

APOLLO, JUPITER, and MARS:
OH MONSTER!

(THESPIS sings in great terror, which he endeavours to conceal)

JUPITER: Well Sir, the year is up to-day.

APOLLO: And a nice mess you've made of it.

MARS You've deranged the whole scheme of society.

THESPIS: *(aside)* There's going to be a row! *(Aloud and very familiarly)* My dear boy – I do assure you –

No 17 cont'd (at **B**)

JUPITER:
BE RESPECTFUL!

JUPITER and MARS:
BE RESPECTFUL!

APOLLO, JUPITER, and MARS:
BE RESPECTFUL!

THESPIS: I don't know what you allude to. With the exception of getting our scene-painter to "run up" this temple, because we found the ruins draughty, we haven't touched a thing.

No. 17 cont'd (at **C**)

JUPITER:
OH STORY TELLER!

JUPITER and MARS:
OH STORY TELLER!

APOLLO, JUPITER, and MARS:
OH STORY TELLER!

(Enter THESPIANS)

THESPIS: My dear fellows, you're distressing yourselves unnecessarily. The court of Olympus is about to assemble to listen to the complaints of the year, if any. But there are none, or next to none. Let the Olympians assemble!

(Enter THESPIANS. THESPIS takes chair. JUPITER, APOLLO and MARS sit below him.)

THESPIS: Ladies and gentlemen. It seems that it is usual for the gods to assemble once a year to listen to mortal petitions. It doesn't seem to me to be a good plan, as work is liable to accumulate; but as I'm particularly anxious not to interfere with Olympian precedent, but to allow everything to go on as it has always been accustomed to go – why, we'll say no more about it. *(Aside)* But how shall I account for your presence?

JUPITER: Say we are gentlemen of the press.

THESPIS: That all our proceedings may be perfectly open and above-board I have communicated with the most influential members of the Athenian press, and I beg to introduce to your notice three of its most distinguished members. They wear masks emblematic of the anonymous character of modern journalism. *(Business of introduction. THESPIS very uneasy)* Now then, if you're all ready we will begin.

MERCURY: *(brings tremendous bundles of petitions)* Here is the agenda.

THESPIS: What's that? The petitions?

MERCURY: Some of them. *(Opens one and reads)* Ah, I thought there'd be a row about it.

THESPIS: Why, what's wrong now?

MERCURY: Why, it's been a wet Friday in November for the last six months and the Athenians are tired of it.

THESPIS: There's no pleasing some people. This craving for perpetual change is the curse of the country. Friday's a very nice day.

MERCURY: So it is, but a Friday six months long! – it gets monotonous.

JUPITER, APOLLO and MARS (*rising*): It's perfectly ridiculous.

THESPIS: (*calling them*) It shall be arranged. Cymon!

CYMON: (*as Time with the usual attributes*) Sir!

THESPIS: (*introducing him to THREE GODS*) Allow me – Father Time – rather young at present but even Time must have a beginning. In course of Time, Time will grow older. Now then, Father Time, what's this about a wet Friday in November for the last six months?

CYMON: Well, the fact is, I've been trying an experiment. Seven days in the week is an awkward number. It can't be halved. Two's into seven won't go.

THESPIS: (*tries it on his fingers*) Quite so – quite so.

CYMON: So I abolished Saturday.

JUPITER, APOLLO and MARS: Oh but – (*Rising.*)

THESPIS: Do be quiet. He's a very intelligent young man and knows what he is about. So you abolished Saturday. And how did you find it answer?

CYMON: Admirably.

THESPIS: You hear? He found it answer admirably.

CYMON: Yes, only Sunday refused to take its place.

THESPIS: Sunday refused to take its place?

CYMON: Sunday comes after Saturday – Sunday won't go on duty after Friday, Sunday's principles are very strict. That's where my experiment sticks.

THESPIS: Well, but why November? Come, why November?

CYMON: December can't begin till November has finished. November can't finish because I've abolished Saturday. There again my experiment sticks.

THESPIS: Well, but why wet? Come now, why wet?

CYMON: Ah, that is your fault. You turned on the rain six months ago, and you forgot to turn it off again.

JUPITER, MARS and APOLLO: (*rising*) Oh this is monstrous!

ALL Order, order.

THESPIS: Gentlemen, pray be seated. (*To the others*) The liberty of the press, one can't help it. (*To the three gods*) It is easily settled. Athens has had a wet Friday in November for the last six months. Let them have a blazing Tuesday in July for the next twelve.

JUPITER, MARS and APOLLO: But-

ALL Order, order.

THESPIS: Now then, the next article.

MERCURY: Here's a petition from the Peace Society. They complain that there are no more battles.

MARS (*springing up*): What!

THESPIS: Quiet there! Good dog! Soho, Timidon!

TIMIDON: (*as MARS*) Here.

THESPIS: What's this about there being no battles?

TIMIDON: I've abolished battles; it's an experiment.

MARS (*springing up*): Oh come, I say –

THESPIS: Quiet then! (*To TIMIDON*) Abolished battles?

TIMIDON: Yes, you told us on taking office to remember two things, to try experiments and to take it easy. I found I couldn't take it easy while there are any battles to attend to, so I tried the experiment and abolished battles. And then I took it easy. The Peace Society ought to be very much obliged to me.

THESPIS: Obligated to you! Why, confound it! since battles have been abolished war is universal.

TIMIDON: War universal?

THESPIS: To be sure it is! Now that nations can't fight, no two of 'em are on speaking terms. The dread of fighting was the only thing that kept them civil to each other. Let battles be restored and peace reign supreme.

MERCURY: (*reads*) Here's a petition from the associated wine merchants of Mytilene.

THESPIS: Well, what's wrong with the associated wine merchants of Mytilene? Are there no grapes this year?

MERCURY: Plenty of grapes; more than usual.

THESPIS: (*to the gods*) You observe, there is no deception; there are more than usual.

MERCURY: There are plenty of grapes, only they are full of ginger beer.

APOLLO, MARS, and JUPITER: Oh, come I say.

(*Rising, they are put down by THESPIS.*)

THESPIS: Eh? what. (*Much alarmed*) Bacchus?

TIPSEION: (*as BACCHUS*) Here!

THESPIS: There seems to be something unusual with the grapes of Mytilene; they only grow ginger beer.

TIPSEION: And a very good thing too.

THESPIS: It's very nice in its way, but it is not what one looks for from grapes.

TIPSEION: Beloved master, a week before we came up here, you insisted on my taking the pledge. By so doing you rescued me from my otherwise inevitable misery. I cannot express my thanks. Embrace me!
(*Attempts to embrace him.*)

THESPIS: Get out, don't be a fool! Look here, you know you're the god of wine.

TIPSEION: I am.

THESPIS: (*very angry*) Well, do you consider it consistent with your duty as the god of wine to make the grapes yield nothing but ginger beer?

TIPSEION: Do you consider it consistent with my duty as a total abstainer to grow anything stronger than ginger beer?

THESPIS: But your duty as the god of wine –

TIPSEION: In every respect in which my duty as the god of wine can be discharged consistently with my duty as a total abstainer, I will discharge it. But when the functions clash, everything must give way to the pledge. My preserver! (*Attempts to embrace him.*)

THESPIS: Don't be a confounded fool! This can be arranged. We can't give over the wine this year, but at least we can improve the ginger beer. Let all the ginger be extracted from it immediately.