alas, what have you done?

XANTIPPE:

Alas, it's for I don't know how many ridiculous speeches of this sort that they are making this poor man die. Truly, my husband, you break my heart and I will strangle all the judges with my own hands. I scolded you, but I loved you: and these are the polite folk who've poisoned you. Ah! ah! My dear husband, ah!

SOCRATES:

Calm yourself, my good Xantippe. Don't cry any more my friends. It doesn't become disciples of Socrates to shed tears.

CRITO:

And can one not pour them out after this frightful sentence, after this judicial poisoning ordered by perverse ignorance, who've bought with fifty thousand drachmas the right to murder their fellow citizens with impunity?

SOCRATES:

That's the way they often treat the worshippers of a single God, and the enemies of superstition.

CRITO:

Alas! Must you be one of those victims?

SOCRATES:

It's beautiful to be the victim of Divinity. I am dying satisfied. It's true I would have liked to join to the consolation of seeing you that of Sophronine and Aglaea as well. I am astonished not to see them. They would have rendered my last moments even sweeter than they are.

CRITO:

Alas, they are unaware that you have consummated the iniquity of your judges. They are speaking to the people. They are encouraging the

magistrates who took your part. Aglaea is revealing the crime of Anitus. His shame is going to be public. Aglaea and Sophronine perhaps would have saved your life. Ah! Dear Socrates, why did you hurry your last moments.

AGLAEA: (entering with Sophronine)
Divine Socrates, fear nothing. Xantippe console yourself. Worthy disciples don't weep.

SOPHRONINE:
Your enemies are confounded; all the people are coming to your defense.

AGLAEA:
We've spoken out. We've revealed the jealousy and intrigue of the impious Anitus. It was up to me to demand justice for his crime since I was the cause of it.

SOPHRONINE:
Anitus escaped by flight before the fury of the people. They are pursuing him and his accomplices. They are giving solemn thanks to the judges who opined in your favor. The people are at the gate of the prison, waiting for you to appear, to escort you home in triumph. All the judges have recanted.

XANTIPPE:
Alas, such pains wasted.

ONE OF THE DISCIPLES:
O heaven! O Socrates! Why did you obey?

AGLAEA:
Live, dear Socrates, benefactor of your country, model of men. Live for the happiness of the world.

CRITO:
Virtuous couple, worthy friends, there's no longer time.

XANTIPPE:
You are too late.

AGLAEA:
What? There's no time? Just heaven!

SOPHRONINE:
What! Socrates has already drunk the poisoned cup?

SOCRATES:
Loveable Aglaea, tender Sophronine, the law ordained that I take the poison. I've obeyed the law, all unjust that it is--because it oppressed only me. If this injustice were directed toward another I would have fought it. I am going to die, but the example of friendship and greatness of soul that you are giving to the world will never perish. Your virtue prevails over the crime of those who accused me. I bless what they call my misfortune. It has given birth to the strength of your beautiful soul. My dear Xantippe, be happy and think that to be so one must subdue one's temper. My beloved disciples harken always to the voice of philosophy which scorns persecutors and which takes pity on human weakness. And you, my daughter, Aglaea, my son, Sophronine, be always that way yourselves.

AGLAEA:
How we are to be pitied not to be able to die for you!

SOCRATES:

Your life is precious, mine is useless, Receive my tender and last farewells. The doors of eternity are opening for me.

XANTIPPE:

Come to think of it, he was a great man. Ah, I am going to rouse the nation and eat Anitus' heart!

SOPHRONINE:

We could raise temples to Socrates as a man deserving of it.

CRITO:

At least may his wisdom teach men that it is to God alone that we owe temples.

CURTAIN

End of this Project Gutenberg etext of Socrates by Voltaire,
translated by Frank J. Morlock.