

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 Drixia, 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. Drixia 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.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

