

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Aristophanes**

**- poems -**

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## Chorus of Birds

YE Children of Man! whose life is a span,  
Protracted with sorrow from day to day,  
Naked and featherless, feeble and querulous,  
Sickly calamitous creatures of clay!  
Attend to the words of the Sovereign Birds,  
(Immortal, illustrious, lords of the air),  
Who survey from on high, with a merciful eye,  
Your struggles of misery, labor, and care.  
Whence you may learn and clearly discern  
Such truths as attract your inquisitive turn;  
Which is busied of late with a mighty debate,  
A profound speculation about the creation,  
And organical life, and chaotical strife,  
With various notions of heavenly motions,  
And rivers and oceans, and valleys and mountains,  
And sources of fountains, and meteors on high,  
And stars in the sky . . . We propose by and by,  
(If you'll listen and hear,) to make it all clear.  
And Prodicus henceforth shall pass for a dunce,  
When his doubts are explained and expounded at once.

Our antiquity proved, it remains to be shown  
That Love is our author and master alone;  
Like him we can ramble, and gambol and fly  
O'er ocean and earth, and aloft to the sky;  
And all the world over, we're friends to the lover,  
And when other means fail, we are found to prevail,  
When a Peacock or Pheasant is sent as a present.  
All lessons of primary daily concern  
You have learnt from the Birds, and continue to learn,  
Your best benefactors and early instructors;  
We give you the warning of seasons returning.  
When the Cranes are arranged, and muster afloat  
In the middle air, with a creaking note,  
Steering away to the Libyan sands,  
Then careful farmers sow their lands;  
The crazy vessel is hauled ashore,  
The sail, the ropes, the rudder and oar  
Are all unshipped and housed in store.  
The shepherd is warned, by the Kite reappearing,  
To muster his flock, and be ready for shearing.  
You quit your old cloak at the Swallow's behest,  
In assurance of summer, and purchase a vest.  
For Delphi, for Ammon, Dodona, in fine  
For every oracular temple and shrine,  
The Birds are a substitute equal and fair,  
For on us you depend, and to us you repair  
For counsel and aid when a marriage is made,  
A purchase, a bargain, a venture in trade:  
Unlucky or lucky, whatever has struck ye,  
An ox or an ass that may happen to pass,  
A voice in the street, or a slave that you meet,

A name or a word by chance overheard,  
If you deem it an omen, you call it a Bird;  
And if birds are your omens, it clearly will follow  
That birds are a proper prophetic Apollo.

Aristophanes

## **SONG OF THE CLOUDS (from The Clouds)**

CLOUD-MAIDENS that float on forever,  
Dew-sprinkled, fleet bodies, and fair,  
Let us rise from our Sire's loud river,  
Great Ocean, and soar through the air  
To the peaks of the pine-covered mountains where the pines hang as tressed of hair.  
Let us seek the watch towers undaunted,  
Where the well-watered cornfields abound,  
And through murmurs of rivers nymph-haunted,  
The songs of the sea-waves resound;  
And the sun in the sky never wearies of spreading his radiance around.

Let us cast off the haze  
Of the mists from our band,  
Till with far-seeing gaze  
We may look on the land.

Cloud-maidens that bring the rain shower,  
To the Pallas-loved land let us wing,  
To the land of stout heroes and Power,  
Where Kekrops was hero and king,  
Where honor and silence is given  
To the mysteries that none may declare,  
Where are gifts to the high gods in heaven  
When the house of the gods is laid bare,  
Where are lofty roofed temples, and statues well carven and fair;  
Where are feasts to the happy immortals  
When the sacred procession draws near,  
Where garlands make bright the bright portals  
At all seasons and months in the year;  
And when spring days are here,  
Then we tread to the wine-god a measure,  
In Bacchanal dance and in pleasure,  
'Mid the contests of sweet singing choirs,  
And the crash of loud lyres.

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