

# **Virgil : The Georgics**

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## **Book I: Agriculture And Weather**

### **BkI:1-42 The Invocation**

I'll begin to sing of what keeps the wheat fields happy,  
under what stars to plough the earth, and fasten vines to elms,  
what care the oxen need, what tending cattle require,  
Maecenas, and how much skill's required for the thrifty bees.  
O you brightest lights of the universe  
that lead the passing year through the skies,  
Bacchus and kindly Ceres, since by your gifts  
fat wheat ears replaced Chaonian acorns,  
and mixed Achelous's water with newly-discovered wine,  
and you, Fauns, the farmer's local gods,  
(come dance, together, Fauns and Dryad girls!)  
your gifts I sing. And you, O Neptune, for whom  
earth at the blow of your mighty trident first produced  
whinnying horses: and you Aristaeus, planter of the groves,  
for whom three hundred snowy cattle graze Cea's rich thickets:  
you, O Tegean Pan, if you care for your own Maenalus,  
leaving your native Lycaean woods and glades, guardian  
of the flocks, favour us: and Minerva bringer of the olive:  
and you Triptolemus, boy who revealed the curving plough,  
and Silvanus carrying a tender cypress by the roots:  
and all you gods and goddesses, whose care guards our fields,  
you who nurture the fresh fruits of the unsown earth,  
and you who send plentiful showers down for the crops:  
and you too, Caesar, who, in time, will live among a company  
of the gods, which one's unknown, whether you choose  
to watch over cities and lands, and the vast world  
accepts you as bringer of fruits, and lord of the seasons,  
crowning your brows with your mother Venus's myrtle,  
or whether you come as god of the vast sea, and sailors  
worship your powers, while furthest Thule serves you,  
and Tethys with all her waves wins you as son-in-law,  
or whether you add yourself to the slow months as a Sign,  
where a space opens between Virgo and the grasping claws,

(Even now fiery Scorpio draws in his pincers for you,  
and leaves you more than your fair share of heaven):  
whatever you'll be (since Tartarus has no hope of you as ruler,  
and may such fatal desire for power never touch you,  
though Greece might marvel at the Elysian fields,  
and Proserpine, re-won, might not care to follow her mother),  
grant me a fair course, and agree to my bold beginning,  
pitying the country folk, with me, who are ignorant of the way:  
prepare to start your duties, and even now, hear our prayer.

### **BkI:43-70 Spring Ploughing**

In the early Spring, when icy waters flow from snowy hills,  
and the crumbling soil loosens in a westerly breeze,  
then I'd first have my oxen groaning over the driven plough,  
and the blade gleaming, polished by the furrow.  
The field that's twice felt sun, and twice felt frost,  
answers to the eager farmer's prayer:  
from it boundless harvest bursts the barns.  
But before our iron ploughshare slices the untried levels,  
let's first know the winds, and the varying mood of the sky,  
and note our native fields, and the qualities of the place,  
and what each region grows and what it rejects.  
Here, wheat, there, vines, flourish more happily:  
trees elsewhere, and grasses, shoot up unasked for.  
See how Tmolus sends us saffron fragrance,  
India, ivory, the gentle Sabeans, their incense,  
while the naked Chalybes send iron, Pontus rank  
beaver-oil, Epirus the glories of her mares from Elis.  
Nature has necessarily imposed these rules, eternal laws,  
on certain places, since ancient times, when Deucalion  
hurled stones out into the empty world,  
from which a tough race of men was born.  
Come: and let your strong oxen turn the earth's rich soil,  
right away, in the first months of the year,  
and let the clods lie for dusty summer to bake them in full sun:  
but if the earth has not been fertile it's enough to lift it

in shallow furrows, beneath Arcturus: in the first case  
so that the weeds don't harm the rich crops, in the other,  
so what little moisture there is doesn't leave the barren sand.

### **BkI:71-99 Treatment of the Land**

Likewise alternate years let your cut fields lie fallow,  
and the idle ground harden with neglect:  
or sow yellow corn, under another star, where you  
first harvested beans rich in their quivering pods,  
or a crop of slender vetch, and the fragile stalks  
and rattling stems of bitter lupin. For example  
a harvest of flax exhausts the ground, oats exhaust it,  
and poppies exhaust it, filled with Lethean sleep:  
but by rotation, the labour prospers: don't be ashamed  
to saturate the arid soil with rich dung,  
and scatter charred ashes over the weary fields.  
So with changes of crop the land can rest,  
and then the untilled earth is not ungrateful.  
It's often been beneficial to fire the stubble fields,  
and burn the dry stalks in the crackling flames,  
whether the earth gains hidden strength and rich food  
from it, or every poison is baked out of it by the fire,  
and useless moistures sweated from it,  
or the heat frees more cracks and hidden pores,  
by which strength reaches the fresh shoots, or whether  
it hardens the soil more and narrows the open veins,  
so the fine rain, or the fiercer power of the blazing sun,  
or the north wind's penetrating cold can't harm it.  
He who breaks the dull clods with a hoe, and drags a harrow  
of willow over them, does the fields great good, and  
golden Ceres does not view him idly from high Olympus.  
And he too who reverses his plough and cuts across the ridges  
that he first raised, when he furrowed the levels,  
who constantly works the ground, and orders the fields.

### **BkI:100-117 Irrigation**

Farmers, pray for moist summers and mild winters:  
the crops are glad, the fields are glad of winter dryness:  
Then Mysia boasts no finer cultivation,  
and even Gargarus marvels at its own harvests.  
Need I mention him who, having sown the seed,  
follows closely, and flattens the heaps of barren sand,  
then diverts the stream and its accompanying brooks to his crops,  
and see, when the scorched land burns, the grasses withering,  
he draws water, in channels, from the brow of the hill.  
Or him who grazes his luxuriant crop in the tender shoot,  
as soon as the new corn's level with the furrow,  
lest the stalks bend down with over-heavy ears.  
Or him who soaks out a marsh's gathered water with thirsty sand,  
especially in changeable seasons when rivers overflow  
and cover everything far and wide with a coat of mud,  
so the hollow ditches exude steamy vapours?

### **BkI:118-159 The Beginnings of Agriculture**

Though men and oxen, labouring skilfully, have  
turned the land, the wretched geese still cause harm,  
and the Strymonian cranes, and the bitter fibred chicory,  
and the shade of trees. The great Father himself willed it,  
that the ways of farming should not be easy, and first  
stirred the fields with skill, rousing men's minds to care,  
not letting his regions drowse in heavy lethargy.  
Before Jupiter's time no farmers worked the land:  
it was wrong to even mark the fields or divide them  
with boundaries: men foraged in common, and the earth  
herself gave everything more freely, unasked.  
He added the deadly venom to shadowy snakes,  
made the wolves predators, and stirred the seas,  
shook honey from the trees, concealed fire,  
and curbed the wine that ran everywhere in streams,  
so that thoughtful practice might develop various skills,



little by little, and search out shoots of grain in the furrows,  
and strike hidden fire from veins of flint.  
Then, rivers knew the hollowed alder-boat:  
then, sailors told and named the constellations,  
the Pleiades, the Hyades, and Lycaon's gleaming Bears:  
then men learned to snare game in nets, deceive  
with birdlime, and surround great glades with dogs:  
Now one strikes into a broad river, seeking the depths,  
while another drags his dripping net through the sea:  
then came rigid iron and the melodious saw-blade  
(since the first men split the fissile wood with wedges),  
then came the various arts. Hard labour conquered all,  
and poverty's oppression in harsh times.  
Ceres first taught men to plough the earth with iron,  
when the oaks and strawberry-trees of the sacred grove  
failed, and Dodona denied them food.  
Soon the crops began to suffer and the stalks  
were badly blighted, and useless thistles flourish in the fields:  
the harvest is lost and a savage growth springs up,  
goose-grass and star-thistles, and, amongst the bright corn,  
wretched darnel and barren oats proliferate.  
So that unless you continually attack weeds with your hoe,  
and scare the birds with noise, and cut back the shade  
from the dark soil with your knife, and call up rain  
with prayers, alas, you'll view others' vast hayricks in vain,  
and stave off hunger in the woods, shaking the oak-branches.

### **BkI:160-175 Tools and Tasks**

I must tell of the sturdy countryman's weapons,  
without which the crops could not be sown or grown:  
first the ploughshare, and the curved plough's heavy frame,  
the slow lumbering wagons of Demeter, the Eleusinian mother,  
threshing sledges, drags, and cruelly weighted hoes:  
and the ordinary wicker-ware of Celeus, besides,  
hurdles of arbutus wood, and Iacchus's sacred winnowing fans.  
You'll store away all these, you've remembered to provide long before,

if the noble glory of the divine countryside is to remain yours.  
At the start an elm, in the woods, bent by brute force, is trained  
to become a plough-beam, taking the form of the curving stock.  
A pole eight feet in length is fitted to the stock,  
two earth-boards, and a double-backed share-beam.  
A light lime-tree is felled beforehand for the yoke, and a tall beech  
for the plough handle, to turn the frame below, from behind,  
and smoke from the hearth seasons the hanging wood.

### **BkI:176-203 Ancient Maxims**

I can repeat many ancient maxims to you,  
unless you reject them, and dislike learning lesser things.  
Especially that the threshing floor should be levelled  
with a heavy roller: brushed by hand: and firmed with tenacious clay,  
lest weeds spring up there, or it splits, crumbling to dust,  
and various blights mock you: often the little mouse  
sets up house under the soil, and builds its granaries,  
or moles with sightless eyes dig out chambers,  
and toads may be found in cavities, and all the many pests  
of the earth, and weevils infest vast heaps of grain,  
and ants fearful of a destitute old-age.  
Consider also, when the almond in the woods covers herself  
deeply in blossom, and dips her fragrant branches:  
if the young nuts are plentiful, a like wheat-harvest will follow,  
and a great threshing will come with great heat:  
but if the cloud's heavy in the fullness of growth,  
your threshing-floor will thrash stalks rich in chaff.  
For my part I've seen many a sower treat his seeds,  
soaking them first in nitrate, and black lees of olive-oil,  
so the deceptive husks might bear larger grains  
which will quickly boil soft, however low the fire.  
I've seen choice seed, proven with much labour,  
degenerate, still, if the largest were not picked out  
each year, by human hand. So all things are fated  
to slide towards the worst, and revert by slipping back:  
just as if one who can hardly drive his boat with oars

against the stream, should slacken his arms,  
and the channel sweep it away downstream.

### **BkI:204-258 Star-Lore**

The star of Arcturus, and the days of the Kids, and bright Draco  
the Serpent, are as much ours as theirs, who sailing homewards  
over stormy seas, dare Pontus, and the jaws of oyster-rich Abydos.  
When Libra makes the hours of daytime and sleep equal,  
and divides the world between light and shadow,  
then work your oxen, men, sow barley in your fields  
right to the edge of formidable winter's rains:  
then it's time too to sow your crops of flax, in the soil,  
and Ceres's poppy, and readily bend to the plough,  
while the dry ground will let you, and the clouds are high.  
Sow beans in Spring: then the crumbling furrows receive you,  
clover, and millet, you come to our annual attention,  
when snow-white Taurus with golden horns opens  
the year, and Sirius sets, overcome by opposing stars.  
But if you work the ground for harvests of wheat  
and hardy spelt, and you aim at grain alone,  
first let the Pleiades, Atlas's daughters, set for you in the dawn,  
and let the Cretan stars of the burning Crown, Corona Borealis,  
vanish, before you commit the seeds required to the furrows,  
or rush to entrust a year's hopes to the unwilling soil.  
Many have started to do so, before Maia's setting,  
but the hoped-for crop has deluded them, the husks empty.  
Yet it's true that if you sow vetch, or the humble kidney bean,  
and don't ignore cultivation of Egypt's lentils,  
Boötes setting will send no malign signals:  
begin, and carry on sowing into the thick of the frosts.  
For this purpose the golden sun commands his ecliptic,  
split into fixed segments, through twelve heavenly constellations.  
Five zones comprise the Earth: of which one  
is always bright with the glittering sun, and always burned by his flames:  
round this at the sky's ends, two stretch to left and right,  
layered with ice and darkened by storms:

between these and the central zone, two more have been given  
to weak humanity, by the grace of the gods, and a track passes  
between them, on which the oblique procession of Signs can revolve.  
Just as the world rises steeply north, towards Scythia  
and the Rhiphaean cliffs, it sinks down to Libya in the south.  
One pole is always high above us: while the other,  
under our feet, sees black Styx and the infernal Shades.  
Here mighty Draco glides in winding coils,  
around and between the two Bears, like a river,  
the Bears that fear to dip beneath the ocean.  
There, they say, either the dead of night keeps silence,  
and the shadows of night's mask grow ever thicker:  
or Dawn, leaving us, brings back their day,  
and when the rising sun, with panting horses, first breathes on us,  
there burning Vesper lights his evening fire.  
From all this we can foretell the seasons, through unsettled skies:  
from this, the days for harvesting, and time for sowing,  
and when it's right to set oars to the treacherous sea,  
when to launch the armed fleet, or fell  
the mature pine-tree in the forest.  
We don't observe the Signs in vain, as they rise and set,  
nor the year divided into its four varied seasons.

### **BkI:259-310 Appropriate Times for Tasks**

Whenever freezing rain keeps the farmer indoors,  
he can ready much that would soon have to be hurried,  
in clearer weather: the farmer forges a hard blade  
for the blunted ploughshare, carves out troughs from tree-trunks,  
or brands his cattle, or labels his ricks' measures.  
Others sharpen stakes and two-pronged forks,  
or make tethers for the pliant vines, from Amerian willow.  
Now weave the graceful basket of reddish twigs,  
now parch grain by the fire, now grind it on the stone.  
Even on sacred days you can carry out certain tasks,  
by divine and human law: no religious rule forbids  
diverting streams, protecting crops with a hedge,

setting snares for birds, firing brambles,  
or dipping the bleating flock in the health-giving water.  
Often the farmer loads his slow mule's flanks  
with flasks of olive-oil, or humble fruit, and returns  
from town with a metallated millstone, or a mass of dark pitch.  
The Moon herself has set certain days as auspicious  
for certain kinds of work. Avoid the fifth: it's then pale Orcus  
and the Furies were born: then in impious labour Earth  
gave birth to Coeus, Iapetus, and savage Typhoeus,  
and the brothers who banded together to raze the Heavens.  
Three times, indeed, they tried to pile Ossa on Pelion,  
and roll wooded Olympus on top of Ossa: three times  
Jupiter split the mountain pile apart with his lightning bolt.  
The seventeenth is good for planting vines,  
and taming yoked oxen, and adding threads to the loom.  
The ninth is better for runaways, harmful for the thief.  
Many things too go better in the cool night,  
or when, at first light, Dawn wets the Earth with dew.  
Slender stalks are best cut at night, and dry meadows,  
at night there's no lack of lingering moisture.  
One stays awake by the late blaze of a winter fire,  
and sharpens torches with a keen knife, while his wife  
solaces herself with singing over her endless labour,  
running the noisy shuttle through the warp,  
or boiling down the sweet juice of grape must, on the fire,  
while skimming the cauldron's boiling liquid with a leaf.  
But Ceres's golden crop is reaped in midday heat,  
and in midday heat the threshing floor thrashes the dry ears.  
Plough half-naked: half-naked, sow: winter's the farmer's quiet time.  
In the cold season countrymen mainly enjoy their lot  
and treat themselves, delighting in feasts, together.  
Genial winter entices them, and soothes their cares,  
just as when loaded ships touch harbour,  
and happy sailors crown the sterns with garlands.  
But then is the time to gather acorns, and berries  
from the bay-tree, and trim the olives, and blood-red myrtles,  
to set snares for cranes, and nets for stags,

and chase the long-eared hares, to strike the deer  
whirling a Balearic sling by its thongs of hemp,  
when snow lies deep, and rivers thrust up ice.

### **BkI:311-334 Storms**

What should I tell of autumn's storms, and stars,  
and what men must watch for when the daylight shortens,  
and summer becomes more changeable, or when spring  
pours down showers, when spiked crops bristle in the fields,  
and wheat swells with sap on its green stem?  
Often, when the farmer brought the reapers to his golden fields,  
and cut the barley with its brittle stalks, I've seen  
all the winds conflict in battle, ripping up the heavy crop  
from its deepest roots, on every side, and hurling it  
into the air: then the storm would sweep away  
the light stalks and the flying stubble in its dark whirlwind.  
Often a vast column of water towers in the sky,  
and clouds from the heights gather into a vile tempest  
of dark rain: high heaven falls, and washes away  
the joyful crops and the oxen's labour, with its great deluge:  
the ditches fill, and the channelled rivers swell and roar,  
and the heaving ocean boils in the narrow straits.  
Jupiter himself, at storm-clouded midnight, wields  
his lightning bolts with glittering hand: at whose shock  
the vast earth trembles: the creatures run, and humbling terror  
subdues men's hearts everywhere: with blazing shafts of light  
he rushes over Athos, Rhodope and the Ceraunian peaks.  
The Southerlies redouble, and the rain intensifies,  
now the woods moan with the mighty blast, now the shores.

### **BkI:335-350 The Worship Of Ceres**

Fearing this, note the signs and seasons of the heavens,  
to what region Saturn's cold planet retreats,  
and into what celestial orbit Mercury's fire wanders.  
Above all worship the gods, and offer great Ceres

her yearly rites, with sacrifice on the grass, delighted,  
at winter's final end, now it is clear springtime.  
Then lambs grow fattest, and wine is mellow,  
sleep is sweet, and the shadows are dense on the hills.  
Let all the country folk worship Ceres: bathe  
the honeycomb for her, in milk and vintage wine,  
let the auspicious victim go three times round the new crop,  
while your whole choir of companions follow, rejoicing,  
and call Ceres loudly to their homes: and let no one  
put his sickle to the ripe corn, until he has wreathed  
his brow with a garland of oak leaves,  
danced artless dances and sung her songs.

### **BkI:351-392 Weather Signs: Terrestrial**

And so that we might learn the sure signs of these things,  
heat, and rain, and cold-bearing winds,  
Jupiter himself commanded what the monthly moon  
should warn of, what would signal the easing of the winds,  
at what frequent sight the farmer should stable his cattle.  
Immediately the winds rise, either the straits of the sea  
begin to heave and swell, and a low noise is heard  
from the high mountains: or the shore rings  
with a distant sound, and a murmuring rises in the glades.  
Then the waves don't spare the curved ships, the swift  
sea-birds fly back from mid-ocean, and send their cries to shore,  
coots of the seaboard settle on dry land, and the grey heron  
leaves its familiar marsh, and flies high above the clouds.  
Often when the wind is threatening you'll see stars slide  
headlong from the sky, showing white in the dark of night,  
with a long trail of flame behind them:  
often light chaff, and fallen leaves fly up,  
and feathers dance together skimming the water.  
But when lightning flashes from the wild North sector,  
and when the house of the East and West winds thunders,  
the whole countryside is afloat, with overflowing ditches,  
every sailor furls dripping sails at sea. Rain never takes men

unawares: either the cranes, airborne, fly before it, as it reaches  
the valley's depths, or a heifer looks up at the sky  
and sniffs the air with nostrils spread,  
or the swallows twitter circling the pools,  
and the frogs in the mud croak their ancient lament.  
And often the ant, beating out a narrow track,  
brings eggs from an innermost nest, and a huge rainbow  
drinks, and a great troop of rooks leaving the fields  
beat their wings together densely, in ranks.  
Then there are the many sea birds, and those  
that search in Cayster's sweet pools among the Asian meadows:  
you see them emulating each other splashing water madly  
over their backs, dipping their heads in the waves, paddling  
into the stream, and enjoying their bath with wild enthusiasm.  
Then the cruel raven's deep cry calls up the rain,  
and, alone with himself, he walks the dry sands.  
Even girls, spinning, at their nocturnal task, have not failed  
to note the coming storm, seeing the oil sputter  
in the fiery lamp, and a clot of soot gather on the wick.

### **BkI:393-423 Weather Signs: After The Rain**

No less, after rain, do we predict sunlight and clear skies,  
and recognise fair weather by certain signs:  
since the stars' sharp edges are not obscured  
and the Moon rises, not dimmed by her brother's rays,  
and thin fleecy clouds no longer drift across the sky:  
The halcyons, Thetis's delight, stop spreading their wings  
on the sand, to catch the warm sun, and the muddy pigs  
forget to toss loose bales of hay around with their snouts.  
But the mists seek out the valleys more, and settle  
on the plains, and the owl, watching the sunset  
from some high hill, gives out its twilight calls in vain.  
Nisus, the sea-eagle's seen high in the clear sky,  
and Scylla, the rock-dove, suffers for the purple lock:  
wherever she flies, cutting the thin air with her wings,  
see, her fierce enemy Nisus, follows her through the breeze



with a loud whirring: when Nisus climbs in the sky,  
she flies quickly, cutting the thin air with her wings.  
Now the rooks repeat their clear calls, three or four times,  
with narrowed throats, and often caw to themselves  
in their high nests among the leaves, delighting  
in some unusual pleasantry: they're glad, the rain over,  
to see their sweet nests and their little chicks again:  
not that I think they have divine wisdom  
or greater knowledge of the workings of Fate:  
but when the weather changes, and the rain from fickle skies,  
and Jupiter, among the wet South winds, makes what was now  
rarefied, dense, and makes dense what was rarefied,  
ideas in their minds alter, and their hearts feel differently,  
differently to when the wind was chasing the clouds.  
So that chorus of birds in the fields, the delight  
of the cattle, the triumphant cries of the rooks.

#### **BkI:424-460 Weather Signs: Moon And Sun**

If you pay close attention to the rapid suns and moon,  
following in order, tomorrow's hour won't fail you,  
you'll not be caught out by a cloudless night.  
As soon as the moon waxes, as her light renews,  
if she encloses a dark mist in dim horns,  
heavy rains are brewing for farmers and for sailors:  
but if a virgin blush spreads over her face, the wind will rise,  
golden Phoebe always blushes in the wind.  
And if on the fourth day (and this is the clearest sign)  
she travels a clear sky with undimmed horns,  
then that day, and all the days after it, to the end  
of the month, will be free of wind and rain,  
and sailors safe in harbour will worship  
Glaucus, Panopea, and Melicerta, Ino's son.  
The Sun too provides signals, rising, and when setting  
into the waves: certain signals follow the sun,  
those he brings at dawn, and as the stars rise.  
When, hidden in cloud, he's discoloured the early morning

with blotches, and is veiled at the centre of his disc,  
expect the showers: since the south wind, inauspicious  
for trees, crops and herds, is sweeping up from the deep.  
Or when scattered rays break through dense cloud  
at dawn, or Aurora rises pale as she leaves  
Tithonus's saffron bed, ah, then the vine-leaf  
will protect the ripe grapes badly: the bristling hail  
dances so fiercely, rattling on the roofs.  
And it will do you more good still to remember, this,  
when he's crossed the sky and is setting: often  
we see varied colours wandering over his face:  
dark-blue announces rain, fiery colours an Easterly,  
but if the hues begin to mix with glowing fire,  
then you'll see everything rage with wind and storm.  
Don't let anyone advise me to travel the sea that night,  
or haul in my cable from the land.  
But if when the sun brings and ends the day  
his disc is bright, your fear of storms is groundless,  
and you'll see the woods swaying in a clear North wind.

### **BkI:461-497 The Portents At Julius Caesar's Death**

So, the sun will give you signs of what late evening brings,  
and from where a fair-weather wind blows the clouds,  
or what the rain-filled southerly intends. Who dares to say  
the sun tricks us? He often warns us that hidden troubles  
threaten, that treachery and secret wars are breeding.  
He pitied Rome when Caesar was killed,  
and hid his shining face in gloomy darkness,  
and an impious age feared eternal night.  
At that time earth, and the level sea,  
troublesome dogs, and fateful birds, gave omens.  
How often Etna inundated the Cyclopes's fields,  
streams of lava pouring from her shattered furnace,  
hurling gouts of flame and molten rock!  
In Germany they heard the clash of weapons,  
across the sky, the Alps shook with strange quakes.

A great shout was heard, openly, in the silent groves,  
and pale ghosts in strange forms were seen in the dark of night,  
and, ah horror, creatures spoke like men.  
Rivers stopped, earth split, and sad, the ivories wept  
in the temples, and the bronze sweated.  
Eridanus, king of the rivers, washed away forests  
in the whirl of his maddened vortex, and swept  
cattle and stables over the plains. Nor at that time  
was there any lack of ominous marks in the dark entrails,  
blood flowing in the wells, and mighty cities  
echoing at night with the howls of wolves.  
Never did greater lightning flash from a clear sky,  
never did fatal comets shine more often.  
So Philippi again saw Roman armies clash  
amongst themselves, with equal weapons:  
And the gods thought it not unfitting that Emathia and the broad plain  
of Haemus, should twice be enriched with our blood.  
And a time will come, when in those lands,  
the farmer labouring at the earth with curved plough,  
will come upon spears eaten by scabrous rust,  
or strike an empty helmet with his heavy hoe,  
and wonder at giant bones in the opened grave.

### **BkI:498-514 A Prayer for Augustus's Success**

Gods of my country, Heroes, Romulus, Mother Vesta,  
who guards the Tuscan Tiber, and Rome's Palatine,  
don't stop this young prince at least from rescuing  
a world turned upside down! Our blood's atoned,  
long enough, for Laomedon's perjuries at Troy:  
heaven's realms have denied you to us long enough,  
Caesar, and they complain of your need for earthly triumphs.  
Here right and wrong are reversed: so many wars  
in the world, so many faces of evil: the plough  
not worthy of any honour, our lands neglected, robbed of farmers,  
and the curved pruning-hooks beaten into solid blades.  
Here Germany, there Euphrates wages war:

neighbouring cities take up arms, breaking the laws  
that bound them: impious Mars rages through the world:  
just as when the chariots stream from the starting gates,  
add to their speed each lap, and the charioteer tugging vainly at the bridles,  
is dragged on by the horses, the chariot not responding to the reins

### **End Of Book I**

## **Book II: Arboriculture And Viniculture**

### **BkII:1-8 Introduction**

So much for the cultivation of fields, and the stars in the sky:  
Now I'll sing you, Bacchus, not forgetting the saplings  
of woodlands, and the children of slow-growing olives.  
Here, O Lenean Father (here all is filled with your gifts,  
the field flourishes filled with autumnal vine shoots,  
the grape harvest foams in the brimming vats)  
here, O Lenean Father, come, and, free of footwear  
plunge naked feet, with me, in the new vintage.

### **BkII:9-34 Methods of Propagation**

Firstly Nature has various ways of propagating trees.  
Some, unforced by Man, appear far and wide, on their own,  
and colonise the plains and the winding rivers:  
such as the pliant osier and the slow-growing broom,  
the poplar and the pale silver-leafed willow:  
others spring from fallen seed, like the tall  
chestnut, the broad-leaved oak of Jupiter's groves,  
and the oak the Greeks consider to be oracular.  
With others a dense thicket sprouts from the roots,  
as in cherries and elms: even the laurel of Parnassus  
springs as a tiny shoot, in its mother's extensive shade.  
These are the methods Nature first ordered: by these means  
every kind of forest tree, shrub, and sacred grove flourishes.  
There are others that practice has found out for herself,  
in her own way. This man cuts shoots from the tender trunk  
of the mother tree, and sets them in furrows: that one buries  
stems in the ground, as cross-cut stakes and pointed spikes:  
other shrubs wait to be bent in curved layers,  
and the shoots gain life from their own soil:  
others need no roots, and the pruner has no fear  
of cutting the top, and trusting the tip to the earth.  
Amazing to say, when an olive-trunk is cut,

an olive root thrusts itself out of the dry wood.  
And often we see one tree's branches harmlessly  
given over to another's, a pear altered to carry grafted apples,  
and stony cornelian cherries blushing on a plum.

### **BkII:35-60 The Labour Required**

So, farmers, work, oh, learn the methods proper to each species,  
and tame wild fruits by cultivation, and never let your soil  
be idle. Thrace delights in planting vines  
and adorning great Tabernus with the olive.  
And come, Maecenas, trace together the labour I've begun,  
oh noble one, deservedly, the chief part of my fame,  
set your sails to course over the open sea.  
I don't seek to embrace all in my verses,  
not if I had a hundred tongues, a hundred mouths,  
an iron voice. Come, pass by the nearest point of shore,  
land is to hand: I'll not hold you here with idle song,  
through rambling ways and lengthy preludes.  
Trees that lift themselves into the regions of light  
spring up unfruitful, but are pleasing and vigorous,  
since there's a natural power in the soil: these too  
if grafted, or transplanted in well-dug trenches,  
will lose their woodland nature, and in careful cultivation  
will not be slow to follow any pattern you wish.  
And indeed the barren sucker that springs from the base  
of the stem will do this if set in open ground:  
now though it's mother's leaves and branches darken it,  
inhibiting fruit as it grows, nipping it in the bud.  
The tree that raises itself from scattered seed,  
grows slowly, creating shade for our descendants,  
its fruits degenerate, losing their former savour,  
and the vine bears sad clusters, a prize for the birds.

### **BkII:61-108 Treatment Of Individual Species**

Labour must be spent on them all, of course,

and all have to be set in trenches and tamed at great cost.  
 But olives respond best as boles, vines in layers,  
 Paphian myrtles from the solid trunk:  
 tough hazels spring from suckers, and the giant ash:  
 and the shade-giving tree that garlanded Hercules,  
 and Chaonian Jupiter, from acorns: so too the tall palm  
 rises, and the fir that will meet the dangers of the sea.  
 But the wild strawberry-tree is grafted with a walnut shoot,  
 and barren plane-trees have carried vigorous apple:  
 the beech has shown white with pale chestnut flowers, and the ash  
 with the pear's: and pigs have crunched acorns under the elm.  
 Nor is the method of grafting and budding always the same.  
 Where the buds push out of the bark and burst  
 their tender sheaths, a narrow slit's made in the knot:  
 in this they insert a bud from a different tree,  
 and teach it to grow into the sapwood.  
 Or, again, trunks without knots are split open,  
 and paths are cut deep to the core, using wedges,  
 then vigorous shoots admitted: and, in a little while,  
 a tall tree with fine branches rises to the sky,  
 wondering at strange leaves and fruit not its own.  
 Also the strong elms are not of only one species,  
 nor the willow, lotus, nor the cypresses of Ida,  
 nor do rich olives only grow in one form, there are  
 oval *orchads*, long *radii*, and bitter-fruited *pausians*:  
 and so with apples and the orchards of Alcinous: nor are cuttings  
 the same for Crustumian pears, and Syrian, or the heavy *volema*.  
 The same vines don't hang from our trees  
 that Lesbos harvests in Methymna's branches:  
 there are Thracian grapes, and the white Mareotic,  
 one suited to rich soils, the other to lighter ones,  
 and the Psithian, better for raisin-wine, and the light Lagean,  
 sure to trip your feet, and tie your tongue some day:  
 the ripe purple and the early-ripening, and what should I say  
 of you Rhaetic? Still yours don't compete with Falernian cellars!  
 And there are Aminnean vines, their wine's most certain,  
 to which the Tmolian bows, and the king itself, Phanaean:

and the lesser Argitis, that none can match  
in quantity or in enduring so many years.  
I wouldn't pass you by, Rhodian, fit for the gods  
and the second course: or Bumastus, your swollen clusters.  
But there's no final count of the many species or names,  
nor indeed is it worth counting them all:  
who wishes to know, will also want to learn how many grains  
of sand, on the Libyan plain, are blown by the West wind,  
or how many waves of the Ionian Sea reach shore  
when an East wind strikes the ships violently.

### **BkII:109-135 The Effects of Climate and Location**

Nor do all lands carry all kinds of plants.  
Willows grow by rivers, and alders in dank marshes,  
and the barren manna ash on rocky hills:  
the coast delights in myrtles: lastly Bacchus's vine  
loves open hills, and the yew the cold North wind.  
See, the furthest regions are tamed by cultivation,  
the Arabs at home in the East, the tattooed Scythians:  
country's differ in their trees. Only India  
bears black ebony, only Sabeans have frankincense.  
Why tell you of the balsams that drip from perfumed wood,  
or the berries of the evergreen acanthus?  
Why mention the Ethiopian trees white with cotton,  
or how the Chinese obtain silk from their leaves?  
Or the jungles India bears nearer to the Ocean,  
on that coast at the world's end, where no arrows  
can reach the air above the tops of the trees?  
Yet that people's not slow to handle the quiver.  
Media produces bitter juices, and the lasting taste  
of the healthy citron, which comes as an antidote,  
and drives the dark venom from the limbs  
if a cruel stepmother poisons the drinks,  
mixing herbs with harmful spells, no one suspecting.  
The tree itself is tall and looks like a bay  
(and would be a bay if it didn't give off



a different perfume): no wind makes its leaves fall:  
its flowers are particularly lasting: the Mede  
sweetens his breath with it, and cures old age's asthma.

## **BkII:136-176 A Celebration of Italy**

But neither the groves of Media, its richest soils,  
nor lovely Ganges, nor Hermus full of gold,  
compete with Italy's glories, not Bactria, or India,  
nor all Panchaea, rich with incense-bearing sands.  
No bulls with nostrils breathing fire, ploughed this land  
in order to sow the savage dragon's teeth,  
no human harvest bristled, thick with helmets and spears:  
but dense fruit filled her, and the juice of Massica's vines:  
she contains olive-trees and pleasing herds.  
Here the war-horse charges proudly over the plain,  
here are your snowy flocks, Clitumnus, and, the noblest sacrifice,  
your bulls, that, drenched in your sacred stream,  
have often led Roman triumphs to the gods' temples.  
Here is continual spring, and summer in unseasonable months,  
the herds breed twice, the trees are good, twice, for fruit.  
And raging tigers are absent, and lions' savage young,  
no aconite deceives unlucky foragers,  
no scaly serpent slides his huge segments over the ground,  
or winds his vast length in coils.  
Add to that all the towns, the work of human labour,  
built up by hand on the steep cliffs,  
and the rivers gliding by the ancient walls.  
Shall I recall the seas that wash the land to east and west?  
Or the vast lakes? You, Larius, our largest, and you, Benacus,  
with the waves and roar of the surging sea?  
Shall I recall the harbours, and the barrier across the Lucrine,  
and the angry ocean sounding, far off, in mighty anger  
where the Julian waves are repulsed  
and the Tyrrhenian tide pours into the straits of Avernus?  
This land has revealed streams of silver and copper mines,  
in its deep veins, and has flowed with much gold.

She has bred a fierce race of men, Marsians and Sabines,  
Ligurians used to hardship, and Volscian spearmen,  
the Decii, the Marii, and the great Camilli,  
the Scipios tough in war, and you, greatest Caesar,  
who, having conquered Asia's furthest shores, now drive  
the cowardly Indians from our Roman strongholds.  
Hail, land of Saturn, great mother of fruits and men:  
for you I carry out this work of ancient art and praise,  
and dare to unseal the sacred fountains,  
and sing the songs of Ascrea in Roman towns.

### **BkII:177-225 The Nature of Various Soils**

This is the section on the nature of soils, the vigour of each,  
its colour, and its natural powers for supporting growth.  
Firstly, difficult ground and unkindly hills,  
where there's poor clay and gravel in the thorny fields,  
enjoy Minerva's groves of long-lived olives.  
A sign of this is the wild olive, the oleaster, growing freely  
in the same place, the ground covered with its fruit.  
But a rich soil delighting in sweet moisture,  
a level thick with grass, and deeply fertile,  
(such as we're often used to seeing in a hollow valley  
in the hills: the streams flow into it from the high cliffs,  
carrying with them rich mud), one that rises to the south,  
and nourishes ferns, hostile to the curved plough,  
this will one day provide you the strongest of vines,  
and rich flowing wine: from it come fruitful grapes,  
and the juice we offer in golden bowls,  
while the sleek Tuscan blows his ivory flute at the altars,  
and we deliver up the steaming organs in curved dishes.  
If you're more inclined to keep cows and calves,  
or breed sheep, or goats that nip the plants,  
search out the distant woodland pastures of rich Tarentum,  
or such fields as those unfortunate Mantua lost,  
feeding the snowy swans in grass-bordered rivers:  
the flocks won't lack clear springs or grazing,

and whatever the herds crop in the long days,  
the cool dew will replace at night.  
Earth that's black and rich under the heavy ploughshare  
and whose soil crumbles (such as we try for by ploughing)  
is best for crops: you won't see more wagons heading  
home from any other, behind the slow oxen:  
or the earth from which an irate farmer's stripped the trees,  
destroying groves untouched for many years,  
and, with the deep-rooted trunks, tearing up ancient homes  
of birds: they leave their nests and seek the skies,  
but the virgin fields gleam under the driven plough.  
For the barren gravel of the hill country hardly feeds  
the bees with humble spurge-laurel and rosemary,  
and the rough tufa and chalk haunted by black watersnakes  
shows that no other land gives the snakes  
such sweet food or such winding retreats.  
The soil that breathes out thin mists, and steams fleetingly,  
and drinks the moisture and discharges it at will,  
that always clothes itself greenly with its own grass,  
and doesn't coat iron with rough and salty rust,  
that will wreath your elms with healthy vines,  
that will be rich in olives, that you'll find in cultivation  
suited to herds, and patient under the curved plough.  
Such is the soil that rich Capua farms, and the coast near  
Vesuvius's ridge, and Clanius, not friendly to worthless Acerris.

### **BkII:226-258 The Recognition of Soil Types**

Now I'll tell you how to recognise each type of soil.  
If you want to know if it's nature is lighter or denser  
(since one favours corn, the other vines,  
the denser Ceres more, the lighter Bacchus)  
pick out a place by sight, and order a pit sunk deeply  
in the ground, and replace all the earth again,  
and level the surface of the ground with your feet.  
If it's deficient, the land is light and fitter for herds,  
and the kindly vine: if it won't fill its previous place

and there's earth left when the trench is filled,  
the earth compacted: expect resistant clods,  
and dense ridges, and plough the earth with strong oxen.  
As for salt-laden land, the kind called bitter,  
(it's unfavourable for crops, and does not mellow with ploughing,  
adds nothing to a vineyard's lineage, or an apple's fame)  
it will grant this proof: take your thickly-woven baskets  
and wine-strainers from the smoky roof:  
press that poor soil into them, with sweet spring water,  
to the top: all the water will be forced out of course  
and large drops will squeeze through the willow:  
but the taste will clearly manifest itself, and its bitter flavour  
will make anyone testing screw up their mouths.  
Again we learn which soils are rich, precisely like this:  
it never crumbles when split, in the hands,  
but sticks to the fingers like pitch when held.  
Moist soil yields taller grass, and is duly fertile  
in its own right. Ah, may that over-rich soil not belong to me,  
and not show its excess vigour in the first shoots of wheat!  
A heavy soil reveals itself silently by its weight, as does  
a light one: it's easy for the eye to know a black soil,  
and any obvious colour. But to detect a wretchedly cold soil  
is difficult: only pine, gloomy yew, and black ivy  
occasionally disclose traces of its presence.

### **BkII:259-353 Planting A Vineyard**

Having noted this, remember to let the ground dry out well,  
and raze large mounds by trenching, and expose  
the upturned clods of soil to the North wind,  
before you plant a fertile type of vine. Fields with soils  
that crumble are best: the wind and cold frost  
take care of that, and the digger who moves and shakes the land.  
But if these men are to let nothing escape them,  
they first identify similar plots, where the vines can be prepared,  
early, for their supporting trees, or where they can be taken later,  
and planted out, so they don't suddenly reject the change of soil.

They even print on the bark the region of the sky each one faced,  
so they can identically align the side that withstood  
the southern heat, and that which was turned to the northern pole:  
we grow accustomed to so much in tender years.

Consider first whether it's better to plant the vines on the slopes  
or on the level. If you're laying out fertile fields on the plain,  
plant close: Bacchus is no more sluggish in close-planted soil:  
but if the soil rises in mounds and sloping hills, give the rows room:  
and again, when the vines are set, let all the paths  
be squared off neatly with a clear-cut boundary.

As in great battles often, when the legion deploys its cohorts  
in a long line, and the column holds the open ground,  
the troops ranked deep, and the whole plain far and wide  
heaves with shining bronze, the grim conflict not yet joined,  
but Mars wanders uncertainly between the troops:

so let all your paths be laid out equal in size:  
not just so that the view might nourish idle thought,  
but because only like this will the earth grant equal vigour  
to all, and the stems be able to extend into free air.

Perhaps you'll also ask what depth the trenches should be.  
I'd even trust a vine to a shallow furrow.

But sink the tree deep in the earth,  
the oak above all, which stretches its crown to the air of heaven,  
as far as it stretches its roots down to Tartarus.

So that no storms, or gales, or rains uproot it:  
it remains untouched, and, enduring, it outlasts  
many generations and centuries of men as they roll by.

It extends strong trunks and branches to either side,  
and itself, in the middle, casts a vast shadow.

Don't let your vineyard slope towards the setting sun,  
and don't plant hazel among the vines, or attack  
the top shoots, or take cuttings from the tip  
(they prefer the ground so much) or damage young plants  
with a blunt knife, or graft into trunks of wild olive.

Since often fire's left behind by a careless shepherd,  
fire that lurking, hidden under the rich bark,  
seizes the trunk and climbing to the high foliage

sends a great roaring to the sky: then following  
the branches and tall crowns, rules supreme,  
engulfing the whole grove in flames, and throwing up  
dark clouds of thick pitch-black smoke,  
especially if a gale from above has descended on the woods,  
and a following wind intensifies the burning.  
When this happens the tree stumps are worthless,  
and can't survive being cut back, or resurrect  
their previous greenness from the depths of the earth:  
only the wretched bitter-leaved oleaster remains.  
And don't let anyone be so wise as to convince you  
to turn the solid earth when a North wind's blowing.  
Since winter grips the soil with frost and won't let a shoot  
that's planted then fix its frozen roots in the ground.  
The optimum season for planting vines is when the stork  
that enemy of long snakes, arrives, in the first blush of spring,  
or in autumn's first chill before the horses of the swift sun  
touch winter, when summer is on the wane.  
Spring benefits the leaves of the groves and woods,  
in Spring soil swells and demands life-bringing seed.  
Then Heaven, the omnipotent father, descends as fertile rain,  
into the lap of his joyful consort, and joining his power  
to her vast body nourishes all growth.  
Then the wild thickets echo to the songs of birds,  
and in the settled days the cattle renew their loves:  
the kindly earth gives birth, and the fields open their hearts,  
in the warm West winds: gentle moisture flows everywhere,  
and the grasses safely dare to trust to the new sun.  
the vine-shoots don't fear a rising Southerly,  
or rain driven through the sky, by great Northerly gales,  
but put out their buds, and unfold all their leaves.  
I can believe such days shone at the first dawn  
of the nascent world, and took such temperate course.  
That was true Spring, the great world passed its Spring,  
and the Easterlies spared their wintry gales,  
when the first cattle drank in the dawn,  
and the iron race of men lifted their heads from the hard ground,

and wild creatures were freed in the woods, and stars in the sky.  
And tender things could not endure their labour,  
if this respite did not come between the cold and the heat,  
and heaven's gentleness welcome the earth.  
What's more, whatever cuttings you push into the earth,  
sprinkle them with manure, and don't forget to bury them with soil,  
and dig in porous stones or rough shell:  
then the water will slip between, and the fine air steal in,  
and the sown plants will breathe. And some have been known  
to cover them with stones, and large heavy tiles:  
defending them against driving showers, and when the Dog-Star  
brings its heat, splitting the cracked fields with thirst.

### **BkII:354-420 Care of The Vineyard**

When the sets are planted it remains to you to break up the soil  
at the roots, often, and to wield the heavy hoe,  
or work the ground under pressure of the ploughshare,  
and turn your labouring oxen between the vines themselves:  
then prepare light canes, props from peeled sticks,  
ash stakes and strong forks, by means of which  
the vines can be trained to climb, scorn the winds,  
and follow the upper layers of the elms.  
And when the fresh leaves bud in their early youth,  
be careful of their tenderness, and while the shoot pushes  
joyfully skyward, growing with free rein in the pure air,  
don't touch the plants themselves with a keen blade,  
but pick and pluck among the leaves with bent fingers.  
Later when they've grown to clasp the elms with strong shoots,  
then clip their foliage, and prune their branches  
(before then they'll fear the knife), and, in the end,  
maintain a harsh rule, and curb their uncontrolled growth.  
You must weave hedgerows too, and keep out all cattle,  
principally while leaves are tender, and unused to suffering,  
for besides severe winters, and the power of the sun,  
wild oxen, and persistent roe-deer, toy with them,  
and sheep, and greedy heifers, graze on them.

No cold, solid with hoar frost, or summer heat,  
hanging heavily over arid crags, has done as much harm  
as the herds, the mischief from their harsh teeth,  
and the scars gnawed deep in the stems.  
It's for no other crime that a goat is sacrificed to Bacchus  
on every altar, and that the old tragedies arrived on stage,  
and the people of Theseus set up tributes to genius, in the villages  
and at the crossroads, and danced joyfully in the soft meadows,  
among the wine-cups, on the oiled goat-skin.  
Likewise the Ausonian farmers, a people out of Troy,  
act out rough verses, with unrestrained laughter,  
and wear fearful faces, hollowed from bark,  
and call to you, Bacchus, in joyful song, and hang  
tender little masks on the tall pine-trees.  
Then every vineyard ripens with plentiful fruit,  
richness fills hollow valleys and deep glades,  
and wherever else the god has turned his handsome face.  
So, in the songs of our land, we'll duly speak in Bacchus's  
honour, and bring him dishes of meats and sacred cakes,  
and, led by the horn, the sacrificial goat will stand at the altar,  
and the rich organs will be roasted on hazel spits.  
There's another task too of dressing the vines, over which  
there can never be too much trouble taken: since three or four times  
each year your soil must be turned and the clods broken  
endlessly with a reversed hoe, and all the plantation  
lightened of its leaves. The farmer's work returns, driven  
in a cycle, and the year revolves on itself over its own track.  
And once the vineyard has shed its autumn leaves,  
and the cold North wind has shaken the glory from the woods,  
the keen farmer already gives thought to the coming year,  
and attacks the vines he left, trimming them with Saturn's  
curved blade, and shaping them by pruning.  
Be first to dig the ground, first to carry the off-cuts away  
and burn them, and first to put the stakes away under cover:  
be the last to harvest. Twice, leaf shadow thickens on the vines,  
twice, weeds and briars cover the vineyard: either labour  
is heavy: praise the large estates but farm a small one.



Also rough shoots of broom must be cut, in the woods,  
and reeds from the river, along the banks,  
and you're kept busy tending the beds of wild willows.  
Now the vines are tied, now they're free of the pruning knife,  
now the last vine-dresser sings of his finished rows:  
still you must stir the soil, and trouble the dust,  
and be fearful of Jupiter's rain on your ripening grapes.

### **BkII:420-457 A Wealth of Trees And Plants**

Olives, on the contrary, need no care,  
they don't require curved knife or stubborn hoe,  
once they've clung to the fields, and endured the breeze:  
the earth itself, opened up by the curved ploughshare,  
gives enough moisture and heavy fruit.  
Nurture the rich olive, like this, pleasing to Peace.  
Fruit-trees too race skywards with natural vigour,  
as soon as they sense that their trunks are firmly set,  
and reach full strength, needing no effort from us.  
Meanwhile ever wood's no less heavy with fruit,  
and the wild-bird's haunts redden with crimson berries.  
The clover's grazed: the high wood provides pine torches,  
so the fires of night are fed and pour out their light.  
And do men hesitate to plant and tend the fields?  
Why talk of the greater? Willows and humble broom  
provide grazing for the sheep, shade for the shepherd,  
a hedge for the crops, pastures for the bees.  
And the delight of viewing Cytorus's undulating boxwood,  
or groves of Narycian pitch pine, the delight  
of seeing fields that owe nothing to men or hoes.  
Even the barren woods on the heights of the Caucasus,  
storm-tossed, and shattered, endlessly by angry Easterlies,  
give something useful in their way, good timber,  
pine for ships, cedar and cypress for houses.  
From them farmer's plane spokes, and wheels, for carts,  
and lay out curved keels, and ribs, for boats.  
The willow's rich in osiers, the elm in leaves: the myrtle,

and the cornel, good for war, make strong spear-shafts,  
and yews are bent into Ituraean bows.  
Smooth lime and box, turned on the lathe, take form,  
and are hollowed out by the sharp steel.  
So, the light alder, sent on its way, rides the foaming waves  
of the River Po, and so the bees swarm and build  
in the hollow cork-trees, and the hearts of rotten oaks.  
What gift as memorable has the vine brought?  
Bacchus even gave reason for offence: he caused the deaths  
of the maddened Centaurs, Rhoetus, Pholos  
and Hylaeus, who threatened the Lapiths with a heavy bowl.

### **BkII:458-542 The Joys Of The True Life**

O farmers, more than happy if they've realised their blessings,  
for whom Earth unprompted, supreme in justice, pours out  
a rich livelihood from her soil, far from the clash of armies!  
If no tall mansion with proud entrance disgorges a tide of guests  
at dawn, if they don't gaze at doors inlaid with tortoiseshell,  
clothes threaded with gold, or bronzes from Ephyra,  
if their white wool's not dipped in Assyrian dyes,  
nor the clear oil they use spoiled by rosemary,  
still there's no lack of tranquil peace, life without deceit,  
rich in many things, the quiet of broad estates  
(caves, and natural lakes, and cool valleys,  
the cattle lowing, and sweet sleep under the trees):  
they have glades in the woods, and haunts of game,  
a youth of patient effort, accustomed to hardship,  
worship of the gods, and respect for old age: Justice,  
as she left the Earth, planted her last steps among them.  
As for me, may the sweet Muses, supreme above all,  
whose rites, I celebrate, stirred by a great love,  
receive me, and show me heaven's roads, and the stars,  
the sun's many eclipses, the moon's labours,  
where earth-quakes come from, forces that swell the deep seas,  
bursting their barriers, then sinking back again into themselves:  
why winter suns rush so to dip themselves in the ocean,

and what it is that holds back the slow nights.  
But if the chill blood around my heart prevents me  
from reaching those regions of nature, let the country  
and the flowing streams in the valleys please me,  
let me love the rivers and the woods, unknown. O for the plains,  
for Spercheus, for Taygetus of the Spartan virgins' Bacchic rites!  
O set me in the cool valleys of Haemus, and protect me  
with the shadows of mighty branches!  
He who's been able to learn the causes of things is happy,  
and has set all fear, and unrelenting fate, and the noise  
of greedy Acheron, under his feet. And he's happy too,  
who knows the woodland gods, Pan,  
and old Sylvanus, and the Nymphs, his sisters.  
The honours of the crowd, royal purple, won't move him,  
nor the discord stirring treacherous brothers,  
the Dacians swooping down from perjured Danube,  
the wealth of Rome, or doomed kingdoms: he neither  
grieves in pity for the poor, nor envies the rich.  
He gather the fruits that his trees and his fields  
themselves have produced, and has not viewed  
the laws in iron, the Forum's madness, the public records.  
Others trouble unknown seas with oars, rush on  
their swords, enter the gates and courts of kings.  
This man destroys a city and its wretched houses,  
to drink from a jewelled cup, and sleep on Tyrian purple:  
that one heaps up wealth, and broods about buried gold:  
one's stupefied, astonished by the Rostra: another, gapes,  
entranced by repeated applause, from people and princes,  
along the benches: men delight in steeping themselves  
in their brothers' blood, changing sweet home and hearth for exile,  
and seeking a country that lies under an alien sun.  
The farmer has been ploughing the soil with curving blade:  
it's his year's work, it's sustenance for his little grandsons,  
and his country, his herds of cattle and his faithful oxen.  
There's no rest, but the season is rich in fruit  
or his herds produce, or Ceres's wheat sheaves  
burden the furrows with their load, and fill the barns.

Winter comes: Sicyon's olive is bruised in the mill,  
the pigs come home fattened with acorns, the woods  
give fruit from the strawberry-tree, autumn its varied yield,  
and the grapes are dried high on the sunny rocks.  
Meanwhile his dear children hang on his lips,  
his chaste house guards its purity, the cows drop  
milky udders, and the fat kids butt each other,  
horn against horn, on the pleasant grass.  
He himself has a holiday, and stretched on the ground,  
with a fire in the middle, he calls to you, Bacchus,  
offering a libation, while his friends garland the bowl,  
or he sets up a target on an elm, for the swift spear-throwing,  
or they strip their tough bodies for the country-wrestling.  
The ancient Sabines once lived such a life,  
and Remus and his brother, so Etruria grew strong,  
so Rome became the loveliest of all things,  
and enclosed her seven hills with a single wall.  
Before even Cretan Jupiter held the sceptre, before  
an impious race feasted on slaughtered oxen,  
golden Saturn lived such a life on Earth:  
before they'd yet heard the blare of trumpets,  
or the sword-blades ring, laid on the harsh anvil.  
But we've crossed a vast expanse of space, and now  
it's time to loose the necks of our sweating team.

## **End of Book II**

## **Book III: Livestock Farming**

### **BkIII:1-48 Introduction**

I'll sing of you, great Pales, also, and you Apollo, famed shepherd  
of Amphrysus, and of you, woods and rivers of Mount Lycaeus.  
Now all the other themes are too well known,  
that might have charmed an idle mind with song.  
Who hasn't heard of cruel Eurystheus,  
or the altars of wicked Busiris?  
Who has not told of the boy, Hylas, and Latona's Delos,  
and Hippodame, and Pelops, known for his ivory shoulder,  
fearless with horses? I must try a path, by which I too  
can rise from the earth and fly, victorious, from men's lips.  
If life lasts, I'll be the first to return to my country,  
bringing the Muses with me from the Aonian peak:  
I'll be the first, Mantua, to bring you Idumaeen palms,  
and I'll set up a temple of marble by the water, on that green plain,  
where great Mincius wanders in slow curves,  
and clothes his banks with tender reeds.  
Caesar will be in the middle, and own the temple.  
I, the victor, conspicuous in Tyrian purple, will drive  
a hundred four-horse chariots by the river, in his honour.  
For me, all Greece will leave behind, Alpheus, and the groves  
of Molorchus, to compete in races and box with raw-hide gloves.  
I'll bring gifts, my head wreathed in cut olive-leaves.  
Even now it's a delight to lead the solemn procession  
to the sanctuary, and watch the sacrifice of the cattle,  
or how the scene vanishes as the facade turns,  
and how the purple hangings raise high their embroidered Britons.  
In gold and solid ivory, on the doors, I'll fashion battles  
with the tribes of Ganges, the weapons of victorious Quirinus,  
and the Nile surging with war, in full flow,  
and door columns rising up with ships in bronze.  
I'll add Asia's tamed cities, the beaten Niphates, the Parthian,  
trusting to his arrows, fired behind as he flees,  
two trophies taken indeed from diverse enemies,

and two triumphs over nations on either seashore.  
Parian marbles will stand there too, living statues,  
the Trojans, children of Assaracus, and the names of the race  
of Jove, and father Tros, and Apollo, founder of Troy.  
Wretched Envy will fear the Furies and Cocytus's  
grim river, Ixion's coiling snakes and massive wheel,  
and Sisyphus's remorseless stone.  
Meanwhile let's off to the Dryads' woods, the untouched glades,  
no easy demand of yours, Maecenas. Without you  
my mind attempts no high themes: come then,  
end my lingering delay: Mount Cithaeron calls with loud cries,  
the hounds of Taygetus, Epidaurus, tamer of horses:  
and the sound doubled by echoes rings from the woods.  
Soon I'll prepare myself to speak of Caesar's fiery battles,  
and take his name forward, famous, for as many years  
as Caesar's are far from immortal Tithonus's first birth.

### **BkIII:49-122 Breeding Stock**

Whether you choose to nurture horses, in admiration  
of the prize of Olympia's palms, or sturdy oxen, for the plough,  
select the mother's stock carefully. The best-shaped cow  
is fierce, her head ugly, with plenty of neck,  
and dewlaps hanging down from chin to leg:  
then there's no end to her long flanks: all's large,  
even the feet: and there are shaggy ears under crooked horns.  
One marked with blotches, and whiteness, wouldn't displease me,  
shirking the yoke, and also fierce with her horns,  
and more like a bull in looks, tall overall,  
sweeping her hoof prints with the tip of her tail as she walks.  
The age for bearing, and regular breeding,  
starts after the fourth, and ends before the tenth year: else,  
they're not fit for breeding, or strong enough for the plough.  
Let loose the males, then, while fertile youth remains in the herd:  
send your cattle to mate first, and produce generation  
after generation of offspring, through breeding.  
The best day's of life are always the first to vanish,

for mortal beings: disease and old age creep on, and suffering,  
and the harshness of cruel death snatches us away.  
There'll always be some cattle whose form you want to alter:  
always refresh the stock, and lest you look for what's already lost,  
anticipate, and each year sort the offspring from the herd.  
The same selection is needed for horses as for cattle.  
Only spend special effort, from their earliest age,  
on those you decide to rear for the good of the breed.  
The foal from a noble line always steps higher  
over the ground, and brings his hooves down more gently:  
he dares to lead the way, and attempt menacing rivers,  
and commit himself to the unknown bridge,  
and not start at idle noise. He has a long neck,  
a graceful head, a short belly and solid back,  
and his spirited chest is muscular. Chestnuts and greys  
are handsome, the least desirable are white, and dun.  
Again if distant battle sounds he can't stand still,  
he pricks up his ears, and trembles in his limbs,  
and snorts the gathered heat from his nostrils.  
His mane is dense, tossed back to fall on his right shoulder:  
a double ridge runs along his thighs, his hoof scrapes  
the ground, and rings deeply with the solid horn.  
Such was Cyllarus, tamed by the reins of Pollux  
of Amyclae, and those the Greek poets remember,  
Mars's yoked horses, and great Achilles's team.  
Such too was swift Saturn himself flinging his mane,  
a horse's, over his shoulder, at his wife's arrival,  
filling high Pelion with his shrill neighing, as he fled.  
Stable a horse too, when he declines, worn with illness,  
or slower with age, don't forgive his wretched senility.  
Old, he's cold in desire, and works uselessly at a thankless task,  
and when he comes to the struggle, he rages in vain,  
as a great fire does at times, without force, in the stubble.  
So note their age and spirit particularly:  
then their other virtues and their bloodline,  
and the pain each shows in defeat, the pride in winning.  
Have you seen the chariots pour from the barrier,

rushing to attack the flat, competing headlong,  
when young men's hopes are roused, and fear throbs,  
draining each exultant heart? On they go with writhing whips,  
bending forward to loosen the rein, the red-hot axle turns:  
Now low, now lifted high, they seem to be carried  
through the void, and leap into the air:  
no delay, no rest: a cloud of yellow dust rises,  
and they're wet with foam, and the breath of those pursuing:  
so strong the desire for glory, so dear is victory.  
Ericthonius was the first who dared to yoke four horses  
to his chariot, and stand above the swift wheels, victorious.  
The Lapiths of Thessaly gave us the bridle, and the circuit,  
mounting on horseback, and teaching the armed rider  
to taunt the earth, and gather in his proud paces.  
Each requires equal breeding, equally the trainers require  
young horses, with fiery spirit and eager for the course:  
though some older one may often have driven the enemy  
to flight, and claims Epirus or noble Mycenae for his birthplace,  
and traces his line of ancestry from Neptune himself.

### **BkIII:123-156 Care of the Sire and Dam**

Noting these observations they busy themselves as the time nears,  
and are careful to fatten with solid flesh the one they've chosen  
as leader and named as head of a herd:  
They cut ripe grasses for him, and serve him with water and corn,  
lest he's not more than equal to the flattering effort,  
or weak offspring repeat the leanness of their sire.  
But they keep female cattle thin deliberately,  
and when the familiar desire first urges them to mate,  
they deny them foliage, and keep them from the founts.  
Often too they goad them to run, and tire them in the heat,  
while the threshing-floor groans heavily as the grain is flailed,  
while the light chaff is tossed on the rising breeze.  
They do this so that the advantage of their fertile soil  
isn't dulled by excess, the idle furrows clogged with mud,  
but it will seize on the seed thirstily and bury it deep inside.



Care for the sire begins to fade, and be replaced by that of the dam.  
When their months are full, and they wander swollen with young,  
don't anyone allow them to endure the yokes of heavy wagons,  
or leap around on the roads, or race around madly, scouring  
the meadows, or swim a fast-flowing river.  
They graze them in open glades, and by brimming streams,  
where there's moss and the banks are greenest with grass,  
and caves shelter them, and a rock casts a long shadow.  
There's a gadfly, its Roman name is *asilus*, but the Greeks call it,  
in their tongue, *oestrus*, that buzzes round the groves of Silacus,  
and the green oaks of Alburnus, in great numbers, fierce,  
and high-pitched in sound, and whole herds scatter from it,  
through the woods, the breeze, the trees, and banks  
of dry Tanagra, stunned, in terror, mad with bellowing.  
Juno once worked her terrible anger with this creature,  
when she plagued Io, the daughter of Inachus, changed to a heifer.  
Keep it away from the pregnant herd, too (since it attacks  
more fiercely in the midday heat) by grazing the cattle  
when the sun's newly risen, or the stars are bringing on the night.

### **BkIII:157-208 Care of Calves and Foals**

After their birth all attention's transferred to the calves:  
straight away they brand them, with the mark and name of the herd,  
and hold back those they want to rear for breeding, or keep  
as sacrifice for the altars, or to plough the soil  
and turn rough ground, by breaking the clods.  
The rest of the cattle graze on the green grass.  
But train those you'll shape for farm use and duties  
as calves, and start them on the path of submission,  
while their young minds are adaptable, their age pliant.  
First tie loose loops of thin willow round their shoulders:  
then when their once free necks are used to servitude,  
yoke the bullocks in pairs, joined by the loops themselves,  
and force them to take their steps together:  
then let them pull empty carts over the ground, often,  
and print their tracks on the surface of the dust:

later let the beech-wood axle creak as it strains beneath  
its heavy load, a metallad pole dragging the yoked wheels.  
Meanwhile don't feed their untamed youth only on grass  
or meagre willow leaves, or marsh plants,  
but on the corn crop cut by hand: and your milch-cows  
won't fill the white milking pails after the manner of our fathers  
but will dedicate their udders to their sweet calves.  
If your efforts are aimed more at war and proud squadrons,  
or at gliding by Pisa's river Alpheus on wheels,  
and driving a swift chariot through Jupiter's grove,  
the horse's first task is to gaze at brave men and warlike weapons,  
then endure the trumpets, suffer the groaning of the laden wheels,  
and hear the jingling of bridles in the stall:  
then to enjoy the trainer's flattering praise, more and more,  
and love the sound of his neck being patted.  
And as soon as he's weaned from his mother's teats,  
let him now and again dare to trust his mouth to soft halters,  
while powerless and quivering, still, and ignorant of life.  
But when three summers are past and the fourth arrives,  
let him start trotting round the ring, his paces falling evenly,  
bending his legs in curves alternately, and seeming  
as if labouring hard: then let him challenge the wind to race,  
and, flying over the open ground, as if free of reigns, let him  
barely touch the surface of the sand with the tips of his hooves:  
like a dense brooding Northerly from the Hyperborean coasts,  
that brings wild weather from Scythia, with rainless cloud:  
when the deep wheat-fields and the overflowing plains shiver  
to the gentle gusts, the crowns of the trees give out a rustling,  
and long waves drive towards the shore:  
it blows, sweeping over fields and seas alike in its flight.  
Such a horse will either sweat towards the winning post at Elis  
over the widest space of ground, flinging bloody foam  
from his mouth or better still, with tender neck, will pull  
the Belgian war-chariot. But only let colts fatten on coarse mash  
when they're broken in, since before being broken  
their spirits will be raised too high, and when caught they'll balk  
at the pliant whip, and refuse to obey the harsh curb.

### **BkIII:209-283 The Dangers of Desire**

But, whether dealing with cattle or horses is more pleasing  
to you, no diligence increases their powers as much  
as keeping them from desire, and the pangs of hidden passion.  
And so the bull's banished to distant lonely pastures,  
behind an opposing hill, and over a wide river,  
or he's kept locked up in a well-provided pen.  
Because the sight of a female slowly inflames him  
and wastes his strength, and she with her sweet attractions  
stops him from recalling grasses and groves, and often  
she drives her proud lovers to fight for her with their horns.  
The lovely heifer grazes in Sila's great southern forest:  
the bulls in turn do battle, with great force  
and frequent wounds, black blood bathes their bodies,  
with mighty bellowing their horns are forced against  
the sturdy enemy: the woods and the sky echo from end to end.  
The belligerents are not accustomed to herding together,  
but the defeated one leaves, and lives far off in unknown exile.  
He often bemoans his shame and the proud winner's blows,  
and the love he has lost, without yet taking vengeance,  
and gazing at his stall he's abandoned his ancient lands.  
So he takes great care of his strength, and rests all night  
on a naked bed among hard stones,  
with sharp leaves and pointed reeds to eat.  
And he tests himself, and learns to attack tree trunks  
with angry horns, lashes out at the winds with his blows,  
and paws the sand in practice for the fight.  
When he's collected his strength and renewed his powers,  
he shows intent, and runs headlong at his careless enemy:  
just as when a wave starts to whiten in mid-ocean,  
it raises its breaker out of the furthest depths,  
and, rolling towards the shore, echoes savagely against the rocks,  
and falls like nothing less than a mountain: and the water boils  
from the deep in vortices, and churns up black sand.  
Every species on earth, man and creature, and the species

of the sea, and cattle and bright-feathered birds,  
rush about in fire and frenzy: love's the same for all.  
At no other time does the lioness forget her cubs so,  
or wander the plain more fiercely, nor does the rumped bear  
wreak death and destruction more widely in the woods:  
then the wild boar is savage, and the tigress at her worst:  
ah it's dangerous to wander then in Libya's deserted fields.  
Do you see how a tremor seizes the stallion's whole body  
if so much as an odour rises on the familiar breeze?  
The rider's reins and the savage whip won't hold him,  
or rocks, or hollowed cliffs, or rivers in his way,  
that carve the hills away with their whirling waves.  
The great Sabine boar himself rushes in, whetting his tusks,  
and paws the ground in front, rubs his sides against a tree,  
hardening his shoulders here and there against wounds.  
What of Leander, through whose bones harsh love  
winds the great flame? See how he swims the straits  
in a confusion of steep waterspouts, late in the dark of night.  
Heaven's might doorway thunders above him, and the waves  
striking the cliffs re-echo: his unlucky parents cannot stop him,  
nor the girl who'll die because of his cruel fate.  
What of Bacchus's spotted lynxes, and the fierce wolf species,  
and dogs? What of the battles waged by peaceful stags?  
Surely the frenzy of mares is conspicuous among them all:  
Venus herself endowed them with passion, at that time  
when the four Potnian horses tore Glaucus apart with their teeth.  
Love leads them over Mount Gargarus, and the roaring Ascanius:  
they climb mountains and swim rivers. And as soon as  
the flame has crept deep into their eager marrow,  
(in spring above all, because spring revives the heat in their bones)  
they all take to the high cliffs, faces towards the west winds,  
catching the light air, and often without union,  
made pregnant by the breeze (a marvellous tale)  
they run over rocks and crags and through low-lying valleys,  
not towards your rising, East wind, nor the sun's, but north  
and north-west, or where the darkest southerlies rise  
and cloud the skies with freezing rain.

Only then does the poisonous *hippomanes*, the horse-madness,  
as the shepherds rightly call it, drip slowly from their sex,  
*hippomanes* that evil stepmothers often collect  
and mix with herbs and not un-harmful spells.

### **BkIII:284-338 The Care of Sheep and Goats**

But meanwhile time flies, flies irretrievably,  
while, captivated by passion, I describe each detail.  
Enough of the herds: a second part of my subject remains,  
the tending of woolly flocks and hairy goats.  
Here's labour: sturdy farmers place your hope of praise in this.  
I'm in no doubt how hard it is to capture it in words,  
and so add honour to a humble theme:  
But sweet love seizes me and carries me over the empty heights  
of Parnassus: a delight to roam the ridges, where no  
other track runs down to Castalia over the gentle slopes.  
Now, revered Pales, now we must sing higher.  
Firstly I say that sheep should crop the grass  
in comfortable pens, until leafy summer quickly returns,  
and the hard ground under them should be covered  
with straw and handfuls of fern, so the chill ice doesn't harm  
the tender flock, bringing mange and ugly foot-rot.  
Moving on, I tell you to feed the goats on leafy arbutus,  
provide them with fresh water, place their pens  
out of the wind, facing the winter sun, and midday heat,  
while cold Aquarius sets, moistening the vanishing year.  
We must guard the goats as well with no less care,  
and the profit will be no less, though the fleeces of Miletus  
dyed in Tyrian purple may change hands for a higher price.  
These produce more offspring, a large supply of milk:  
the more the milking pail foams from the drained udders,  
the richer the streams will flow when the teats are squeezed.  
No less do herdsmen clip the grey beards on the chins  
of Cinyphian goats, and their hairy bristles, for the use  
of the camps, and as coverings for wretched sailors.  
They graze in the woods and on the heights of Lycaeus,

among bristling briars, and thorn-bushes that love the heights.  
And they remember to return home, themselves, leading their kids,  
and with udders so full they can scarcely mount the threshold.  
So because they need man's attention less, protect them  
with all due care, from the ice and snowy winds,  
happily bringing them fodder and twigs as food,  
and don't close up your hay-lofts through the winter.  
But when joyful summer, at the west-wind's call,  
sends sheep and goats to the pastures and the glades,  
let's run to the cool fields while Lucifer is setting,  
while the day is new, while the grass is still white,  
and the dew on the tender blades is sweetest to the flocks.  
Then when day's fourth hour has brought thirst on,  
and the plaintive cicadas trouble the trees with their noise,  
I'll order the flocks to drink the running water  
from oak troughs, at the side of wells or deep pools:  
but in noon heat let them find a shadowy valley,  
wherever Jupiter's vast oak with its ancient trunk  
stretches huge branches, or wherever a grove broods,  
its sacred shade black with dense elm-trees:  
then give them trickling water again and graze them  
again till sunset, when the cool evening tempers the air,  
and the moon, shedding dew, now feeds the glades,  
the shores echoing with halcyons, thorn bushes with finches.

### **BkIII:339-383 The Herdsmen of Africa and Scythia**

Why tell you in verse of the shepherds of Lybia,  
their pastures and huts where they live under meagre roofs?  
Often day and night for months on end, the flocks wander  
and graze deep in the desert with no shelter:  
so large are the plains. The African herdsman  
carries everything with him, his roof and home,  
his weapons, his 'Spartan' dogs and 'Cretan' quiver:  
no differently than the brave Roman, with his country's weapons,  
when he hurries on his road, under a heavy load, and halts  
in column, and pitches camp, before his enemy expects him.

But not so where the Scythian tribes are, and Maeotis's waters,  
and where the wild Danube throws up its yellow sand,  
and where vast Thracian Mount Rhodope touches the sky.  
There they keep the herds penned in, and no grass  
is visible on the plains, or leaves on the trees:  
but the land far and wide lies formless under mounds of snow  
and heaps of ice rising seven metres high.  
It's always winter, always North winds breathing cold.  
There the Sun never disperses the pale mists,  
neither when he finds high heaven, carried by his team,  
nor when he drenches his chariot headlong in Ocean's red waters.  
Ice-floes form suddenly on the running rivers,  
and the water soon carries metalled wheels on its back,  
once greeting boats and now broad wagons:  
Everywhere bronze cracks, clothes freeze as they're worn,  
and they cut out the liquid wine with axes,  
whole lakes turn to solid ice, and bristling icicles  
harden on their straggling beards.  
Meanwhile it snows as well over the whole sky:  
cattle die, the vast bodies of the oxen are cased in frost,  
and the crowded herds of deer are stunned by the strange weight,  
and the tips of their horns barely rise above it.  
They hunt these, not by releasing dogs, or with nets, nor by driving  
the terrified creatures with their fear of the crimson-feathered ropes,  
but men kill them with knives, close to, as they struggle with the  
hill of snow against their chests, slaughter them  
as they bellow loudly, and carry them home with shouts of joy.  
The people live at leisure secure in dugouts, hollowed  
from the deep earth, rolling piles of logs to the hearths,  
and setting fire to whole elm trunks.  
Here they spend the nights at ease, and joyfully imitate  
our cups of wine with beer and acidic service-berries.  
Such is the wild Hyperborean race living beneath  
the seven stars of the Plough, buffeted by Rhipaeian Easterlies,  
their bodies covered in the tawny pelts of beasts.

### **BkIII:384-439 Tending the Flocks**

If wool's your object, first clear the rough growth  
of burs and thistles: avoid rich pastures,  
and start by choosing flocks with soft white fleeces.  
But even if a ram's fleece is of the whitest, if he has so much  
as a dark tongue in his moist palate, reject him,  
in case he taints the wool of the lambs with dusky spots,  
and look for another in the richness of your fields.  
It was with such a gift of snowy wool, if it's to be believed,  
that Pan, god of Arcady, charmed and beguiled you, O Moon,  
calling you into the deep woods: nor did you reject his call.  
But he who desires milk, let him bring clover and lotus  
and briny grasses, often, in his own hands, to the pens.  
So they'll desire more water, and stretch their udders more,  
and they'll carry a slight taste of salt in their milk.  
Many keep kids from the mothers when they are born,  
and at first fasten iron muzzles over their mouths.  
The milk obtained at dawn or in daylight hours  
they press into cheese at night: what they get in the evening  
and at sunset they transport in baskets at dawn (when a shepherd  
goes to town): or add a touch of salt and store it for winter.  
Don't let the dogs be your last concern, but feed swift Spartan pups,  
and fierce Molassians both, on rich whey. With them as guards  
you'll never fear midnight thieves in the stables, attacks  
of wolves, or aggressive robbers behind your back.  
Often too you'll set the timid wild ass running,  
and hunt the hare with hounds, with hounds the deer.  
Often you'll raise the wild boar from his woodland lair,  
routing him out with the baying pack, and with loud shouts,  
through the high hills, drive a huge stag into the nets.  
Learn also, to burn perfumed cedar in your stalls,  
and drive off offensive water-snakes with Syrian fumes.  
Often a viper, deadly to the touch, has lurked  
under un-fumigated stalls, coiling there in fear of the light,  
or the snake (a bitter plague on the oxen) is used to sliding along  
in secret and in shadows, and spraying venom on the cattle,



hugging the ground. Shepherd grip stones in your hands,  
grasp sticks, and kill him as he lifts in menace, and, hissing,  
swells his neck. Now he's lowered his timid head deep, in flight,  
while he loosens the knot of his coils, and the tip of his long tail,  
and the last fold slowly draws away in a sinuous curve.  
There's also that vile water-snake in Calabria's glades,  
writhing its scaly back with erect front,  
its length of belly marked with large blotches,  
and, while any streams gush from their source,  
while the ground's wet with moisture and rainy southerlies,  
he lives in the pools, and, cruelly haunting the banks,  
fills his dark jaws with fish and croaking frogs:  
when the marsh is dry, and the ground splits with the heat,  
he slithers to firm land, and rolling his blazing eyes,  
rages in the fields, fierce from thirst, and afraid of the heat.  
Don't let me snatch sweet sleep then under the sky,  
or lie stretched out on the grass of some grove,  
when, casting his skin, fresh and gleaming with youth,  
he slithers along, leaving his eggs and young in the nest,  
tall in the sun, flickering a three-forked tongue from his mouth.

### **BkIII:440-477 The Treatment of Diseases**

I'll teach you about the causes and signs of disease as well.  
Vile scabies attacks sheep, when cold rain, and winter  
bristling with white frost, sink deep into the quick,  
or when unwashed sweats cling to the shorn flock,  
and sharp briars tear at their flesh. Therefore  
the shepherds immerse the whole flock in the stream,  
and the ram with dripping fleece is plunged in the pool,  
and released to float down with the current.  
Or they smear the body with bitter olive oil lees, after shearing,  
and blend silvery foam, and natural sulphur,  
with pitch from Ida, rich oily wax, squill,  
strong hellebore, and black bitumen.  
But no effort is more readily useful to them  
than when courage is able to cut open the tip

of an ulcer with a blade: the problem feeds and lives  
by being hidden, when the shepherd refuses to set  
his healing hand to the wound, and sits there  
praying the gods will make all well.  
Indeed when the pain slips to the marrow of the bleating victim  
raging there, and a dry fever feeds on the limbs,  
you do well to avert the fiery heat, and lance a vein,  
throbbing with blood, deep in the foot,  
as the Bisaltae do by custom, and the eager Scythian  
when he flees to Mount Rhodope and the Thracian wilds,  
and drinks milk curdled with horses' blood.  
If you see a sheep often drift away into the soft shade,  
or crop the tips of the grass-blades listlessly,  
or follow at the back, or sink down in the middle of the field  
while grazing, or move apart alone late at night,  
check the mischief straight away with your knife,  
before the deadly infection spreads through the careless crowd.  
A hurricane from the sea's not as thick with driving winds,  
as the herds with disease. Sickness doesn't seize single victims,  
but suddenly seizes a whole summer's effort,  
the flock and its promise, and the whole race at the root.  
He knows, who sees, even now after so long, the high Alps,  
and the forts on the hills by the Danube, and the fields  
of Illyrian Timavus: the region empty of shepherds,  
and the woodland glades unoccupied, far and wide.

### **BkIII:478-566 The Plague**

Once, wretched weather, from the diseased sky,  
visited them, glowing with late summer's full heat,  
and it killed every type of herd, and every wild creature,  
poisoned the lakes, and infected the pastures with plague.  
The road to death wasn't simple: but once a fiery thirst,  
running through all the veins, had shrivelled the body,  
a watery fluid welled up in turn, and absorbed all the bones  
into itself, as bit by bit they dissolved with disease.  
Often at the moment of honouring the gods, the victim,

standing by the altar, fell dying among the hesitant attendants,  
just as the sacred band of white wool encircled it.  
Or if the priest had killed the sacrifice before with a knife,  
then the altars didn't blaze when the entrails were placed there,  
and the seer when consulted couldn't give a response:  
and the knife beneath it was barely tinged with blood,  
and the surface of the sand darkened with a meagre stain.  
Then the calves died everywhere in the pleasant grass,  
and gave up their sweet spirits beside the full pen:  
then madness comes to fawning hounds, and a fierce coughing  
shakes the diseased pigs, and chokes them, their throats swelling.  
The once victorious horse, wretched in his failing efforts,  
and neglectful of the grass, turns from spring water,  
and often paws the ground: his ears droop, and a dubious sweat  
appears, cold in fact with approaching death: the skin  
is dry and hard to the touch, resistant to being stroked.  
These are the signs they show before dying in the early days,  
but as the plague begins to take its course,  
then the eyes blaze and the breath is drawn deeply,  
at times with heavy groans, the depths of the chest  
strained by long sobs, black blood flows from the nostrils,  
and the coarse tongue chokes the blocked throat.  
It helped to pour wine juice in through a horn:  
this seemed the only assistance for the dying:  
Soon even this was fatal: they burned with renewed fury,  
and sick to the point of death (may the gods be kinder  
to the good, and such delusions be for our enemies!)  
they mangled their torn bodies with their bare teeth.  
See, the ox falls smoking under the plough's weight.  
and spews blood mixed with foam from his mouth,  
and heaves his last groans. The ploughman goes sadly  
to unyoke the bullock that grieves for its brother's death,  
and leaves the blade stuck fast in the middle of its work.  
No shadows of the deep woods, no soft meadows  
can stir its spirits, no stream purer than amber  
flowing over the stones, as it seeks the plain: but the depths  
of his flanks loosen, and stupor seizes his listless eyes,

and his neck sinks to earth with dragging weight.  
What use are his labour and his service? What matter that he turned  
the heavy earth with the blade? And yet no gifts of Massic wine  
or repeated banquets harmed these creatures:  
they graze on leaves and simple grass, for sustenance,  
their drink is from clear fountains, and rivers racing  
in their course, and no cares disturb their healthy rest.  
At that time, and no other, they say they searched the land  
for bullocks for Juno's rites, and the chariot was pulled  
by unmatched wild oxen to her high altar.  
So they scratch the ground with harrows, painfully,  
and bury the seed with their own fingernails, and drag  
the creaking wagons, with straining shoulders, over the high hills.  
The wolf tries no tricks around the sheepfold,  
and doesn't prowl by night among the flocks: a stronger  
concern tames him. Timid deer and swift stags  
wander among the dogs now, and around the houses.  
Now the wave washes up the children of the vast deep,  
and all swimming things, like shipwrecked corpses, at the edge  
of the shore: strange seals swim into the rivers.  
The viper dies, defended in vain by her winding nest,  
and the water-snake, his scales standing up in terror.  
Even the air is unkind to the birds, and they fall headlong,  
leaving their lives behind high in the clouds.  
Even a change of pasture no longer helps, and the remedies  
looked for cause harm: the masters of medicine die,  
Chiron, Philyra's son, and Melampus, son of Amythaon.  
Pale Tisiphone rages, and, sent to the light from the Stygian dark,  
drives Disease and Fear in front of her, while day by day  
raising herself higher, she lifts her greedy head.  
The rivers and dry banks and sloping hills resound  
to the bleating of flocks and the endless lowing.  
And now she wreaks havoc in the herds, and the bodies  
pile up in the very stalls, decaying with vile disease,  
until men learn to cover them with earth and bury them in pits.  
As the hides cannot be used, nor can the meat  
be cleansed with water, or be cooked on the fire.

They couldn't even shear the fleeces, consumed  
by plague and filth, nor touch the decaying yarn:  
truly if anyone handled their hateful clothing,  
feverish blisters and foul sweat would cover  
his stinking limbs, and he'd not long to wait  
before the accursed fire was eating his infected body.

### **End of Book III**

## **Book IV: Bee-Keeping (Apiculture)**

### **BkIV:1-7 Introduction**

Next I'll speak about the celestial gift of honey from the air.  
Maecenas, give this section too your regard.  
I'll tell you in proper sequence about the greatest spectacle  
of the slightest things, and of brave generals,  
and a whole nation's customs and efforts, tribes and battles.  
Labour, over little: but no little glory, if favourable powers  
allow, and Apollo listens to my prayer.

### **BkIV:8-66 Location and Maintenance of the Apiary**

First look for a site and position for your apiary,  
where no wind can enter (since the winds prevent them  
carrying home their food) and where no sheep or butting kids  
leap about among the flowers, or wandering cattle brush  
the dew from the field, and wear away the growing grass.  
Let the bright-coloured lizard with scaly back, and the bee-eater  
and other birds, and Procne, her breast marked  
by her blood-stained hands, keep away from the rich hives:  
since they all lay waste on every side, and while the bees are flying,  
take them in their beaks, a sweet titbit for their pitiless chicks.  
But let there be clear springs nearby, and pools green with moss,  
and a little stream sliding through the grass,  
and let a palm tree or a large wild-olive shade the entrance,  
so that when the new leaders command the early swarms  
in their springtime, and the young enjoy freedom from the combs,  
a neighbouring bank may tempt them to leave the heat,  
and a tree in the way hold them in its sheltering leaves.  
Whether the water flows or remains still, throw willows  
across the centre, and large stones, so that it's full  
of bridges where they can rest, and spread their wings  
to the summer sun, if by chance a swift Easterly  
has wet the lingerers or dipped them in the stream.  
Let green rosemary, and wild thyme with far-flung fragrance,

and a wealth of strongly-scented savory, flower around them,  
and let beds of violets drink from the trickling spring.  
Let the hives themselves have narrow entrances,  
whether they're seamed from hollow bark,  
or woven from pliant osiers: since winter congeals  
the honey with cold, and heat loosens it with melting.  
Either problem's equally to be feared with bees:  
it's not for nothing that they emulate each other in lining  
the thin cells of their hives with wax, and filling the crevices  
with glue made from the flowers, and keep a store of it  
for this use, stickier than bird lime or pitch from Phrygian Ida.  
If rumour's true they also like homes in tunnelled hiding-places  
underground, and are often found deep in the hollows  
of pumice, and the caverns of decaying trees.  
You keep them warm too, with clay smoothed by your fingers  
round their cracked hives, and a few leaves on top.  
Don't let yew too near their homes, or roast  
blushing crabs on your hearth, or trust a deep marsh  
or where there's a strong smell of mud, or where hollow rock  
rings when struck, and an echoed voice rebounds on impact.  
As for the rest, when the golden sun has driven winter  
under the earth, and unlocked the heavens with summer light,  
from the first they wander through glades and forests,  
grazing the bright flowers, and sipping the surface of the streams.  
With this, with a delightful sweetness, they cherish their hive  
and young: with it, with art, they form  
fresh wax and produce their sticky honey.  
So, when you look up at the swarm released from the hive,  
floating towards the radiant sky through the clear summer air,  
and marvel at the dark cloud drawn along by the wind,  
take note: they are continually searching for sweet waters  
and leafy canopies. Scatter the scents I demanded,  
bruised balm and corn parsley's humble herb, and make  
a tinkling sound, and shake Cybele's cymbals around:  
they'll settle themselves on the soporific rest sites:  
they'll bury themselves, as they do, in their deepest cradle.

## **BkIV:67-102 The Fighting Swarms**

But if on the other hand they've gone out to fight –  
because often discord, with great turmoil, seizes two leaders:  
and immediately you may know in advance the will of the masses  
and, from far off, how their hearts are stirred by war:  
since the martial sound of the harsh brass rebukes the lingerers,  
and an intermittent noise is heard, like a trumpet blast –  
then they gather together restlessly, and their wings quiver,  
and they sharpen their stings with their mouths, and flex their legs.  
And they swarm round their leader, and the high command,  
in crowds, and call out to the enemy with loud cries:  
So, when they've found a clear spring day, and an open field,  
they burst out of the gates: there's a clash, the noise rises high  
in the air, they're gathered together, mingled in one great ball,  
and fall headlong: hail from the sky's no thicker,  
nor is the rain of acorns from a shaken oak-tree.  
The leaders themselves in the middle of their ranks,  
conspicuous by their wings, have great hearts in tiny breasts,  
determined not to give way until the victor's might has forced  
these here, or those there, to turn their backs in flight.  
The tossing of a little dust restrains and calms  
these fits of passion and these mighty battles.  
When you've recalled both generals from the fight,  
give death to the one that appears weaker, to avoid waste:  
and let the stronger one hold power alone.  
That one will shine with rough blotches of gold,  
since there are two kinds: the better is distinguished in looks,  
and bright with reddish armour: the other's shaggy from sloth,  
and ingloriously drags a swollen belly.  
As the features of the leaders are twofold, so their subjects' bodies.  
Since some are ugly and bristling, like a parched traveller who  
comes out of the deep dust, and spits the dirt from his dry mouth:  
others gleam and sparkle with brightness, their bodies  
glowing and specked with regular drops of gold.  
These are the stronger offspring: in heaven's due season,  
you'll take sweet honey from these, and no sweeter than it is clear,



and needed to tame the strong flavour of wine.

#### **BkIV:103-148 The Surrounding Garden**

But when the swarms fly aimlessly, and swirl in the air,  
neglecting their cells, and leaving the hive cold,  
you should prevent their wandering spirits from idle play.  
It's no great effort to stop them: tear the wings  
from the leaders: while they linger no one will dare  
to fly high or take the standards from the camp.  
Let gardens fragrant with saffron flowers tempt them,  
and let watchful Priapus, lord of the Hellespont, the guard  
against thieves and birds, protect them with his willow hook.  
He whose concerns are these, let him bring thyme and wild-bay,  
himself, from the high hills, and plant them widely round his house:  
let him toughen his hands himself with hard labour, let him set  
fruitful plants in the ground himself, and sprinkle kind showers.  
And for my part, if I were not at the furthest end of my toil,  
furling my sails, and hurrying to turn my prow towards shore,  
perhaps I too would be singing how careful cultivation ornaments  
rich gardens, and of the twice-flowering rose-beds of Paestum,  
how the endive delights in the streams it drinks,  
and the green banks in parsley, and how the gourd, twisting  
over the ground, swells its belly: nor would I be silent about  
the late-flowering narcissi, or the curling stem of acanthus,  
the pale ivy, and the myrtle that loves the shore.  
Since I recall how I saw an old Corycian, under Tarentum's towers,  
where the dark Galaesus waters the yellow fields,  
who owned a few acres of abandoned soil,  
not fertile enough for bullocks to plough,  
not suited to flocks, or fit for the grape harvest:  
yet as he planted herbs here and there among the bushes,  
and white lilies round them, and vervain, and slender poppies,  
it equalled in his opinion the riches of kings, and returning home  
late at night it loaded his table with un-bought supplies.  
He was the first to gather roses in spring and fruit in autumn:  
and when wretched winter was still splitting rocks

with cold, and freezing the water courses with ice,  
he was already cutting the sweet hyacinth flowers,  
complaining at the slow summer and the late zephyrs.  
So was he also first to overflow with young bees,  
and a heavy swarm, and collect frothing honey  
from the squeezed combs: his limes and wild-bays were the richest,  
and as many as the new blossoms that set on his fertile fruit trees  
as many were the ones they kept in autumn's ripeness.  
He planted advanced elms in rows as well, hardy pears,  
blackthorns bearing sloes, and plane-trees  
already offering their shade to drinkers.  
But I pass on from this theme, confined within narrow limits,  
and leave it for others to speak of after me.

#### **BkIV:149-227 The Nature and Qualities of Bees**

Come now and I'll impart the qualities Jupiter himself  
gave bees, for which reward they followed after  
the melodious sounds and clashing bronze of the Curetes,  
and fed Heaven's king in the Dictean cave.  
They alone hold children in common: own the roofs  
of their city as one: and pass their life under the might of the law.  
They alone know a country, and a settled home,  
and in summer, remembering the winter to come,  
undergo labour, storing their gains for all.  
For some supervise the gathering of food, and work  
in the fields to an agreed rule: some, walled in their homes,  
lay the first foundations of the comb, with drops of gum  
taken from narcissi, and sticky glue from tree-bark,  
then hang the clinging wax: others lead the mature young,  
their nation's hope, others pack purest honey together,  
and swell the cells with liquid nectar:  
there are those whose lot is to guard the gates,  
and in turn they watch out for rain and clouds in the sky,  
or accept the incoming loads, or, forming ranks,  
they keep the idle crowd of drones away from the hive.  
The work glows, and the fragrant honey is sweet with thyme.

And like the Cyclopes when they forge lightning bolts  
quickly, from tough ore, and some make the air come and go  
with ox-hide bellows, others dip hissing bronze  
in the water: Etna groans with the anvils set on her:  
and they lift their arms together with great and measured force,  
and turn the metal with tenacious tongs:  
so, if we may compare small things with great,  
an innate love of creation spurs the Attic bees on,  
each in its own way. The older ones take care of the hive,  
and building the comb, and the cleverly fashioned cells.  
But at night the weary young carry back sacs filled with thyme:  
they graze far and wide on the blossom of strawberry-trees,  
and pale-grey willows, and rosemary and bright saffron,  
on rich lime-trees and on purple hyacinths.  
All have one rest from work: all have one labour:  
they rush from the gates at dawn: no delay: when the evening star  
has warned them to leave their grazing in the fields again,  
then they seek the hive, then they refresh their bodies:  
there's a buzzing, a hum around the entrances and thresholds.  
Then when they've settled to rest in their cells, there's silence  
in the night, and sleep seizes their weary limbs.  
If rain's threatening they don't go far from their hives,  
or trust the sky when Easterlies are nearing,  
but fetch water from nearby, in the safety of their city wall,  
and try brief flights, and often lift little stones,  
as unstable ships take up ballast in a choppy sea,  
and balance themselves with these in the vaporous clouds.  
And you'll wonder at this habit that pleases the bees,  
that they don't indulge in sexual union, or lazily relax  
their bodies in love, or produce young in labour,  
but collect their children in their mouths themselves from leaves,  
and sweet herbs, provide a new leader and tiny citizens themselves,  
and remake their palaces and waxen kingdoms.  
Often too as they wander among harsh flints they bruise  
their wings, and breathe their lives away beneath their burden.  
so great is their love of flowers, and glory in creating honey.  
And though the end of a brief life awaits the bees themselves

(since it never extends beyond the seventh summer)  
the species remains immortal, and the fortune of the hive  
is good for many years, and grandfathers' grandfathers are counted.  
Besides, Egypt and mighty Lydia and the Parthian tribes,  
and the Median Hydaspes do not pay such homage to their leader.  
With the leader safe all are of the same mind:  
if the leader's lost they break faith, and tear down the honey  
they've made, themselves, and dissolve the latticed combs.  
The leader is the guardian of their labours: to the leader  
they do reverence, and all sit round the leader in a noisy throng,  
and crowd round in large numbers, and often  
they lift the leader on their shoulders and expose their bodies  
in war, and, among wounds, seek a glorious death.  
Noting these tokens and examples some have said  
that a share of divine intelligence is in bees,  
and a draught of *aether*: since there is a god in everything,  
earth and the expanse of sea and the sky's depths:  
from this source the flocks and herds, men, and every species  
of creature, each derive their little life, at birth:  
to it surely all then return, and dissolved, are remade,  
and there is no room for death, but still living  
they fly to the ranks of the stars, and climb the high heavens.

#### **BkIV:228-250 Gathering The Honey**

Whenever you would unseal their noble home, and the honey  
they keep in store, first bathe the entrance, moistening it  
with a draught of water, and follow it with smoke held out  
in your hand. Their anger knows no bounds, and when hurt  
they suck venom into their stings, and leave their hidden lances  
fixed in the vein, laying down their lives in the wound they make.  
Twice men gather the rich produce: there are two seasons  
for harvest, as soon as Taygete the Pleiad has shown  
her lovely face to Earth and spurned the Ocean stream  
with scornful foot, and when that same star fleeing watery Pisces  
sinks more sadly from the sky into the wintry waves.  
But if you fear a harsh winter, and would spare their future,

and pity their bruised spirits, and shattered fortunes,  
who would then hesitate to fumigate them with thyme  
and cut away the empty wax? For often a newt has nibbled  
the combs unseen, cockroaches, light-averse, fill the cells,  
and the useless drone sits down to another's food:  
or the fierce hornet has attacked with unequal weapons,  
or the dread race of moths, or the spider, hated by Minerva,  
hangs her loose webs in the entrances.  
The more is taken, the more eagerly they devote themselves  
to repairing the damage to their troubled species,  
and filling the cells, and building their stores from flowers.

#### **BkIV:251-280 Disease in Bees**

Since life has brought the same misfortunes to bees as ourselves,  
if their bodies are weakened with wretched disease,  
you can recognise it straight away by clear signs:  
as they sicken their colour immediately changes: a rough  
leanness mars their appearance: then they carry outdoors  
the bodies of those without life, and lead the sad funeral procession:  
or else they hang from the threshold linked by their feet, or linger  
indoors, all listless with hunger and dull with depressing cold.  
Then a deeper sound is heard, a drawn out murmur,  
as the cold Southerly sighs in the woods sometimes,  
as the troubled sea hisses on an ebb tide,  
as the rapacious fire whistles in a sealed furnace.  
Then I'd urge you to burn fragrant resin, right away,  
and give them honey through reed pipes, freely calling them  
and exhorting the weary insects to eat their familiar food.  
It's good too to blend a taste of pounded oak-apples  
with dry rose petals, or rich new wine boiled down  
over a strong flame, or dried grapes from Psithian vines,  
with Attic thyme and strong-smelling centaury.  
There's a meadow flower also, the Italian starwort,  
that farmers call *amellus*, easy for searchers to find:  
since it lifts a large cluster of stems from a single root,  
yellow-centred, but in the wealth of surrounding petals

there's a purple gleam in the dark blue: often the gods' altars  
have been decorated with it in woven garlands:  
its flavour is bitter to taste: the shepherd's collect it  
in valleys that are grazed, and by Mella's winding streams.  
Boil the plant's roots in fragrant wine, and place it  
as food at their entrances in full wicker baskets.

#### **BkIV:281-314 Autogenesis of Bees**

But if someone's whole brood has suddenly failed,  
and he has no stock from which to recreate a new line,  
then it's time to reveal the famous invention of Aristaeus,  
the Arcadian master, and the method by which in the past  
the adulterated blood of dead bullocks has generated bees.  
I will tell the whole story in depth, tracing it from its first origins.  
Where the fortunate peoples of Pellaean Canopus live  
by the overflowing waters of the flooded Nile,  
and sail around their fields in painted boats,  
where the closeness of the Persian bowmen oppresses them,  
and where the river's flow splits, in seven distinct mouths,  
enriching green Egypt with its black silt,  
the river that has flowed down from the dark Ethiopians,  
all in that country depend on this sure stratagem.  
First they choose a narrow place, small enough for this purpose:  
they enclose it with a confined roof of tiles, walls close together,  
and add four slanting window lights facing the four winds.  
Then they search out a bullock, just jutting his horns out  
of a two year olds forehead: the breath from both its nostrils  
and its mouth is stifled despite its struggles: it's beaten to death,  
and its flesh pounded to a pulp through the intact hide.  
They leave it lying like this in prison, and strew broken branches  
under its flanks, thyme and fresh rosemary.  
This is done when the Westerlies begin to stir the waves  
before the meadows brighten with their new colours,  
before the twittering swallow hangs her nest from the eaves.  
Meanwhile the moisture, warming in the softened bone, ferments,  
and creatures, of a type marvellous to see, swarm together,

without feet at first, but soon with whirring wings as well,  
and more and more try the clear air, until they burst out,  
like rain pouring from summer clouds,  
or arrows from the twanging bows,  
whenever the lightly-armed Parthians first join battle.

#### **BkIV:315-386 Aristaeus And His Mother Cyrene**

Muses, what god produced this art for us?  
How did this new practice of men begin?  
Aristaeus the shepherd, so the tale goes, having lost his bees,  
through disease and hunger, leaving Tempe along the River Peneus,  
stopped sadly by the stream's sacred source,  
and called to his mother, with many groans, saying:  
'O mother, Cyrene, you who live here in the stream's depths,  
why did you bear me, of a god's noble line,  
(if Thymbrean Apollo's my father, indeed, as you say)  
to be hated by fate? Or why is your love taken from me?  
Why did you tell me to set my hopes on the heavens?  
See how, though you are my mother, I even relinquish  
this glory of mortal life itself, that skilful care  
for the crops and herds hardly achieved for all my efforts.  
Come and tear down my fruitful trees, with your own hands,  
set destructive fire to my stalls, and destroy my harvest,  
burn my seed, and set the tough axe to my vines,  
if such loathing for my honour has seized you.'  
But his mother felt the cry from her chamber in the river's depths,  
Around her the Nymphs were carding fleeces  
from Miletus, dyed with deep glassy colours:  
Drymo and Xantho, Phyllodoce, Ligea,  
their bright hair flowing over their snowy necks,  
Cydippe and golden-haired Lycorias, one a virgin,  
the other having known the pangs of first childbirth,  
Clio and her sister Beroe, both daughters of Ocean,  
both ornamented with gold, clothed in dappled skins:  
Ephyre and Opis, and Asian Deiopea,  
and swift Arethusa, her arrows at last set aside.

Among them Clymene was telling of Vulcan's  
baffled watch, and Mars's tricks and stolen sweetness,  
and recounting the endless loves of the gods, from Chaos on.  
And while they unwound the soft thread from the spindles,  
captivated by the song, Aristaeus's cry again struck  
his mother's ear, and all were startled, sitting on their crystal seats:  
But Arethusa, before all her other sisters, lifted her golden hair  
above the wave's surface and, looking out, called from far off:  
'O Cyrene, sister, your fear at such loud groaning is not idle,  
it is your own Aristaeus, your chief care, standing weeping  
by the waters of father Peneus, calling, and naming you as cruel.'  
His mother, her heart trembling with fresh fear, calls to her:  
Bring him, bring him to me: it's lawful for him to touch  
the divine threshold': at that she ordered the river to split apart  
so the youth could enter. And the wave arched above him like a hill  
and, receiving him in its vast folds, carried him below the stream.  
Now, marvelling at his mother's home, and the watery regions,  
at the lakes enclosed by caves, and the echoing glades,  
he passed along, and, dazed by the great rushing of water,  
gazed at all the rivers as, each in its separate course, they slide  
beneath the mighty earth, Phasis and Lycus  
and the source from which deep Enipeus first rises,  
the source of father Tiber, and that of Anio's streams,  
and rock-filled sounding Hypanis, and Mysian Caicus,  
and Eridanus, with twin golden horns on his forehead,  
than whom no more forceful river flows  
through the rich fields to the dark blue sea.  
As soon as he had reached her chamber, with its roof  
of hanging stone, and Cyrene knew of her son's useless tears,  
the sisters bathed his hands with spring water, and, in turn,  
brought him smooth towels: some of them set a banquet  
on the tables and placed brimming cups: the altars  
blazed with incense-bearing flames. Then his mother said:  
'Take the cup of Maeonian wine: let us pour  
a libation to Ocean.' And with that she prayed  
to Ocean, the father of things, and her sister Nymphs  
who tend a hundred forests, a hundred streams.



Three times she sprinkled the glowing hearth with nectar,  
three times the flame flared, shooting towards the roof.  
With this omen to strengthen his spirit, she herself began:

#### **BkIV:387-452 The Capture of Proteus**

‘A seer, Proteus, lives in Neptune’s Carpathian waters,  
who, sea-green, travels the vast ocean in a chariot  
drawn by fishes and two-footed horses.

Even now he’s revisiting the harbours of Thessaly,  
and his native Pallene. We nymphs venerate him,  
and aged Nereus himself: since the seer knows all things,  
what is, what has been, what is soon about to be:  
since it’s seen by Neptune, whose monstrous sea-cows  
and ugly seals he grazes in the deep.

You must first capture and chain him, my son, so that he  
might explain the cause of the disease, and favour the outcome.  
For he’ll give you no wisdom unless you use force, nor will you  
make him relent by prayer: capture him with brute force and chains:  
only with these around him will his tricks fail uselessly.

When the sun has gathered his midday heat, when the grass thirsts,  
and the shade’s welcome now to the flock, I’ll guide you myself  
to the old man’s hiding place, where he retreats from the waves  
when he’s weary, so you can easily approach him when he’s asleep.

When you seize him in your grip, with chains and hands,  
then varied forms, and the masks of wild beasts, will baffle you.

Suddenly he’ll become a bristling boar, a malicious tiger,  
a scaly serpent, or a lioness with tawny mane,  
or he’ll give out the fierce roar of flames, and so slip his bonds,  
or he’ll dissolve into tenuous water, and be gone.

But the more he changes himself into every form,  
the more you, my son, tighten the stubborn chains,  
until, having altered his shape, he becomes such as you saw  
when he closed his eyes at the start of his sleep.

She spoke, and spread about him liquid perfume of ambrosia,  
with which she drenched her son’s whole body:  
and a sweet fragrance breathed from his ordered hair,

and strength entered his supple limbs. There's a vast cave  
carved in a mountain side, from which many a wave  
is driven by the wind, and separates into secluded bays,  
safest of harbours at times for unwary sailors:  
Proteus hides himself in there behind a huge barrier of rock.  
Here the Nymph placed the youth, hidden from the light,  
she herself stood far off, veiled in mist.  
Now the Dog Star blazed in the sky, fiercely parching  
the thirsty Indians, and the fiery sun had consumed  
half his course: the grass withered, and deep rivers were heated  
and baked, by the rays at their parched sources, down to the mud,  
when Proteus came from the sea, to find his customary cave.  
Round him the moist race of the vast sea frolicked,  
scattering the salt spray far and wide.  
The seals lay down to sleep here and there on the shore:  
he himself sat on the rock in the middle, as the guardian  
of a sheepfold on the hills sometimes sits, when Vesper brings  
the calves home from pasture, and the bleating of lambs rouses  
the wolf, hearing them, and the shepherd counts his flock.  
As soon as chance offered itself, Aristaeus,  
hardly allowed the old man to settle his weary limbs  
before he rushed on him, with a great shout, and fettered him  
as he lay there. The seer does not forget his magic arts,  
but transforms himself into every marvellous thing,  
fire, and hideous creature, and flowing river.  
but when no trickery achieves escape, he returns  
to his own shape, beaten, and speaks at last with human voice:  
'Now who has told you to invade my home, boldest of youths?  
What do you look for here?' he said, but Aristaeus replied:  
'You know, yourself, Proteus, you know: you are deceived  
by nothing: but let yourself cease. Following divine counsel,  
I come to seek the oracle here regarding my weary tale.'  
So he spoke. At that the seer, twisting in his grip, eyes blazing  
with grey-green light, and grimly gnashing his teeth,  
opened his lips at last, and spoke this fate:

#### **BkIV:453-527 Orpheus and Eurydice**

‘Not for nothing does divine anger harass you:  
you atone for a heavy crime: it is Orpheus, wretched man,  
who brings this punishment on you, no less than you deserve  
if the fates did not oppose it: he raves madly for his lost wife.  
She, doomed girl, running headlong along the stream,  
so as to escape you, did not see the fierce snake, that kept  
to the riverbank, in the deep grass under her feet.  
But her crowd of Dryad friends filled the mountaintops  
with their cry: the towers of Rhodope wept, and the heights  
of Pangaea, and Thrace, the warlike land of Rhesus,  
and the Getae, the Hebrus, and Orythia, Acte’s child.  
Orpheus, consoling love’s anguish, with his hollow lyre,  
sang of you, sweet wife, you, alone on the empty shore,  
of you as day neared, of you as day departed.  
He even entered the jaws of Taenarus, the high gates  
of Dis, and the grove dim with dark fear,  
and came to the spirits, and their dread king, and hearts  
that do not know how to soften at human prayer.  
The insubstantial shadows, and the phantoms of those without light,  
came from the lowest depths of Erebus, startled by his song,  
as many as the thousand birds that hide among the leaves,  
when Vesper, or wintry rain, drives them from the hills,  
mothers and husbands, and the bodies of noble heroes  
bereft of life, boys and unmarried girls, and young men  
placed on the pyre before their father’s eyes:  
round them are the black mud and foul reeds  
of Cocytus, the vile marsh, holding them with its sluggish waters,  
and Styx, confining them in its nine-fold ditches.  
The House of the Dead itself was stupefied, and innermost  
Tartarus, and the Furies, with dark snakes twined in their hair,  
and Cerberus held his three mouths gaping wide,  
and the whirling of Ixion’s wheel stopped in the wind.  
And now, retracing his steps, he evaded all mischance,  
and Eurydice, regained, approached the upper air,  
she following behind (since Proserpine had ordained it),

when a sudden madness seized the incautious lover,  
one to be forgiven, if the spirits knew how to forgive:  
he stopped, and forgetful, alas, on the edge of light,  
his will conquered, he looked back, now, at his Eurydice.  
In that instant, all his effort was wasted, and his pact  
with the cruel tyrant was broken, and three times a crash  
was heard by the waters of Avernus. 'Orpheus,' she cried,  
'what madness has destroyed my wretched self, and you?  
See, the cruel Fates recall me, and sleep hides my swimming eyes,  
Farewell, now: I am taken, wrapped round by vast night,  
stretching out to you, alas, hands no longer yours.'  
She spoke, and suddenly fled, far from his eyes,  
like smoke vanishing in thin air, and never saw him more,  
though he grasped in vain at shadows, and longed  
to speak further: nor did Charon, the ferryman of Orcus,  
let him cross the barrier of that marsh again.  
What could he do? Where could he turn, twice robbed of his wife?  
With what tears could he move the spirits, with what voice  
move their powers? Cold now, she floated in the Stygian boat.  
They say he wept for seven whole months,  
beneath an airy cliff, by the waters of desolate Strymon,  
and told his tale, in the icy caves, softening the tigers' mood,  
and gathering the oak-trees to his song:  
as the nightingale grieving in the poplar's shadows  
laments the loss of her chicks, that a rough ploughman saw  
snatching them, featherless, from the nest:  
but she weeps all night, and repeats her sad song perched  
among the branches, filling the place around with mournful cries.  
No love, no wedding-song could move Orpheus's heart.  
He wandered the Northern ice, and snowy Tanais,  
and the fields that are never free of Rhipaeian frost,  
mourning his lost Eurydice, and Dis's vain gift:  
the Ciconian women, spurned by his devotion,  
tore the youth apart, in their divine rites and midnight  
Bacchic revels, and scattered him over the fields.  
Even then, when Oeagrian Hebros rolled the head onwards,  
torn from its marble neck, carrying it mid-stream,

the voice alone, the ice-cold tongue, with ebbing breath,  
cried out: 'Eurydice, ah poor Eurydice!'  
'Eurydice' the riverbanks echoed, all along the stream.

#### **BkIV:528-558 Aristaeus Sacrifices to Orpheus**

So Proteus spoke, and gave a leap into the deep sea,  
and where he leapt the waves whirled with foam, under the vortex.  
But not Cyrene: speaking unasked to the startled youth:  
'Son, set aside these sad sorrows from your mind.  
This is the cause of the whole disease, because of it the Nymphs,  
with whom that poor girl danced in the deep groves,  
sent ruin to your bees. Offer the gifts of a suppliant,  
asking grace, and worship the gentle girls of the woods,  
since they'll grant forgiveness to prayer, and abate their anger.  
But first I'll tell you in order the method of worship.  
Choose four bulls of outstanding physique,  
that graze on your summits of green Lycaeus,  
and as many heifers, with necks free of the yoke.  
Set up four altars for them by the high shrines of the goddesses,  
and drain the sacred blood from their throats  
leaving the bodies of the steers in the leafy grove.  
Then when the ninth dawn shows her light  
send funeral gifts of Lethean poppies to Orpheus,  
and sacrifice a black ewe, and revisit the grove:  
worship Eurydice, placate her with the death of a calf.'  
Without delay he immediately does as his mother ordered:  
he comes to the shrines, raises the altars as required,  
and leads four chosen bulls there of outstanding physique,  
and as many heifers with necks free of the yoke.  
Then when the ninth dawn brings her light,  
he sends funeral gifts to Orpheus, and revisits the grove.  
Here a sudden wonder appears, marvellous to tell,  
bees buzzing and swarming from the broken flanks  
among the liquefied flesh of the cattle,  
and trailing along in vast clouds, and flowing together  
on a tree top, and hanging in a cluster from the bowed branches.

### **BkIV:559-566 Virgil's Envoi**

So I sang, above, of the care of fields, and herds,  
and trees besides, while mighty Caesar thundered in battle,  
by the wide Euphrates, and gave a victor's laws  
to willing nations, and took the path towards the heavens.  
Then was I, Virgil, nursed by sweet Parthenope,  
joyous in the pursuits of obscure retirement,  
I who toyed with shepherds' songs, and, in youth's boldness,  
sang of you, Tityrus, in the spreading beech-tree's shade.

### **End of The Georgics**

