

Introduction

Our next reading comes from the *Oeconomicus* by Xenophon.

Here is a brief biography of the author by Derek John Mosley.

Xenophon, the son of Gryllus of the Athenian deme Erebia, lived from c. 428/7 BCE to c. 354 BCE. By his wife Philesia Xenophon had two sons, Gryllus and Diodorus, of whom the former died in the battle of Mantinea in 362 BCE. Xenophon was born of a comparatively wealthy family, but his life was not easy and undisturbed, and his various experiences had a corresponding effect on the sympathies and interests which he reveals in his writings. Xenophon approached maturity at a time of oligarchic revolution at Athens and perhaps participated in the battle of Arginusae, which was the occasion of unhappy political events. As a young aristocrat, a member of the cavalry, and an associate of Socratic circles he probably found life politically difficult during the oligarchic revolution and even precarious after the democratic restoration, and left Athens in 401. In that year, at the invitation of Proxenus and in spite of Socrates' advice, he joined the army in Asia Minor which turned out to be in the service of Cyrus who aspired to the Persian throne. After the failure of the expedition, the Anabasis, Xenophon was elected a general and extricated the army which came to Trapezus in 400. After service with Seuthes of Thrace he offered the troops under his command to the Spartan general Thibron and campaigned in Asia Minor with him and his successor Dercylidas in 399/7. It was probably in 399, the year of Socrates' death and a time of difficulty for Socratic associates, that Xenophon was formally exiled. His sons were born in the following years. In 396/4 he served under the Spartan king Agesilaus, to whom he became strongly attached. When Agesilaus was recalled at the start of the Corinthian War, Xenophon accompanied him and was present at the battle of Coronea in 394, when Spartan forces were ranged against his native Athens. Unable to return home Xenophon was allowed to stay at first with his family in Sparta and was then presented by the Spartans with an estate near Olympia, at Scillus. It was while he was at Scillus that Xenophon was elected Spartan *proxenos*, for the entertainment of Spartans visiting Olympia. In 371, in defiance of Sparta, Elis claimed Scillus and Xenophon was obliged to leave his estate there, whence he and his family went to Corinth and stayed in the region of the Isthmus. As relations between Athens and Sparta improved, the decree of exile was rescinded c. 368. In 366/5 when the Athenians were expelled from Corinth he returned to Athens, where he lived until c. 354, when he died, possibly on a visit to Corinth (Diogenes Laertius 2. 56) (*Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd edition, 1141-1142).

Michel Foucault has noted, "Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* contains the most fully developed treatise on married life that classical Greece has left us" (*The Use of Pleasure*, 152). The dialogue opens with a conversation between Socrates and Critoboulos, the son of Crito (a close friend of Socrates, who features prominently in the dialogue that bears his name). In the course of this initial conversation, we learn about the value of Critoboulos' estate, which placed him among the class of propertied Athenians who were wealthy enough to underwrite some expenses of the city, for example, outfitting a trireme or paying for production of a drama during the Greater Dionysia. Because Critoboulos is still quite young and recently married, the conversation concerns wealth and the proper use of material resources. At one point, Critoboulos says:

I am quite convinced, Socrates, that farming is the best, noblest, and most pleasant way of making a living. But you told me that you discovered the reasons why some farmers manage to farm in such a way that they get all they need in abundance, whereas others farm in such a way that their farming does not produce any profit for them. It would be a pleasure to hear from you about the reasons in each case so that we shall be able to do what is right and avoid what is disadvantageous (6.11).

In response Socrates recounts a conversation with a man named Ischomachus, who emerges in Socrates' estimation as an ideal husband and successful manager of an estate. This selection from the dialogue focuses on the relationship between Ischomachus and his much younger wife and on the management of the enslaved workers both in the household and on the farm. (Please note that we are reading translation from Sarah Pomeroy's edition that provides the Greek text and facing translation, which accounts for the odd page numbers. When referring to passages in the text, use the chapter (capital Roman numbers) and section numbers.)

XENOPHON *OECONOMICUS*

A Social and Historical Commentary

With a new English translation

SARAH B. POMEROY

CLARENDON PRESS · OXFORD

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noblest, and most pleasant way of making a living. But you told me that you had discovered the reasons why some farmers manage to farm in such a way that they get all they need in abundance, whereas others farm in such a way that their farming does not produce any profit for them. It would be a pleasure to hear from you about the reasons in each case so that we shall be able to do what is right and avoid what is disadvantageous.

SOCRATES. Critobulus, suppose I tell you from the beginning how I once 12 met a man who in my opinion really deserved that phrase we use 'a true gentleman'.⁵

CRITOBULUS. I should very much like to hear about it, for I myself have a great passion to be worthy of that title.

SOCRATES. Then I will tell you how I came to make enquiries about him. 13 I needed very little time to go around visiting the good smiths, good painters, good sculptors, and so on, and to view what were considered their finest works. My soul very much desired to become acquainted 14 with one of those who are called by that dignified title 'gentleman', so that I might consider what kind of behaviour it was that led people to think that such men deserved it. And first of all, because in this phrase 15 the word 'beautiful' was added to the word 'good' I approached every beautiful-looking man and tried to discover whether I could see virtue attached to beauty in any of them. But I found that things were not 16 like that at all. I discovered that some who were beautiful in appearance were, in my view, utterly depraved in their souls. So I decided to give up the notion of physical beauty and to approach one of those who are called 'gentlemen'. When I heard that Ischomachus was called a 'gentle- 17 man' by everyone, men and women, and foreigners and citizens, I decided to try to meet him.

[The following conversation (cc. vii–xxi) is related by Socrates to VII Critobulus. *ἔφη φάναι* 'he told me he said to her' and similar formulae have not been translated since they interrupt the flow of the narrative.]

One day, I saw him sitting in the Stoa of Zeus Eleutherius, apparently unoccupied, so I went up to him and sat next to him, and said, 'What's happening, Ischomachus? It's not like you to sit around unoccupied. Usually when I see you, you are busy with something or, at any rate, not

⁵ Literally 'beautiful and good'.

totally unoccupied in the marketplace.'

Ischomachus replied, 'You wouldn't have seen me behaving like this 2 now, only I have agreed to meet some guests here.'

'When you're not doing something of that kind,' I asked, 'where do you spend your time by the gods, and what do you do? I should very much like you to tell me what exactly it is that you do to be called a "gentleman", since you don't spend your time indoors, and your physical condition does not suggest that you do so.'

Ischomachus laughed at the question: 'What do you do to be called a 3 "gentleman"?' But he was evidently pleased, and replied, 'I don't know whether people use this title when they are talking to you about me. Certainly whenever they challenge me to an exchange of property to pay for the maintenance of a trireme or for training choruses for the festivals, no one sets about looking for the "gentleman", but they summon me simply by the name Ischomachus together with that of my father. And, Socrates, in reply to your question, I certainly do not spend time indoors, for my wife is more than capable of managing everything inside the house, even by herself.'

I said, 'I should very much like you to tell me, Ischomachus, whether 4 you yourself trained your wife to become the sort of woman that she ought to be, or whether she already knew how to carry out her duties when you took her as your wife from her father and mother.'

'What could she have known when I took her as my wife, Socrates? She 5 was not yet fifteen when she came to me, and had spent her previous years under careful supervision so that she might see and hear and speak as little as possible. Don't you think it was adequate if she came to me knowing 6 only how to take wool and produce a cloak, and had seen how spinning tasks are allocated to the slaves? And besides, she had been very well trained to control her appetites, Socrates,' he said, 'and I think that sort of training is most important for man and woman alike.'

'Ischomachus,' I asked, 'did you train your wife yourself in other respects 7 so that she would be competent to deal with matters that concern her?'

'No, by Zeus,' said Ischomachus, 'at least, not until I had sacrificed to 8 the gods and prayed that I might be successful in teaching and she in learning what was best for both of us.'

'Did your wife sacrifice along with you and offer the same prayers?', I asked.

'Oh, yes, very much so, and she vowed and prayed fervently to the gods that she might become the sort of woman that she ought to be, and she made it clear that she would not neglect what she had been taught.'

'By the gods, Ischomachus,' I said, 'tell me what you began by teaching 9

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her, since I would rather hear you describing that than giving an account of the most splendid athletic competition or horse-race.'

Ischomachus replied, 'Well, Socrates, as soon as she was sufficiently 10 tamed and domesticated so as to be able to carry on a conversation, I questioned her more or less as follows: "Tell me, wife, have you ever thought about why I married you and why your parents gave you to me? It must be quite obvious to you, I am sure, that there was no shortage of 11 partners with whom we might sleep. I, on my part, and your parents, on your behalf, considered who was the best partner we could choose for managing an estate and for children. And I chose you, and your parents, apparently, chose me, out of those who were eligible. Now if some day the 12 god grants us children, then we shall consider how to train them in the best way possible. For this will be a blessing to us both, to obtain the best allies and support in old age. But at present we two share this estate. I go 13 on paying everything I have into the common fund; and you deposited into it everything you brought with you. There is no need to calculate precisely which of us has contributed more, but to be well aware of this: that the better partner is the one who makes the more valuable contribution."

'In reply to this, Socrates, my wife answered, "What should I be able 14 to do to help you? What ability have I got? Everything depends on you. My mother told me that my duty is to practise self-control."

"By Zeus, wife," I said, "my father said the same to me. But self-control 15 for both man and woman means behaving so that their property will be in the very best condition and that the greatest possible increase will be made to it by just and honourable means."

"And what do you envisage that I might do to help improve our estate?", 16 asked my wife.

"By Zeus," I said, "try to do as well as possible what the gods have given you the natural ability to do, and which the law encourages, as well."

"And what is that?", she asked.

17

"I suppose," I said, "that they are not trivial matters, unless, of course, the activities that the queen bee presides over in the hive are trivial. Wife, 18 the gods seem to have shown much discernment in yoking together female and male, as we call them, so that the couple might constitute a partnership that is most beneficial to each of them. First of all, so that the various 19

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species of living creatures may not become extinct, this pair sleeps together for the purpose of procreation. Then this pairing provides offspring to support the partners in their old age, at least in the case of human beings. And finally, human beings do not live outdoors like cattle, but obviously have need of shelter.

“Those who intend to obtain produce to bring into the shelter need 20 someone to work at the outdoor jobs. For ploughing, sowing, planting, and herding is all work performed outdoors, and it is from these that our essential provisions are obtained. As soon as these are brought into the 21 shelter, then someone else is needed to look after them and to perform the work that requires shelters. The nursing of newborn children requires shelters, and so does the preparation of bread from grain, and likewise, making clothing out of wool. Because both the indoor and the outdoor 22 tasks require work and concern, I think the god, from the very beginning, designed the nature of woman for the indoor work and concerns and the nature of man for the outdoor work. For he prepared man’s body and 23 mind to be more capable of enduring cold and heat and travelling and military campaigns, and so he assigned the outdoor work to him. Because the woman was physically less capable of endurance, I think the god has evidently assigned the indoor work to her. And because the god was aware 24 that he had both implanted in the woman and assigned to her the nurture of newborn children, he had measured out to her a greater share of affection for newborn babies than he gave to the man. And because the god had 25 also assigned to the woman the duty of guarding what had been brought into the house, realizing that a tendency to be afraid is not at all disadvantageous for guarding things, he measured out a greater portion of fear to the woman than to the man. And knowing that the person responsible for the outdoor work would have to serve as defender against any wrong doer, he measured out to him a greater share of courage.

“Because it is necessary for both of them to give and to take, he gave 26 both of them equal powers of memory and concern. So you would not be able to distinguish whether the female or male sex has the larger share of these. And he gave them both equally the ability to practise self-control 27 too, when it is needed. And the god granted the privilege to whichever one is superior in this to gain a larger share of the benefit accruing from it, whether man or woman. So, because they are not equally well endowed 28 with all the same natural aptitudes, they are consequently more in need of

each other, and the bond is more beneficial to the couple, since one is capable where the other is deficient.

"Well, wife, because we know what has been assigned to each of us by the god, we must each try to perform our respective duties as well as possible. The law encourages this, for it yokes together husband and wife, and just as the god made them partners in children, so the law has appointed them partners in the estate. And the law declares honourable those duties for which the god has made each of them more naturally capable. For the woman it is more honourable to remain indoors than to be outside; for the man it is more disgraceful to remain indoors than to attend to business outside. If someone behaves in a way contrary to the nature the god has given him, perhaps his disobedience will not escape the notice of the gods, and he will pay a penalty for neglecting his proper business or for performing his wife's work. It seems to me", I added, "that the queen bee toils constantly at such work appointed by the god."

My wife asked, "How does the work of the queen bee resemble that which I must perform?"

I replied, "She remains in the hive and does not allow the bees to be idle, but those who ought to work outside she dispatches to their job, and she knows and receives what each brings in, and keeps it until it is necessary to use it. And when the time comes to use it, she distributes a fair share to each. She supervises the construction of the combs inside the hive, so that they are woven beautifully and quickly, and she is concerned that the offspring shall be reared to maturity. When the little ones have been reared and are capable of working, she sends them out to found a colony with someone to lead the new generation."

My wife asked, "Shall I have to do this too?"

"Certainly," I replied, "you will have to stay indoors and send forth the group of slaves whose work is outdoors, and personally supervise those whose work is indoors. Moreover, you must receive what is brought inside and dispense as much as should be spent. And you must plan ahead and guard whatever must remain in reserve, so that the provisions stored up for a year are not spent in a month. And when wool is brought in to you, you must see that clothes are produced for those who need them. And you must also be concerned that the dry grain is in good condition for eating."

However," I said, "one of your proper concerns, perhaps, may seem to 37
you rather thankless: you will certainly have to be concerned about nursing
any of the slaves who becomes ill."

"Oh, no," exclaimed my wife, "it will be most gratifying if those who
are well cared for will prove to be thankful and more loyal than before."

Ischomachus went on: 'I was delighted with her response and said, 38
"Wife, because of such thoughtful actions on the part of the queen bee,
isn't the relationship of the bees to her, too, of such a kind that when she
deserts the hive, not one of the bees considers staying behind, but all
follow her?"'

'My wife replied, "It would surprise me if the leader's activities did not 39
apply more to you than to me. For if you were not concerned that supplies
were brought in from outside, surely my guarding the things indoors and
my budgeting would seem pretty ridiculous."

'And I replied: "Yes, but my bringing in supplies would appear just as 40
ridiculous if there were not someone to look after what has been brought
in. Don't you see how people pity those who draw water in a leaky jar, as
the saying goes, because they seem to labour in vain?"'

"Yes, by Zeus," said my wife, "they are truly miserable if they do that."

"But, wife, your other special concerns turn out to be pleasant: whenever 41
you take a slave who has no knowledge of spinning, and teach her that
skill so that you double her value to you: and whenever you take one who
does not know how to manage a house or serve, and turn her into one who
is a skilled and faithful servant and make her invaluable; and whenever
it is in your power to reward the helpful and reasonable members of your
household and to punish any of them who appears to be vicious. But the 42
sweetest experience of all will be this: if you prove to be better than I am
and make me your servant. Then you will have no need to fear that as
your years increase you will be less honoured in the household; but you
may be confident that when you become older, the better partner you have
been to me, and the better guardian of the estate for the children, the
greater the respect you will enjoy in the household. For it is not because 43
of youthful grace that beautiful and good things increase for human beings,
but rather because of their virtues," I said. As far as I can recall, those are
the kind of subjects, Socrates, that I believe I discussed with her first.'

I asked, 'Did you also notice, Ischomachus, that as a result of these VIII
discussions she was stimulated about the things that concern her?'

Ischomachus replied: 'Certainly, by Zeus. I know she was quite upset
and that she blushed when she could not give me one of the things that

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had been brought into the house when I asked for it. However, I could see 2
that she was annoyed with herself, so I said, "Don't be so miserable, wife,
just because you aren't able to give me what I happen to ask for. It's
obviously poverty when you haven't got something for use when you need
it; but this shortcoming, that is, looking for something without being able
to find it, is less painful than not looking for it at all because you know it's
not there. It's not your fault, but mine, because when I put the household
into your hands, I failed to give you any instructions about where everything
was to be put, so that you might know where you ought to put them away,
and where to take them from. For there is nothing, wife, as useful or good 3
for people as order. For instance, a chorus is composed of people. But
whenever every member does whatever he likes, there is simply chaos, and
it is not a pleasant spectacle. But when they act and sing in an orderly
manner, these same persons seem to be both worth watching and worth
hearing.

"Wife," I said, "an army in disorder is a most chaotic thing, both very 4
easily overcome by its enemies and a most disgraceful sight for its allies,
and most useless, too, with mule, hoplite, baggage-carrier, light-armed
troops, cavalry, and wagons all mixed together. How could they march in
such a state? They will impede each other, the marching man the runner,
the runner the soldier who is standing at his post, the wagon the cavalry-
man, the mule the wagon, and the baggage-carrier the hoplite. If they 5
should actually need to fight as well, how could they in such a state? For
those of them who were forced to flee in the face of an attack would be in
just the right position, in their flight, to trample on the men who had kept
their arms. But an orderly army is a most noble sight for its allies to see, 6
and most odious for its enemies. For what ally would not be pleased to see
a mass of hoplites marching in order? Who would not admire cavalry
advancing in squadrons? What enemy would not be afraid at the sight of
hoplites, cavalry, peltasts, archers, and slingers carefully drawn up in
separate groups and following their commanders in an orderly manner?
When they march in order, even if there are tens of thousands of them, 7
they all proceed smoothly as one man, for those behind continually move
up to fill the space that the others have vacated.

"And why is a trireme which is crammed with men a frightening 8
spectacle to enemies and a pleasant sight to allies? Is it not because it sails
quickly? Why do the men on board not get in each other's way? Is it not

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because they sit on the benches in order, moving their bodies forward and backward in order, and embarking and disembarking in order? I think a rough parallel to disorder is what would result if a farmer tossed barley, 9 wheat, and beans into one bin, and then when he needed barley-cake or bread or something to go with it, had to pick it out grain by grain, instead of taking them ready for use when they had been already carefully arranged in separate groups.

"And so, you too, wife, if you wish to avoid such confusion, and instead 10 wish to know exactly how to manage our property and to put your hands easily on whatever we need to use and to please me by giving me whatever I request, let us decide on the appropriate place for each item, and when we put it there, let us teach the maid to take it from that place and to put it back there again. That way we will know how much of our property is safe, and how much of it is not. For the place itself will indicate what is missing, and a glance will detect anything that needs attention. And if we know where each thing is, we can put our hands on it quickly so that we will never be unable to make use of it."

'I believe that the most beautiful and meticulous arrangement of equip- 11 ment that I ever saw, Socrates, was when I boarded the great Phoenician merchant ship to see what it was like. For I saw an enormous amount of equipment arranged in separate places in the smallest receptacle. For, you 12 know,' he said, 'a ship needs many pieces of wooden equipment and ropes when she anchors or puts out to sea, and much rigging, as they call it, when she sails. She is armed with many devices to use against enemy ships, and she carries around with her many weapons for the crew. She also carries all the same utensils that people use at home for the various meals they eat together. In addition to all this, she is laden with all the cargo the owner takes with him to make a profit. I'm telling you from my personal 13 experience,' he said, 'that all the items I am mentioning were stored in a space not much bigger than a dining-room large enough for eleven couches. I noticed that everything was stored in such a manner that nothing got in the way of anything else, and there was no need for anyone to go and search for it. Nothing was disarranged or difficult to untie so as to cause delay when something was required for immediate use. I found that the 14 pilot's mate, who is called the "look-out man", knew exactly where everything was, so that even when he wasn't on board he could say where each thing was stored and how many of them there were, just as accurately as a literate man can say how many letters there are in the word "Socrates" and what order they occur in.' Ischomachus went on: 'I saw the same man 15 in his spare time personally inspecting everything that was likely to be

needed on the boat. I was surprised by his inspection,' he said, 'and so I asked him what he was doing. He answered, "My friend, I am inspecting the way in which the articles in the ship are stored, in case of any accident, or in case something is missing, or has been put away in the wrong place together with other equipment. For when the god raises a storm at sea, 16 there is no time to search for what is needed nor to hand out something that's in the wrong place. The god threatens and punishes the lazy. If he only fails to destroy the innocent, then we should be content enough; but if he also spares those who perform their work extremely well, then", he said, "great thanks are due to the gods."

'Having seen the meticulous arrangement of the equipment that I've just 17 described, I said to my wife: "Sailors on ships which are comparatively small find places for their equipment, and even when they are violently tossed about they still keep them in order, and even when they are terrified they can still find what they need to get. What about us? We have large storerooms in the house so that we can keep things separately in them, and the house rests on a firm foundation. Wouldn't it be sheer stupidity on our part if we don't find some good place where each thing can be easily found? I have already told you that it is good for equipment to be arranged in 18 order and that it is easy to find a place in the house that is suitable for each piece of it. How beautiful it looks, when shoes are arranged in rows, 19 each kind in its own proper place, how beautiful to see all kinds of clothing properly sorted out, each kind in its own proper place, how beautiful bed-linens, bronze pots, table-ware! And what a facetious man would laugh at most of all, but a serious man would not: even pots appear graceful when they are arranged in a discriminating manner. It follows from this that all 20 other things somehow appear more beautiful when they are in a regular arrangement. Each of them looks like a chorus of equipment, and the interval between them looks beautiful when each item is kept clear of it, just as a chorus of dancers moving in a circle is not only a beautiful sight in itself, but the interval between them seems pure and beautiful, too. Without going to any trouble or inconvenience, wife, we can check whether 21 these statements of mine are true. Moreover, wife, there is no need to be despondent either about the difficulty of finding someone who will learn where the proper places are and remember to put each thing back where

it belongs," I said. "For surely we know that the city as a whole has ten 22
thousand times as many things as we, but still you can order any of the
slaves to buy anything you want from the market and bring it to you, and
not one will be uncertain what to do. All of them clearly know where to
go to get each item. The only reason for this", I continued, "is that each 23
thing is arranged in its proper place. But when someone is looking for a
person, especially when that person is also out looking for him, often he
gives up the search before he finds him. The only reason for this is that no
arrangement has been made about where each one should wait." As far as
I can remember, that is more or less the discussion I had with her about
the arrangement and use of our equipment.'

'Then what?', I asked. 'Did you think, Ischomachus, that your wife paid IX
any attention to the lessons that you were so eagerly teaching her?'

'Of course. She promised she would be concerned. She was obviously
very pleased that she had found a solution to her problem, and she begged
me to arrange things as quickly as possible in the way I had described.'

'And how did you arrange things for her, Ischomachus?' 2

'Well, I thought it was best to show her the possibilities of our house
first. It is not elaborately decorated, Socrates, but the rooms are constructed
in such a way that they will serve as the most convenient places to contain
the things that will be kept in them. So the rooms themselves invited what
was suitable for each of them. Thus the bedroom, because it was in the 3
safest possible place, invited the most valuable bedding and furniture. The
dry storerooms called for grain, the cool ones for wine, and the bright ones
for those products and utensils which need light. I continued by showing 4
her living rooms for the occupants, decorated so as to be cool in summer
and warm in winter. I pointed out to her that the entire house has its
façade facing south, so that it was obviously sunny in winter and shady in
summer. I also showed her the women's quarters, separated from the men's 5
quarters by a bolted door, so that nothing might be removed from them
that should not be, and so that the slaves would not breed without our
permission. For, generally, honest slaves become more loyal when they
have produced children, but when bad ones mate, they become more
troublesome. After we had gone through these rooms,' he said, 'we sorted 6
the contents by type. We first began by putting together the things that

we use for sacrifices. After that we separated the fancy clothing that women wear at festivals, the men's clothing for festivals and for war, bedding for the women's quarters, bedding for the men's quarters, women's shoes, and men's shoes. Another type consisted of weapons, another of spinning implements, another of bread-making implements, another of implements used for other food, another of bathing implements, another of kneading implements, another of dining implements. And we divided all this equipment into two sets, those that are used daily and those used only for feasts. We set aside the things that are consumed within a month, and stored separately what we calculated would last a year. That way we shall be less likely to make a mistake about how it will turn out at the end of the year. When we divided all the contents by types, we carried each thing to its proper place. After this, we showed the slaves where they should keep the utensils they use every day—for example, those needed for baking, cooking, spinning, and so forth, and we handed these over to them and told them to keep them safe. Whatever we use for festivals or entertaining guests or at rare intervals we handed over to the housekeeper; and when we had shown her where they belong, and had counted and made an inventory of each thing, we told her to give every member of the household what he or she required, but to remember what she had given to each of them and when she got it back, to return it to the place from which she takes things of that kind.

'Now, when we appointed our housekeeper, we looked for the one who seemed to have the greatest degree of self-control in eating, drinking wine, sleeping, and intercourse with men, and who, furthermore, seemed to have memory and the foresight both to avoid being punished by us for negligence and to consider how, by pleasing us in any way, she might be rewarded by us in return. We taught her to be loyal to us by giving her a share of our joy when we were happy, and if we had any trouble, we called on her to share it too. We trained her to be eager to improve the estate by taking her into our confidence and by giving her a share in our success. We instilled a sense of justice in her by giving more honour to the just than to the unjust, and showing her that the just live lives that are richer and better suited to a free citizen than the unjust. And so we appointed her to this post.'

He went on: 'Besides all this, Socrates, I told my wife that there would be no point in all these arrangements unless she personally was concerned

constantly to maintain the order that we had established. I taught her that in well-governed cities the citizens do not believe that it is sufficient to pass good laws, but they also choose guardians of the laws who, acting in their capacity of supervisors, praise the law-abiding and punish the law-breakers.'

He said, 'I therefore told my wife to consider herself as guardian of the household laws, and to examine the equipment whenever she saw fit, just as the garrison commander inspects the guard, and to check whether each item is in good condition, as the Council examines horses and cavalry. And I told her that she should praise and honour a worthy member of the household to the best of her ability, like a queen, and scold and punish anyone who deserves it.' He continued: 'In addition I taught her that she would not be justified in feeling annoyed if I assign more duties to her than to the slaves in connection with our possessions, because, as I pointed out, slaves are involved with their owners' property only to the extent that they carry, look after, or guard it; but they cannot use any of it unless the head of the household gives it to them; whereas everything belongs to the owner to use each thing as he or she wishes. I tried to prove to her that it was incumbent upon the person who derives the greatest benefit from their preservation and the greatest harm from their destruction to show the most concern for them.'

'Well, what happened, Ischomachus?' I asked. 'When your wife heard this did she pay any attention to you?'

'Certainly,' he replied, 'she even told me that I was mistaken if I thought I was imposing a difficult task on her when I was teaching her that she must be concerned about our things. She said it would have been more difficult for her if my instructions had been that she should neglect her possessions than if she were required to be concerned about her own goods. "For," she added, "just as it seems natural for a decent woman to be concerned about her children and not to neglect them, so too, it gives a decent woman more happiness to be concerned about her own possessions, inasmuch as they belong to her, rather than to neglect them."

When I heard the answer that his wife had given him, I said, 'By Hera, X Ischomachus, you show that your wife has a masculine intelligence.'

'Yes,' said Ischomachus, 'and I should like to tell you about some other occasions that demonstrate the unusual nobility of her mind, when she obeyed as soon as she had heard what I'd said.'

'What are they?' I asked. 'Do tell me, for it would give me much more pleasure to learn about the virtue of a real woman than to have Zeuxis

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show me a beautiful portrait of a woman that he'd painted.'

So Ischomachus said in reply: 'Well, Socrates, once I saw that she had 2 made up her face with a great deal of white powder so that she might appear paler than she was, and with plenty of rouge so that she might seem to have a more rosy complexion than she truly had. And she wore platform shoes so that she might seem taller than she naturally was. "Tell 3 me, wife," I said, "suppose I showed you my property just as it is, and neither boasted that I had more than I really have nor concealed any of it, or suppose I tried to deceive you by saying that I had more than I really have, showing you counterfeit money and necklaces of gilded wood and clothes dyed with purple that would fade, and claiming that they were genuine: would you think that I was more deserving of your love as a partner in our goods in the first case or the second?"

'She immediately interrupted and said, "Hush! Don't behave like that! 4 If you were like that I certainly shouldn't be able to love you from my heart."

'I said, "Wife, were we not joined in marriage to share our bodies in intercourse with each other too?"

"That's what people say," she replied.

"Should I seem more deserving of your love as a partner in intercourse 5 if I tried to offer my body to you after taking care that it was strong and vigorous and therefore glowing with a genuinely healthy complexion? Or if I presented myself to you smeared with red lead and wearing flesh-coloured eye make-up and had intercourse with you like that, deceiving you and offering you red lead to see and touch instead of my own skin?", I asked.

"Personally, I had not rather touch red lead than you, nor see flesh- 6 coloured eye make-up than your own complexion; nor your eyes covered with make-up than naturally healthy," she said.'

Ischomachus reported, 'I said, "Wife, you must understand that I too 7 do not prefer the colour of white powder and rouge to your own, but just as the gods have made horses most attractive to horses, cattle to cattle, and sheep to sheep, so human beings consider the human body most attractive when it is unadorned. These tricks might perhaps succeed in deceiving 8 strangers without being detected, but those who spend their whole lives together are bound to be found out if they try to deceive each other. Either they are found out when they get out of bed before they have got dressed, or they are detected by a drop of sweat, or convicted when they cry, or

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are revealed as they truly are when they take a bath."

'By the gods,' I asked, 'what did she reply to that?'

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'What do you think?', he replied. 'She never did anything like that in the future, but tried to present herself in an unadorned and becoming manner. However, she asked me if I had any advice to give her about how she might look really beautiful and not merely seem to be so. And, Socrates, I advised her not to spend her time sitting around like a slave, but, with the help of the gods, to try to stand before the loom as a mistress of a household should, and furthermore to teach anything that she knew better than anyone else, and to learn anything that she knew less well; to supervise the baker, and to stand next to the housekeeper while she was measuring out provisions, and also to go around inspecting whether everything was where it ought to be. These activities, I thought, combined her domestic concerns with a walk. I said that mixing flour and kneading dough were excellent exercise, as were shaking and folding clothes and linens. I said that after she had exercised in that way she would enjoy her food more, be healthier, and truly improve her complexion. For compared with a slave, the appearance of a wife who is unadorned and suitably dressed becomes a sexual stimulant, especially when she is willing to please as well, whereas a slave is compelled to submit. But women who spend all their time sitting around proudly lay themselves open to being judged by a comparison with women who are deceivers and wear make-up. And now, Socrates,' he said, 'take it from me that my wife still lives in accordance with the practices which I taught her and which I have just described to you.'

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At that point I said, 'Ischomachus, I think I've heard all I need to know about your wife's activities for now. For a start, both of you deserve the highest praise. But now please tell me about your own activities, so that you can have the pleasure of giving a full account of why you have such an excellent reputation, and so that I may be truly grateful to you, as a result of listening attentively and learning from beginning to end, if I can, about the activities of a gentleman.'

XI

'By Zeus!', exclaimed Ischomachus, 'I'd be delighted to describe my routine activities to you, Socrates, so that you may put me on the right track if you think I'm doing anything wrong.'

I replied, 'As far as that goes, how could I properly put a perfect gentleman on the right track, especially when I've gained the reputation of being an idle chatterer who measures the air, and am called "poverty-

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stricken"—a charge which I reckon is the most senseless of all? I should 4
have been very depressed by this accusation, Ischomachus, if I hadn't come
across the horse belonging to Nicias the foreigner the other day. I saw a
crowd of spectators following it, and I heard some of them engaged in a
lengthy discussion about it. Well, I went up to the groom and asked him
whether the horse had many possessions. He looked at me as if I were mad 5
to ask a question like that, and said, "How could a horse come to own
possessions?"

'It really cheered me up to hear that it was quite all right for even a
poor horse to become a good one, if it was endowed by nature with a good
spirit. For in that case it is quite all right for me also to become a good 6
man. So please describe your activities from beginning to end so that I
may listen and learn to the best of my ability, and try to follow your
example, starting from tomorrow. For that's a good day to embark on a 7
path of virtue.'

'Although you're teasing me, Socrates,' Ischomachus replied, 'neverthe-
less I will describe to you the principles that I try to follow, to the best of
my ability, in the course of my life. For I believe I've learnt that the gods 8
do not think it right that people should succeed unless they understand
their duties and are concerned that they are accomplished, but grant their
favour to some who are prudent and careful, while denying it to others.
Therefore I start by cultivating the good will of the gods. And I try to
behave so that it may be right for me when I pray, to acquire good health,
physical strength, distinction in the city, good will among my friends,
survival with honour in war, and wealth that has been increased by
honest means.'

Hearing this, I asked, 'Ischomachus, are you really concerned about 9
being rich and having many possessions, when you will also have many
problems taking care of them?'

Ischomachus replied, 'Yes, certainly I am concerned about the things
you're asking about. For, Socrates, I think it's a pleasure to honour the
gods magnificently, and to help my friends if they need anything, and to
see to it that, as far as I am responsible, the city never lacks adornments
through shortage of funds.'

I replied, 'The principles that you have mentioned are excellent, 10
Ischomachus, and are typical of an extremely influential man. There's no
doubt of that, because there are many men who cannot live without
requiring help from others, and also many who are quite content if they
are able to provide for their own needs. Those who are able not only to
manage their own estates but also to accumulate a surplus so that they can
adorn the city and support their friends well, such men must certainly be

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considered men of strength and abundance. But, in fact, many of us can 11
praise such men. However, what I want you to do, Ischomachus, is to
return to what you were beginning to tell me. How do you take care of
your health? How can it be right for you to survive with honour even in
war? After that there will be plenty of time to hear about your money-
making.'

'But, Socrates,' said Ischomachus, 'I think all these matters depend on 12
each other. For when someone has enough to eat and works it off properly
I think his health remains stable, and, in fact, the more he works it off,
the greater his strength becomes. If he practises military exercises, he will
survive with more honour, and by remaining careful and not letting himself
grow soft he is more likely to increase his estate.'

'I follow you so far, Ischomachus,' I replied. 'You are saying that by 13
working off meals, by taking good care, and by practice a person is more
likely to obtain a greater share of good things. However, I'd like you to
tell me what kind of work is conducive towards maintaining a good state
of health and physical strength, how you practise military exercises, and
how you take care to make a surplus so that you can benefit your friends
and strengthen the city.'

'Well, Socrates,' replied Ischomachus, 'I usually get out of bed early 14
enough that if there's anyone I need to see, I can find him still at home.
And if I have any business to transact in town, I also use this business
appointment as an opportunity to take a walk. If I haven't any urgent 15
business in town, then my slave leads my horse to the farm, and I make
the trip to the country serve as a walk, and maybe that's better, Socrates,
than if I'd strolled around in the arcade. Once I have arrived at the farm, 16
whether I find them planting, or working the fallow, or sowing, or gathering
in the crops, I always inspect how each of these jobs is being done, and
put them on the right track if I know of any method superior to the one
in use. Afterwards, I generally get on my horse and practise a horseman's 17
manœuvres resembling the horseman's manœuvres that are required in
war as closely as I can manage them, avoiding neither hillside nor steep
descent nor ditch nor stream, though, of course, I take as much care as
possible not to lame the horse while performing these exercises. When I 18
have finished, the slave gives the horse a roll and leads him back home,

taking the opportunity at the same time to bring from the country anything we might need in town. I walk part of the way back and run the rest, and when I have arrived home, I scrape myself clean with a strigil. Then I eat enough lunch, Socrates, to get me through the day feeling neither empty nor too full.'

'By Hera, Ischomachus!', I exclaimed. 'Your way of life is very much to my liking. To employ methods which improve your health and physical strength, provide training for war, and consideration for your fortune, and all at the same time, too, seems to me totally admirable. And besides, you have given convincing proofs that your concern for each of these is proper. For we can see that with the help of the gods you are nearly always healthy and strong. And we know that people say that you are one of the most skilled horsemen and wealthiest men.'

'Yes, Socrates, but although that is how I behave,' he said, 'I am subjected to false accusations by many people, whereas I imagine you thought that I should say I was called a gentleman by many people.'

I said, 'I was about to ask you, Ischomachus, whether you are concerned about this too, the ability to defend yourself in court and to prosecute a man, if necessary.'

'Don't you realize, Socrates, that I am constantly practising precisely that: defending myself by proving that I do no wrong to anyone and that I confer benefits on many people to the best of my ability? And don't you realize that I practise making accusations when I observe people wronging the city as well as many private citizens, and doing no good to anyone?'

'Please explain to me, Ischomachus,' I said, 'whether you actually practise delivering such speeches.'

'I never cease to practise public speaking, Socrates. For when I hear one of our slaves making an accusation or defending himself, I try to conduct a cross-examination; or else I either criticize or praise someone before my friends; or else I reconcile some of my acquaintances, trying to explain that it is more profitable for them to be friends than enemies. Or else some of us get together and censure a general, or we defend someone who has been unjustly accused, or we take turns with each other making accusations when someone who doesn't deserve it has been honoured. Often we deliberate, praising those things that we desire to do and criticizing what we do not want to do.' He added, 'Often before now, Socrates, I've been condemned to suffer a specific punishment or to pay a specific fine.'

'By whom, Ischomachus?' I asked, for I had no idea what this meant.

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'By my wife!', he said.

'And how do you get on when you plead your case?', I asked.

'Reasonably well, when it is expedient to speak the truth. But when I need to tell a lie, by Zeus, I cannot convert the worse cause into the better.'

And I commented, 'Perhaps, Ischomachus, you cannot convert a lie into truth.'

'But I'm afraid I'm detaining you, Ischomachus, and you want to be XII going now,' I said.

'By Zeus, no, Socrates,' he replied, 'I certainly shouldn't want to go 2 before the market closes.'

'By Zeus,' I rejoined, 'you take very strong precautions not to lose that title of "gentleman" that people have given you. For now, though there are many matters, I'm sure, that have a claim on your attention, because you made an arrangement with some guests, you're waiting for them so that you don't break your promise.'

'But, Socrates, I am not neglecting the matters which you mention,' said Ischomachus. 'I have foremen in the fields.'

'When you need a foreman,' I said, 'do you find out if there is a skilled 3 supervisor anywhere around and try to buy him, just as when you need a carpenter, you find out, I'm sure, where you can see a man with building skills and try to get him? Or do you train your foremen yourself?'

'By Zeus, Socrates,' he answered, 'I try to train them myself. If someone 4 is going to be capable of taking charge in my place when I'm away, what else does he need to know other than what I do? If I am capable of supervising the various types of work, surely I can teach someone else what I myself know.'

'First of all,' I said, 'he should be loyal towards you and yours if he is 5 to be capable of representing you in your absence. For what is the use of a foreman's having any kind of knowledge at all, if he has no loyalty?'

'None, by Zeus,' replied Ischomachus. 'So, you see, the first lesson I try to teach him is to be loyal to me and mine.'

'And how on earth do you teach loyalty to you and yours to the man 6 you've chosen?', I asked.

'By Zeus,' said Ischomachus, 'by rewarding him whenever the gods grant us an abundance of some good thing.'

'Do you mean to say,' I asked, 'that by getting some pleasure from your 7 good things, they become loyal to you and want to do some good to you?'

'Yes, Socrates, for I have come to see that this is the best device for securing loyalty.'

'Well, suppose he is loyal to you, Ischomachus,' I continued. 'Will that 8 be enough to make him a competent foreman? Don't you see that although nearly all human beings are loyal to their own interests, yet there are many

of them who are not willing to concern themselves with acquiring the good things they want for themselves?

'By Zeus,' replied Ischomachus, 'when I want to appoint men of that sort as foremen, I also teach them to concern themselves about such things.'

'How on earth do you do that?' I asked. 'I thought that concern of this kind was something which could not possibly be taught.'

'No, Socrates, it is not possible to teach every single one in succession to be concerned about such things,' he said.

'What sort of people can be taught, then?', I asked. 'Please give me a clear idea of them, at any rate.'

'Well, for a start, Socrates,' he replied, 'you can't make those who drink too much wine into men who will show proper concern about things; for drunkenness makes them forget everything that they should do.'

'Are drunkards the only people who are incapable of showing proper concern then, or are there also some other types?'

'There are, by Zeus,' answered Ischomachus, 'those who sleep too much. When asleep, such a man could not do his own work, nor make others do theirs.'

'Well then,' I asked, 'are these the only ones whom we shall find incapable of being taught to show proper concern, or are there even more besides these?'

'I think,' replied Ischomachus, 'those who are love-sick cannot be taught to concern themselves about anything other than their love. For it is not easy to find any hope or concern that gives greater pleasure than concern for darling boys, nor, I can assure you, when the thing to be done has passed by, is it easy to find any harsher punishment than separating him from his beloved. So I've given up even trying to appoint as foremen any of those in whom I recognize such symptoms.'

'Then what about those who are passionately in love with making a profit?', I asked. 'Are these, too, incapable of being trained so that they can concern themselves with the work on a farm?'

'No, not at all,' responded Ischomachus, 'in fact, they can easily be led to concern themselves about such things. You need do nothing but show them that taking proper concern is profitable.'

'What about the others?', I asked. 'If they show self-control in the areas in which you demand it, and are moderately interested in making a profit, how do you teach them to be concerned in the way you require?'

'Very simply, Socrates,' he answered. 'When I see them showing proper concern, I praise them and try to reward them, as well; but when they are not, I try to say and do things that will hurt their feelings.'

'Come, Ischomachus,' I said, 'let's change the subject, and instead of discussing the people who are educated to take proper concern, tell me—'

is it possible for a person who lacks concern to make others show concern?"

'No, by Zeus,' replied Ischomachus, 'no more than a person who is 18
himself unskilled in the arts could make others artistic. For it is difficult to
learn to do anything well if the teacher demonstrates it badly. And when
the master shows that he lacks concern, it is difficult for a slave to be
concerned. In short, I don't think I've ever come across a bad master with 19
good slaves: on the other hand, I've seen bad slaves belonging to a good
master; however, they, at least, didn't escape punishment. But the master
who wants to make his men be concerned must be in the habit of supervising
their work and inspecting it, be prepared to reward any slave who is
responsible for work that's well performed, and not hesitant to impose the
due punishment on any slave who lacks concern. 'I think', he added, 'that 20
the well-known reply of the foreigner is very relevant: I mean, when the
king had acquired a good horse and wanted to fatten him up as quickly
as he could, he asked one of those who had a reputation as an expert on
horses "What fattens a horse most quickly?" They say that he replied, "his
master's eye". This applies to everything, I think, Socrates: the master's
eye produces beautiful and good work.'

'When you have got this very firmly into a man's head, that he needs XIII
to be properly concerned about those things that you want him to, will
such a person then be qualified to be a supervisor immediately, or is there
something else he must learn if he is to be a qualified supervisor?"

'Of course, by Zeus,' Ischomachus answered, 'it still remains for him to 2
learn what he must do, and when, and how. If he didn't know these things,
you wouldn't get any more benefit from a foreman than from a doctor who
was concerned about a patient and visited him morning and night, but
didn't know what treatment would do him good, would you?"

'Well, suppose he has learnt simply how farm work should be done, will 3
he need any more, or will he now, in your view, be a thoroughly accom-
plished foreman?', I asked.

'I think he must learn how to govern the workers,' he replied. 4

'And do you yourself teach your foremen to be capable of governing?',
I asked.

'Well, I do my best,' answered Ischomachus.

'How on earth do you teach them to have the skills required to govern
men?', I asked.

'In a ridiculously simple way, Socrates—so simple that you may well
laugh at me when you hear about it,' he replied.

'It certainly is no laughing matter, Ischomachus,' I said. 'You know, 5 whoever can make people skilled in governing men can obviously also make them skilled masters of men; and whoever can make people skilled masters can also make people skilled to be kings. So the person who can do this seems to me to deserve great praise, not laughter.'

'Well, Socrates,' he said, 'other living creatures learn obedience in two 6 ways as follows: by being punished when they try to disobey, and by being rewarded when they are eager to do as they are told. Colts, for instance, 7 learn to submit to the men who break them in by being given something sweet when they obey them, but when they are disobedient, they get into trouble, until they serve their trainer according to his wishes. Puppies, too, 8 are far inferior to human beings in sense and speech; still, they learn in the same way to run in a circle, turn somersaults, and perform many other tricks. For when they obey, they get something they want, but when they show no concern, they are punished.'

'And in the case of human beings it is possible to make them more 9 obedient merely by talking to them, pointing out that it is to their advantage to obey. But for slaves the method of training that is accepted for wild animals is very effective in teaching obedience. For if you gratify their desires by filling their bellies, you may get a great deal out of them. Those who are naturally ambitious become even keener with praise; for some 10 natures hunger for praise as much as others do for food and drink. These methods, then, are exactly the ones that I use myself, because I believe that I shall have more obedient people in my employ as a result, and I teach them to those I wish to appoint as foremen. And I also help them in the following ways: I make sure that the clothing and the shoes which I must supply for the workers are not identical, but some are of inferior quality, and others superior, so that I can reward the better workers with superior garments and give the inferior ones to the less deserving. For, 11 Socrates,' he continued, 'I'm convinced that good workers become very discouraged when they see that although they have done all the work, nevertheless those who are unwilling to work or, when necessary, to run risks, earn rewards equal to their own. I, myself, then, by no means think 12 that better workers should receive the same treatment as worthless ones. And when I know that the foremen have distributed the best things to the most deserving workers, I praise them; but when I see someone favoured beyond the rest as a result of flattery or some other worthless service, I am not unconcerned, but I reprimand the foreman, and try to teach him,

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Socrates, that favouritism is not beneficial, not even to himself.'

'Ischomachus,' I said, 'when he has become capable of ruling, so that XIV
he can make them obedient, do you think he is a perfect foreman, or is
there anything else that the man who has the qualities you mentioned
needs to have?'

'Yes, by Zeus,' responded Ischomachus. 'He must keep his hands off his 2
masters' property and not steal. For if the man who handles the crops dares
to abscond with them, so that there is not enough left for the work to create
a profit, what benefit would result from running a farm under his care?'

'Then do you undertake to teach this kind of honesty too?', I asked. 3

'Certainly,' replied Ischomachus. 'However, I don't find that everyone
is prepared to learn from my teaching at first. Nevertheless,' he continued, 4
'by applying some provisions from the laws of Draco and some from the
laws of Solon, I try to put my slaves on the path of honesty. Because', he
said, 'I believe these men enacted many of their laws in order to teach
honesty such as this.

'For it is enacted that offenders should be punished for acts of theft, and 5
that anyone convicted of attempted theft should be imprisoned, and even
killed if caught in the act. It is clear', he continued, 'that they enacted
these laws because they wanted to make greed unprofitable for the unjust.
By applying some of these laws,' he said, 'and by adding other enactments 6
from the laws of the kings of Persia, I attempt to make my slaves honest
in their handling of property. For the former laws only contain penalties 7
for wrongdoers, but the laws of the kings not only penalize the dishonest,
but also reward the honest. So, because they see that the honest become
wealthier than the dishonest, many lovers of profit continue firmly to refrain
from dishonesty. However, when I perceive that people attempt to act 8
dishonestly, despite good treatment, I refuse to have anything more to do
with them, on the grounds that they are incorrigibly greedy. On the other 9
hand, if I learn of some who are induced to be honest not only because of
the advantages they gain through being honest, but because of a desire to
be praised by me, I treat them as if they were free men, not only do I
make them wealthy, but I even honour them like gentlemen. For, Socrates,' 10
he said, 'I think an ambitious man differs from a greedy one in that, for
the sake of praise and honour, he is willing to work hard and to run risks

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when necessary and to abstain from dishonest gains.'

'But when you have instilled in someone the desire that you should prosper, and you have also made him concerned that you should actually do so, and, in addition, have provided him with knowledge about how each job may be performed more profitably, and, further, have made him capable of ruling, and over and above all this, he delights as much as you would in showing you the greatest quantities of the fruits of the earth in their season, then I shall no longer ask whether there is any other quality that such a man lacks. I think such a man would be a very valuable foreman. But, Ischomachus,' I said, 'please don't leave out the point we have run over very superficially in our discussion.'

'Which one?', Ischomachus asked.

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'You stated, I believe,' I said, 'that the most important lesson to learn is how to perform each job, and that unless a man understands what should be done and how to do it, no good will come of his concern.'

At this point Ischomachus said, 'Are you asking me now to teach the occupation of farming, Socrates?'

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'Yes,' I answered, 'for that, presumably, is precisely what makes the men who understand it rich, but makes those who do not understand it live in abject poverty, even though they work hard.'

'In that case, Socrates,' he said, 'I will tell you now about the friendliness of this occupation towards mankind. For it is most beneficial and pleasant to work at, and most lovely and most dear to gods and men, and, in addition, it is very easy to learn. So, how could it fail to be noble? For surely we call "noble" those living creatures which are lovely, large, and beneficial, yet gentle to human beings.'

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'But, Ischomachus,' I said, 'I think I have understood sufficiently the drift of what you've been saying—that is, the principle of instructing a foreman. I believe I understand your suggestions about making him loyal to you, and making him be concerned, capable of ruling, and honest. But as to your statement that the person who is going to be concerned about farming successfully must learn how and when to do each job—these matters,' I said, 'we seem to have discussed somewhat superficially: it is as if you were to say that anyone who is going to be able to write from dictation and to read what he has written must know the alphabet. If I

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had been told this, I should, it is true, have heard that I must know the alphabet, but when I had understood that, I do not think I should know the alphabet any better. So too, in the present case I am readily convinced 8 that a man must understand farming if he is going to be concerned about farming successfully, but although I understand that, I don't know any more about farming. If I were to decide to become a farmer immediately, 9 I think I should be like a physician who went around examining patients without knowing what is good for the patients. So please teach me the actual jobs involved in farming so that I shall not be like him,' I said.

'Well, Socrates,' he replied, 'I can assure you that it is not necessary, as 10 it is in the case of other occupations, for people to wear themselves out studying before the student can earn his keep by working, for farming is not so troublesome to learn. By watching the workers perform some of the chores and by hearing about others, you can immediately know what to do, so that you could teach someone else if you wanted to. And I think,' he said, 'you know a great deal without realizing it. For other skilled 11 workers tend to conceal the most vital pieces of information about their occupation, but among farmers, the one who is best at planting would be particularly pleased if someone were watching him; so too would the one who is best at sowing. If you were to ask him about any of the things he does well, he would not conceal from you the way in which he does them. So, Socrates,' he stated, 'very noble are the characters of those who engage 12 in farming.'

'A fine introduction, and not such as to discourage the listener from the 13 inquiry,' I said. 'But since farming is easy to learn, that is all the more reason for you to give me a full account of it. For it is no disgrace for you to teach what is easy, but it is far more disgraceful for me to fail to understand it, especially if it happens to be useful.'

'Well, to begin with, Socrates,' he said, 'there is one aspect of farming XVI that authors who give a very accurate theoretical account of it, but who lack practical experience, say is extremely complicated. I want to show you that it is not really difficult at all. For they assert that the man who is 2 going to be a successful farmer must first understand the nature of the soil.'

'Yes, and they are quite right, too,' I replied, 'for anyone who does not know what the soil is capable of producing, I imagine, would not know what he ought to plant or to sow.'

Ischomachus said, 'Yes, but you can learn simply by looking at the crops 3 and the trees on another man's soil what it can produce and what it can't. When a man has learnt this, there is no point in persisting in struggling against the decrees of the gods; he is not likely to obtain provisions by sowing and planting what he wants, rather than what the soil prefers to