

HESIOD'S WORKS AND DAYS

Translated by Chris Kelk

© Copyright 2020 Chris Kelk, All Rights Reserved.
Please direct enquiries for commercial re-use to chriskelk@sympatico.ca.

Pierian Muses, with your songs of praise,
 Come hither and of Zeus, your father, tell,
 Through whom all mortal men throughout their days
 Acclaimed or not, talked of or nameless dwell'
 So great is he. He strengthens easily
 The weak, makes weak the strong and the well-known
 Obscure, makes great the low; the crooked he
 Makes straight, high-thundering Zeus upon his throne.
 See me and hear me, make straight our decrees,
 For, Perses, I would tell the truth to you. 10
 Not one, but two Strifes live on earth: when these
 Are known, one's praised, one blamed, because these two
 Far differ. For the one makes foul war thrive,
 The wretch, unloved of all, but the gods on high
 Gave the decree that every man alive
 Should that oppressive goddess glorify.
 The other, black Night's first-born child, the son
 Of Cronus, throned on high, set in the soil,
 A greater boon to men; she urges on
 Even the slack to work. One craves to toil 20
 When others prosper, hankering to seed
 And plough and set his house in harmony.
 So neighbour vies with neighbour in great need
 Of wealth: this Strife well serves humanity.
 Potter hates potter, builder builder, and
 A beggar bears his fellow-beggar spite,
 Likewise all singers. Perses, understand
 My verse, don't let the evil Strife invite
 Your heart to shrink from work and make you gaze
 And listen to the quarrels in the square - 30
 No time for quarrels or to spend one's days
 In public life when in your granary there
 Is not stored up a year's stock of the grain
 Demeter grants the earth. Get in that store,
Then you may wrangle, struggling to obtain
 Other men's goods – a chance shall come no more
 To do this. Let's set straight our wrangling
 With Zeus's laws, so excellent and fair.
 We split our goods in two, but, capturing
 The greater part, you carried it from there 40
 And praised those kings, bribe-eaters, who adore
 To judge such cases. Fools! They do not know
 That half may well transcend the total store
 Or how the asphodel and the mallow
 Will benefit them much. The means of life
 The gods keep from us or else easily

Could one work for one day, then, free from strife,
 One's rudder packed away, live lazily,
 Each ox and hard-worked mule sent off. In spleen
 That fraudulent Prometheus duped him, Zeus 50
 Kept safe this thing, devising labours keen
 For men. He hid the fire: for human use
 The honourable son of Iapetus
 Stole it from counsellor Zeus and in his guile
 He hid it in a fennel stalk and thus
 Hoodwinked the Thunderer, who aired his bile,
 Cloud-Gatherer that he was, and said: "O son
 Of Iapetus, the craftiest god of all,
 You stole the fire, content with what you'd done,
 And duped me. So great anguish shall befall 60
 Both you and future mortal men. A thing
 Of ill in lieu of fore I'll afford
 Them all to take delight in, cherishing
 The evil. Thus he spoke and then the lord
 Of men and gods laughed. Famed Hephaistus he
 Enjoined to mingle water with some clay
 And put a human voice and energy
 Within it and a goddess' features lay
 On it and, like a maiden, sweet and pure,
 The body, though Athene was to show 70
 Her how to weave; upon her head allure
 The golden Aphrodite would let flow,
 With painful passions and bone-shattering stress.
 Then Argus-slayer Hermes had to add
 A wily nature and shamefacedness.
 Those were his orders and what Lord Zeus bade
 They did. The famed lame god immediately
 Formed out of clay, at Cronus' son's behest,
 The likeness of a maid of modesty.
 By grey-eyed Queen Athene was she dressed 80
 And cinctured, while the Graces and Seduction
 Placed necklaces about her; then the Hours,
 With lovely tresses, heightened this production
 By garlanding this maid with springtime flowers.
 Athene trimmed her up, while in her breast
 Hermes put lies and wiles and qualities
 Of trickery at thundering Zeus' behest:
 Since all Olympian divinities
 Bestowed this gift, Pandora was her name,
 A bane to all mankind. When they had hatched 90
 This perfect trap, Hermes, that man of fame,
 The gods' swift messenger, was then dispatched

To Epimetheus. Epimetheus, though,
 Ignored Prometheus' words not to receive
 A gift from Zeus but, since it would cause woe
 To me, so send it back; he would perceive
 This truth when he already held the thing.
 Before this time men lived quite separately,
 Grief-free, disease-free, free of suffering,
 Which brought the Death-Gods. Now in misery 100
 Men age. Pandora took out of the jar
 Grievous calamity, bringing to men
 Dreadful distress by scattering it afar.
 Within its firm sides, Hope alone was then
 Still safe within its lip, not leaping out
 (The lid already stopped her, by the will
 Of aegis-bearing Zeus). But all about
 There roam among mankind all kinds of ill,
 Filling both land and sea, while every day
 Plagues haunt them, which, unwanted, come at night 110
 As well, in silence, for Zeus took away
 Their voice – it is not possible to fight
 The will of Zeus. I'll sketch now skilfully,
 If you should welcome it, another story:
 Take it to heart. The selfsame ancestry
 Embraced both men and gods, who, in their glory
 High on Olympus first devised a race
 Of gold, existing under Cronus' reign
 When he ruled Heaven. There was not a trace
 Of woe among them since they felt no pain; 120
 There was no dread old age but, always rude
 Of health, away from grief, they took delight
 In plenty, while in death they seemed subdued
 By sleep. Life-giving earth, of its own right,
 Would bring forth plenteous fruit. In harmony
 They lived, with countless flocks of sheep, at ease
 With all the gods. But when this progeny
 Was buried underneath the earth – yet these
 Live on, land-spirits, holy, pure and blessed, 130
 Who guard mankind from evil, watching out
 For all the laws and heinous deeds, while dressed
 In misty vapour, roaming all about
 The land, bestowing wealth, this kingly right
 Being theirs – a second race the Olympians made.
 A silver one, far worse, unlike, in sight
 And mind, the golden, for a young child stayed,
 A large bairn, in his mother's custody,
 Just playing inside for a hundred years.

But when they all reached their maturity,
 They lived a vapid life, replete with tears, 140
 Through foolishness, unable to forbear
 To brawl, spurning the gods, refusing, too,
 To sacrifice (a law kept everywhere).
 Then Zeus, since they would not give gods their due,
 In rage hid them, as did the earth – all men
 Have called the race Gods Subterranean,
 Second yet honoured still. A third race then
 Zeus fashioned out of bronze, quite different than
 The second, with ash spears, both dread and stout;
 They liked fell warfare and audacity; 150
 They ate no corn, encased about
 With iron, full invincibility
 In hands, limbs, shoulders, and they arms they plied
 Were bronze, their houses, too, their tools; they knew
 Of no black iron. Later, when they died
 It was self-slaughter – they descended to
 Chill Hades' mouldy house, without a name.
 Yes, black death took them off, although they'd been
 Impetuous, and they the sun's bright flame
 Would see no more, nor would this race be seen 160
 Themselves, screened by the earth. Cronus' son then
 Fashioned upon the lavish land one more,
 The fourth, more just and brave – of righteous men,
 Called demigods. It was the race before
 Our own upon the boundless earth. Foul war
 And dreadful battles vanquished some of these,
 While some in Cadmus' Thebes, while looking for
 The flocks of Oedipus, found death. The seas
 Took others as they crossed to Troy fight
 For fair-tressed Helen. They were screened as well 170
 In death. Lord Zeus arranged it that they might
 Live far from others. Thus they came to dwell,
 Carefree, among the blessed isles, content
 And affluent, by the deep-swirling sea.
 Sweet grain, blooming three times a year, was sent
 To them by the earth, that gives vitality
 To all mankind, and Cronus was their lord,
 Far from the other gods, for Zeus, who reigns
 Over gods and men, had cut away the cord
 That bound him. Though the lowest race, its gains 180
 Were fame and glory. A fifth progeny
 All-seeing Zeus produced, who populated
 The fecund earth. I wish I could not be
 Among them, but instead that I'd been fated

To be born later or be in my grave
 Already: for it is of iron made.
 Each day in misery they ever slave,
 And even in the night they do not fade
 Away. The gods will give to them great woe
 But mix good with the bad. Zeus will destroy 190
 Them too when babies in their cribs shall grow
 Grey hair. No bond a father with his boy
 Shall share, nor guest with host, nor friend with friend –
 No love of brothers as there was erstwhile,
 Respect for aging parents at an end.
 Their wretched children shall with words of bile
 Find fault with them in their irreverence
 And not repay their bringing up. We'll find
 Cities brought down. There'll be no deference
 That's given to the honest, just and kind. 200
 The evil and the proud will get acclaim,
 Might will be right and shame shall cease to be,
 The bad will harm the good whom they shall maim
 With crooked words, swearing false oaths. We'll see
 Envy among the wretched, foul of face
 And voice, adoring villainy, and then
 Into Olympus from the endless space
 Mankind inhabits, leaving mortal men,
 Fair flesh veiled by white robes, shall Probity
 And Shame depart, and there'll be grievous pain 210
 For men: against all evil there shall be
 No safeguard. Now I'll tell, for lords who know
 What it purports, a fable: once, on high,
 Clutched in its talon-grip, a bird of prey
 Took off a speckled nightingale whose cry
 Was "Pity me", but, to this bird's dismay,
 He said disdainfully: "You silly thing,
 Why do you cry? A stronger one by far
 Now has you. Although you may sweetly sing,
 You go where *I* decide. Perhaps you are 220
 My dinner or perhaps I'll let you go.
 A fool assails a stronger, for he'll be
 The loser, suffering scorn as well as woe."
 Thus spoke the swift-winged bird. Listen to me,
 Perses – heed justice and shun haughtiness;
 It aids no common man' nobles can't stay
 It easily because it will oppress
 Us all and bring disgrace. The better way
 Is Justice, who will outstrip Pride at last.
 Fools learn this by experience because 230

The God of Oaths, by running very fast,
 Keeps pace with and requites all crooked laws.
 When men who swallow bribes and crookedly
 Pass sentences and drag Justice away,
 There's great turmoil, and then, in misery
 Weeping and covered in a misty spray,
 She comes back to the city, carrying
 Woe to the wicked men who ousted her.
 The city and its folk are burgeoning,
 However, when to both the foreigner 240
 And citizen are given judgments fair
 And honest, children grow in amity,
 Far-seeing Zeus sends them no dread warfare,
 And decent men suffer no scarcity
 Of food, no ruin, as they till their fields
 And feast; abundance reigns upon the earth;
 Each mountaintop a wealth of acorns yields,
 Bees thrive below, and mothers all give birth
 To children who resemble perfectly
 Their fathers, while the fleeces on the sheep 250
 Are heavy. All things flourish, while the sea
 Needs not a ship; the vital sol is deep
 With fruits. Far-seeing Zeus evens the score
 Against proud, evil men. The wickedness
 Of one man often sways whole cities, for
 The son of Cronus sends from heaven distress,
 Both plague and famine, causing death amid
 Its folk, its women barren. Homes decline
 By Zeus's plan. Sometimes he will consign
 Broad armies to destruction or will bid 260
 Them of their walls and take their ships away.
 Lords, note this punishment. The gods are nigh
 Those mortals who from adulation stray
 And grind folk down with fraud. Yes, from on high
 Full thirty-thousand gods of Zeus exist
 Upon the fecund earth who oversee
 All men and wander far, enclosed in mist,
 And watch for law-suits and iniquity.
 Justice is one, daughter of Zeus, a maid
 Who is renowned among the gods who dwell 270
 High in Olympus: should someone upbraid
 Her cruelly, immediately she'll tell
 Lord Zeus, there at his side, of men who cause
 Much woe till people pay a penalty
 For unjust lords, who cruelly bend the laws
 For evil. You who hold supremacy

And swallow bribes, beware of this and shun
 All crooked laws and deal in what is best.
 Who hurts another hurts himself. When one
 Makes wicked plans, he'll be the most distressed. 280
 All-seeing Zeus sees all there is to see
 And, should he wish, takes note nor fails to know
 The justice in a city. I'd not be
 A just man nor would have my son be so –
 It's no use being good when wickedness
 Holds sway. I trust wise Zeus won't punish me.
 Perses, remember this, serve righteousness
 And wholly sidestep the iniquity
 Of force. The son of Cronus made this act
 For men - that fish, wild beasts and birds should eat 290
 Each other, being lawless, but the pact
 He made with humankind is very meet –
 If one should know and publicize what's right,
 Far-seeing Zeus repays him with a store
 Of wealth, but if one swears false oaths outright,
 Committing fatal wrongs, forevermore
 His kin shall live in gloominess, while he
 Who keeps his oath shall benefit his kin.
 I tell you things of great utility,
 Foolish Perses; to take and capture sin 300
En masse is easy: she is very near,
 The road is flat. To goodness, though, much sweat
 The gods have placed en route. The road is sheer
 And long and rough at first, but when you get
 Right to the very peak, though hard to bear
 It's found with ease. That man is wholly best
 Who uses his own mind and takes good care
 About the future. Who takes interest
 In others' notions is a good man too,
 But he who shuns these things is valueless. 310
 Remember all that I have said to you,
 Noble Perses, and work with steadfastness
 Till Hunger vexes you and you're a friend
 Of holy, wreathed Demeter, who with corn
 Will fill your barn. But Hunger will attend
 A lazy man. The gods and men all scorn
 A lazy man, who's like a stingless drone
 Who merely eats and wastes the industry
 Of the bees. You must be organized and hone
 Your working skills so that your granary 320
 Is full at harvest-time. Through work men grow
 Wealthy in sheep and gold: by earnest work

One's loved more by the gods above. There's no
 Disgrace in toil; disgrace it is to shirk.
 The wealth you gain from work will very soon
 Be envied by the idle man: virtue
 And fame come to the rich. A greater boon
 Is work, whatever else happens to you.
 If from your neighbours' goods your foolish mind
 You turn and earn your pay by industry, 330
 As I bid you. Shame of a cringing kind
 Attends a needy man, ignominy
 That causes major damage or will turn
 To gain. Poor men feel sham, the rich, though, are
 Self-confident. The money that we earn
 Should not be seized – god-sent, it's better far.
 If someone steals great riches by duress
 Or with a lying tongue, as has ensued
 Quite often, when his mind in cloudiness
 Is cast by gain, and shame is now pursued 340
 By shamelessness, the gods then easily
 Destroy him, bringing down his house, and there,
 In record time, goes his prosperity.
 Likewise, if someone brings great ills to bear
 On guest or suppliant or, by wrong beguiled,
 Lies with his brother's wife or sinfully
 Brings harm upon a little orphan child,
 Or else insults with harsh contumely
 His aged father, thus provoking Zeus
 And paying dearly for his sins. But you 350
 Must keep your foolish heart from such abuse
 And do your best to give the gods their due
 Of sacrifice; the glorious meat-wrapped thighs
 Roast for them, please them with an offering
 Of wine and balm at night and when you rise
 To gain their favour and that it may bring
 The sale of others' goods, not yours. Invite
 A friend to dine and not an enemy,
 A neighbour chiefly, for disaster might
 Be near and they're in the vicinity, 360
 Unarmed through haste, while kinsmen will delay
 In arming. Wicked neighbours cause much pain
 But good ones bring a splendid profit. They
 Who have good neighbours find that they will gain
 Much worth. No cow is lost unless you dwell
 Near wicked neighbours. Measure carefully
 When borrowing from a neighbour, serve them well
 When giving him repayment equally,

Nay more if you are able, form you'll gain
 By this a friend in need, and do not earn 370
 Ill-gotten wealth – such profits are a bane.
 Love all your friends, turn to all those who turn
 To you. Give to a giver but forbear
 To give to one who doesn't give. One gives
 To open-handed men but does not care
 To please a miser thus, for Giving lives
 In virtue, while Theft lives in sin and brings
 Grim death. The man who gives abundantly
 And willingly rejoices in the things
 He gives, delighting in his soul. But he 380
 Who steals however small a thing will find
 A freezing in his heart. Add to your store
 And leave ferocious famine far behind;
 If to a little you a little more
 Should add and do this often, with great speed
 It will expand. A man has little care
 For what he has at home: there's greater need
 To guard his wealth abroad, while still his share
 At home is safer. Taking from your store
 Is good, but wanting something causes pain – 390
 Think on this. Use thrift with the flagon's core
 But when you open it and then again
 As it runs out, then take your fill – no need
 For prudence with the lees. Allow no doubt
 About a comrade's wages; no, take heed
 Even with your brother – smile and ferret out
 A witness. Trust and mistrust both can kill.
 Let not a dame, fawning and lascivious,
 Dupe you - she wants your barn. Your trust is ill-
 Placed in a woman – she's perfidious. 400
 An only child preserves his family
 That wealth may grow. But if one leaves two heirs,
 One must live longer. Zeus, though, easily
 To larger houses gives great wealth. The cares
 And increase for more kindred greater grow.
 If you want wealth, do this, add industry
 To industry, and harvest what you sow
 When Pleiades' ascendancy you see,
 And plough when they have set. They lurk concealed
 For forty days and nights but then appear 410
 In time when first your sickles for the field
 You sharpen. This is true for dwellers near
 The level plains and sea, and those who dwell
 In woody glens far from the raging deep,

Those fertile lands; sow naked, plough, as well,
 Unclothed, and harvest stripped if you would reap
 Demeter's work in season. Everything
 Will then be done in time: in penury
 You'll not beg help at others' homes and bring
 Your own downfall. Thus now you come to me: 420
 I'll give you nothing. Practise industry,
 Foolish Perses, which the gods have given men,
 Lest, with their wives and children, dolefully
 They seek food from their neighbours, who will then
 Ignore them. Twice or thrice you may succeed,
 But if you still harass them, you'll achieve
 Nothing and waste your words about your need.
 I urge you, figure how you may relieve
 Your need and cease your hunger. The first thing
 That you must do is get a house, then find 430
 A slave to help you with your furrowing,
 Female, unwed, an ox to plough behind,
 Then in the house prepare the things you'll need;
 Don't borrow lest you be refused and lack
 All means and, as the hours duly speed
 Along, your labour's lost. Do not push back
 Your toil for just one day: don't drag your feet
 And fight with ruin evermore. No, when
 You feel no more the fierce sun's sweaty heat
 And mighty Zeus sends autumn rain, why, then 440
 We move more quickly – that's the time when we
 See Sirius travelling less above us all,
 Poor wretches, using night more, and that tree
 You cut has shed its foliage in the fall,
 No longer sprouting, and is less replete
 With worm-holes. Now's the time to fell your trees.
 Cut with a drilling-mortar of three feet
 And pestle of three cubits: you must seize
 A seven-foot axle – that's a perfect fit
 (You'll make a hammerhead with one of eight). 450
 To have a ten-palm wagon, make for it
 Four three-foot wagon-wheels. Wood that's not straight
 Is useful – gather lots for use within:
 At home or in the mountains search for it.
 Hol-oak is strongest for the plough: the pin
 Is fixed on it, on which the pole will sit,
 By craftsmen of Athene. But make two
 Within your house, of one piece and compressed.
 That's better _ if one breaks the other you
 May use. Sound elm or laurel are the best 460

For poles. The stock should be of oak, the beam
 Of holm-oak. Two bull oxen you should buy,
 Both nine years old - a prime age, you may deem,
 For strength. They toil the hardest nor will vie
 In conflict in the furrows nor will break
 The plough or leave the work undone. And now
 A forty-year-old stalwart you should take
 Who will, before he ventures out to plough,
 Consume a quartered, eight-slice loaf, one who,
 Skilled in his craft, will keep the furrow straight 470
 Nor look around for comrades but stay true
 To his pursuit. Born at a later date,
 A man may never plough thus and may cause
 A second sowing. Younger men, distract,
 Will wink at comrades. Let this give you pause -
 The crane's high, yearly call means "time to act"
 Start ploughing for it's winter-time. It's gall
 To one who has no oxen: it will pay
 To have horned oxen fattened in their stall.
 It will be simple then for you to say 480
 "Bring me my oxen and my wagon too",
 And it is also easy to reject
 A friend and say "They have their work to do,
 My oxen." Merely mind-rich men expect
 Their wagon's made already, foolish men.
 They don't know that a hundred boards they'll need.
 Get all you need together and then, when
 The ploughing term commences, with all speed,
 You and your slaves, set out and plough straight through
 The season, wet or dry; quick, at cockcrow, 490
 That you may fill those furrows, plough; and you
 Should plough in spring; in summer, should you go
 On ploughing, won't dismay you. Plough your field
 When soil is light - such is a surety
 For us and for our children forms a shield.
 Pray, then, to Zeus, the god of husbandry,
 And pure Demeter that she fill her grain.
 First grab the handles of the plough and flick
 The oxen as upon the straps they strain.
 Then let a bondsman follow with a stick, 500
 Close at your back, to hide the seed and cheat
 The birds. For man good management's supreme,
 Bad management is worst. If you repeat
 These steps, your fields of corn shall surely teem
 With stalks which bow down low if in the end
 Zeus brings a happy outcome and you've cleared

Your jars of cobwebs: then if you make fast
 Your stores of food at home you will be cheered,
 I think. You'll be at ease until pale spring,
 Nor will you gape at others – rather they'll 510
 Have need of you. Keep at your furrowing
 Until the winter sun and surely fail
 And reap sat down and seize within your hand
 Your meagre crop and bind with dusty speed,
 With many a frown, and take it from your land
 Inside a basket, and few folk will waste
 Their praise upon you. Aegis-bearing Zeus
 Is changeable – his thoughts are hard to see.
 If you plough late, this just may be of use:
 When first the cuckoo calls on the oak-tree 520
 And through the vast earth causes happiness,
 Zeus rains non-stop for three days that the height
 Of flood's an ox's hoof, no more, no less:
 That way the man who ploughs but late just might
 Equal the early plougher. All this you
 Must do, and don't permit pale spring to take
 You by surprise, the rainy season, too.
 Round public haunts and smithies you should make
 A detour during winter when the cold
 Keeps men from work, for then a busy man 530
 May serve his house. Let hardship not take hold,
 Nor helplessness, through cruel winter's span,
 Nor rub your swollen foot with scrawny hand.
 An idle man will often, while in vain
 He hopes, lacking a living from his land,
 Consider crime. A needy man will gain
 Nothing from hope while sitting in the street
 And gossiping, no livelihood in sight.
 Say to your slaves in the midsummer heat:
 "There won't always be summer, shining bright – 540
 Build barns." Lenaion's evil days, which gall
 The oxen, guard yourself against. Beware
 Of hoar-frosts, too, which bring distress to all
 When the North Wind blows, which blasts upon the air
 In horse-rich Thrace and rouses the broad sea,
 Making the earth and woods resound with wails.
 He falls on many a lofty-leafed oak-tree
 And on thick pines along the mountain-vales
 And fecund earth, the vast woods bellowing.
 The wild beasts, tails between their legs, all shake. 550
 Although their shaggy hair is covering
 Their hides, yet still the cold will always make

Their way straight through the hairiest beast. Straight through
 An ox's hide the North Wind blows and drills
 Through long-haired goats. His strength, though, cannot do
 Great harm to sheep who keep away all chills
 With ample fleece. He makes old men stoop low
 But soft-skinned maids he never will go through –
 They stay indoors, who as yet do not know
 Gold Aphrodite's work, a comfort to 560
 Their darling mothers, and their tender skin
 They wash and smear with oil in winter's space
 And slumber in a bedroom far within
 The house, when in his cold and dreadful place
 The Boneless gnaws his foot (the sun won't show
 Him pastures but rotate around the land
 Of black men and for all the Greeks is slow
 To brighten). That's the time the hornèd and
 The unhorned beasts of the wood flee to the brush,
 Teeth all a-chatter, with one thought in mind – 570
 To find some thick-packed shelter, p'raps a bush
 Or hollow rock. Like one with head inclined
 Towards the ground, spine shattered, with a stick
 To hold him up, they wander as they try
 To circumvent the snow. As I ordain,
 Shelter your body, too, when snow is nigh –
 A fleecy coat and, reaching to the floor,
 A tunic. Bothe the warp and woof must you
 Entwine but of the woof there must be more
 Than of the warp. Don this, for, if you do, 580
 Your hair stays still, not shaking everywhere.
 Be stoutly shod with ox-hide boots which you
 Must line with felt. In winter have a care
 To sew two young kids' hides to the sinew
 Of an ox to keep the downpour from your back,
 A knit cap for your head to keep your ears
 From getting wet. It's freezing at the crack
 Of dawn, which from the starry sky appears
 When Boreas drops down: then is there spread
 A fruitful mist upon the land which falls 590
 Upon the blessed fields and which is fed
 By endless rivers, raised on high by squalls.
 Sometimes it rains at evening, then again,
 When the thickly-compressed clouds are animated
 BY Thracian Boreas, it blows hard. Then
 It is the time, having anticipated
 All this, to finish and go home lest you
 Should be enwrapped by some dark cloud, heaven-sent,

Your flesh all wet, your clothing drenched right through.
 This is the harshest month, both violent 600
 And harsh to beast and man – so you have need
 To be alert. Give to your men more fare
 Than usual but halve your oxen's feed.
 The helpful nights are long, and so take care.
 Keep at this till the year's end when the days
 And nights are equal and a diverse crop
 Springs from our mother earth and winter's phase
 Is two months old and from pure Ocean's top
 Arcturus rises, shining, at twilight.
 Into the light then Pandion's progeny, 610
 The high-voiced swallow, comes at the first sight
 Of spring. Before then, the best strategy
 Is pruning of your vines. But when the snail
 Climbs up the stems to flee the Pleiades,
 Stop digging vineyards; now it's of avail
 To sharpen scythes and urge your men. Shun these
 Two things – dark nooks and sleeping till cockcrow
 At harvest-season when the sun makes dry
 One's skin. Bring in your crops and don't be slow.
 Rise early to secure your food supply. 620
 For Dawn will cut your labour by a third,
 Who aids your journey and you toil, through whom
 Men find the road and put on many a herd
 Of oxen many a yoke. When thistles bloom
 And shrill cicadas chirp up in the trees
 Nonstop beneath their wings, into our view
 Comes summer, harbinger of drudgery,
 Goats at their fattest, wine its choicest, too,
 The women at their lustiest, though men
 Are at their very weakest, head and knees 630
 Being dried up by Sirius, for then
 Their skin is parched. It is at times like these
 I crave some rocky shade and Bibline wine,
 A hunk of cheese, goat's milk, meat from a beast
 That's pasture-fed, uncalved, or else I pine
 For new-born kids. Contented with my feast,
 I sit and drink the wine, so sparkling,
 Facing the strong west wind, there in the shade,
 And pour three-fourths of water from the spring,
 A spring untroubled that will never fade, 640
 Then urge your men to sift the holy corn
 Of Demeter, when Orion first we see
 In all his strength, upon the windy, worn
 Threshing-floor. The measure well the quantity

And take it home in urns. Now I urge you
 To stockpile all your year's supplies inside.
 Dismiss your hired man and then in lieu
 Seek out a childless maid (you won't abide
 One who is nursing). You must take good care
 Of your sharp-toothed dog; do not scant his meat 650
 In case The One Who Sleeps by Day should dare
 To steal your goods. Let there be lots to eat
 For both oxen and mules, and litter, too.
 Unyoke your team and grant a holiday.
 When rosy-fingered Dawn first gets a view
 Of Arcturus and across the sky halfway
 Come Sirius and Orion, pluck your store
 Of grapes and bring them home; then to the sun
 Expose them for ten days, then for five more
 Conceal them in the dark; when this is done, 660
 Upon the sixth begin to pour in jars
 Glad Bacchus' gift. When strong Orion's set
 And back into the sea decline the stars
 Pleiades and Hyades, it's time to get
 Your plough out, Perses. Then, as it should be,
 The year is finished. If on stormy seas
 You long to sail, when into the dark,
 To flee Orion's rain, the Pleiades
 Descend, abundant winds will blow: forbear
 To keep at that time on the wine-dark sea 670
 Your ships, but work your land with earnest care,
 As I ordain. So that the potency
 Of the wet winds may not affect your craft,
 You must protect it on dry land, and tamp
 It tight with stones on both sides, fore and aft.
 Take out the plug that Zeus's rain won't damp
 And rot the wood. The tackle store inside
 And neatly fold the sails and then suspend
 The well-made rudder over smoke, then bide
 Your time until the season's at an end 680
 And you may sail. Then take down to the sea
 Your speedy ship and then prepare the freight
 To guarantee a gain, as formerly
 Our father would his vessels navigate.
 In earnest, foolish Perses, to possess
 Great riches, once he journeyed to this place
 From Kyme, fleeing not wealth or success
 But grinding poverty, which many face
 At Zeus's hands. Near Helicon he dwelt
 In a wretched village, Ascra, most severe 690

In winter, though an equal woe one felt
 In summer, goods at no time. Perses, hear
 My words – of every season's toil take care,
 Particularly sailing. Sure, approve
 A little ship but let a large one bear
 Your merchandise – the more of this you move,
 The greater gain you make so long as you
 Avoid strong winds. When you have turned to trade
 Your foolish mind, in earnest to eschew
 Distressful want and debits yet unpaid, 700
 The stretches of the loud-resounding sea
 I'll teach you, though of everything marine
 I am unlearned: yet on no odyssey
 Upon the spacious ocean have I been –
 Just to Euboea from Aulis (the great host
 Of Greeks here waited out the stormy gale,
 Who went from holy Greece to Troy, whose boast
 Is comely women). I myself took sail
 To Chalcis for the games of the genius
 Archidamas: for many games had been 710
 Arranged by children of that glorious,
 Great man and advertised. I scored a win
 For song and brought back home my accolade,
 A two-eared tripod which I dedicated
 To the Muses there in Helicon (I made
 My debut there when I participated
 In lovely song). Familiarity
 With ships for me to this has been confined.
 But since the Muses taught singing to me,
 I'll tell you aegis-bearing Zeus's mind. 720
 When fifty days beyond the solstice go
 And toilsome summer's ending, mortals can
 Set sail upon the ocean, which will no
 Seafarers slaughter, nor will any man
 Shatter his ship, unless such is the will
 Of earth-shaking Poseidon or our king,
 Lord Zeus, who always judge both good and ill.
 The sea is tranquil then, unwavering
 The winds. Trust these and drag down to the sea
 Your ship with confidence and place all freight 730
 On board and them as swiftly as may be,
 Sail home and for the autumn rain don't wait
 Or fast-approaching blizzards, new-made wine,
 The South Wind's dreadful blasts – he stirs the sea
 And brings downpours in spring and makes the brine
 Inclement. Spring, too, grants humanity

The chance to sail. When first some leaves are seen
 On fig-tree-tops, as tiny as the mark
 A raven leaves, the sea becomes serene
 For sailing. Though spring bids you to embark, 740
 I'll not praise it – it does not gladden me.
 It's hazardous, for you'll avoid distress
 With difficulty thus. Imprudently
 Do men sail at that time – covetousness
 Is their whole life, the wretches. For the seas
 To take your life is dire. Listen to me:
 Don't place aboard *all* your commodities –
 Leave most behind, place a small quantity
 Aboard. To tax your cart too much and break
 An axle, losing all, will bring distress. 750
 Be moderate, for everyone should take
 An apt approach. When you're in readiness,
 Get married. Thirty years, or very near,
 Is apt for marriage. Now, past puberty
 Your bride should go four years: in the fifth year
 Wed her. That you may teach her modesty
 Marry a maid. The best would be one who
 Lives near you, but you must with care look round
 Lest neighbours make a laughingstock of you.
 A better choice for men cannot be found 760
 Than a good woman, nor a worse one than
 One who's unworthy, say a sponging mare
 Who will, without a torch, burn up a man
 And bring him to a raw old age. Beware
 Of angering the blessed ones – your friend
 Is not your brother – treat them differently.
 But if you don't, don't be first to offend.
 Don't lie. If he treats you offensively
 In word or deed, then you should recompense
 Him double, then, if he would be again 770
 Your friend and pay the price for his offence,
 Then take him back. They are all wretched men
 Who go from friend to friend, so let your face
 Not falsify your nature. Let none be
 Able to call you comrade of the base
 Or one who fights men of integrity
 Or over-friendly or no friend at all.
 Don't chide a man for his pennilessness
 That devastates and turns one's soul to gall,
 For it's the Deathless Ones' largesse. 780
 A man's best trait's a thrifty tongue. Malign
 Someone and you will very likely hear

Worse of yourself. When you are out to dine
 With many folk at common feasts, don't smear
 Another, for the happiness is fine,
 The cost a trifle. Wash your hands before
 You start to sacrifice the sparkling wine
 To Zeus or other gods – they'll hark no more
 And spit back all your prayers. Don't urinate
 Towards the sun, and when you're travelling 790
 Do not upon the highway micturate,
 Nor off it either. From your frame don't fling
 Your garments – to the gods belongs the night.
 A wise and reverent man will sit beside
 The courtyard wall which keeps him out of sight.
 Your sexual parts do not reveal but hide
 Then after you make love. Don't sow your seed
 After a funeral, rather, having fed
 At a god's feast you should perform the deed.
 When you a lovely stream of water find, 800
 Don't cross it till you've looked into that rill
 And prayed and washed your hands in it. If you
 Should cross with hands and errors unpurged still,
 The gods will visit you with penance due
 And cause you pain. And do not, when you're dining
 At a great feast to honour the gods, cut through
 The dry shoots from the five-branched plant with shining
 Iron, nor in the mixing-bowl, when you
 Are drinking, leave the ladle - fatal blend!
 Don't leave your house half-built in case a crow 810
 Should perch on it and misery portend.
 A pot that is unblessed can bring you woe,
 Therefore don't eat or wash from it. Permit
 No twelve-year- or twelve-month-old to be sat
 Upon a sacred monument, for it
 Will make him womanish, and make sure that
 You don't wash in a basin that has been
 Just handled by a woman – punishment,
 Should you do this, will for a time be keen.
 If you should find a sacrifice unspent 820
 Of flame, do not belittle things that we
 Know nothing of – a god is angered thus.
 In springs or rivers flowing to the sea
 Don't urinate – this point is serious.
 It's better not to vent your bowels there:
 Thus you'll stay free of mortals' wicked chat,
 Which, though lightweight, is difficult to bear
 And hard to lose. Such idle talk as that

Will not completely die when manifold
 Folk use it, for it's godlike. And observe 830
 The days Zeus sends; make sure your slaves are told
 To do likewise. The day that's best to serve
 To portion out all food and oversee
 All work's the thirtieth. These are the days
 Of Counsellor Zeus: all prudent men agree
 This is the truth. Upon these days we praise
 The gods: first, fourth and seventh. It was then
 Gold-girt Apollo first beheld the light,
 Born of Leto: on the eighth and ninth day, when
 The moon is waxing, it's fitting and right 840
 For men to work. When you would shear your sheep
 Or pick your fruit, the twelfth and eleventh days
 Are good, although it's better that you keep
 The twelfth, for then, beneath the morning's rays,
 The spider spins its web and floats in space
 While clever ants their store are harvesting.
 Your wife may then set up her loom and face
 Her coming toil. No time for scattering
 Your seeds in this month is the thirteenth, when
 It's best to raise your plants, though they're unfit 850
 For setting on the sixth, while yet for men
 It is a good day to be born, though it
 Is not for females, who should ne be wed
 Upon this day. Days One to Five well may
 Inflict ill luck on women brought to bed
 Of girls, but geld your kids and lambs that day
 And build a sheepfold. Male births, though, create
 Good luck, but boys born then will love to lie,
 Taunt, flatter, chat in secret. On Day Eight
 Geld boars and bawling bulls, then, by and by, 860
 Upon the twelfth the labouring mules should be
 Castrated too. The twentieth births males
 Of wisdom. On the tenth prosperity
 Attends male births, while wellbeing prevails
 For girls upon the fourth. That time is fair
 For training shuffling oxen, sheep as well,
 And sharp-toothed dogs and labouring mules. Take care
 To shun the fourth, at both its wane and swell –
 Such days will eat your soul. Bring home a bride
 On the auspicious fourth. The fifth you ought 870
 To shun, whose pains will make you terrified.
 Upon the fifth, the Furies, it is thought,
 Helped Strife birth Horkos, who would bring heartache
 To perjurers. Upon the seventh, take care,

Upon the well-worn threshing-floor, to take
 To cast Demeter's holy kernels there.
 Let wood be gathered by a carpenter
 To build your house, and let him bring enough
 To build a ship and start constructing her
 Upon the fourth. The ninth becomes less rough 880
 Towards nightfall. The first ninth is quite free
 Of woe for men and fine for coitus
 For either sex and never totally
 Unlikely, while the most salubrious
 For opening up of jars and coupling
 Your oxen, mules and speedy steeds (it's known
 To few) is the twentieth. You must bring
 Upon that day the swift, oared ship you own
 Down from her dock into the wine-dark sea:
 This day by few is called its proper name. 890
 Broach casks upon the fourth, for markedly
 This is a holy day. Few, too, can claim
 To know the twenty-first's best at cockcrow,
 The worst at dusk. These are of greatest use,
 The rest are luckless, fickle, bland. Few know
 These things, although opinions are diffuse.
 From stepmother to mother goes each day.
 Happy are they who know that these days bless
 All men, guiltless before the gods, while they
 Watch omens and avoid all wickedness. 900