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## HOW TO BE A FARMER

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1 Keeping Up with the Joneses.
Livelhood Is Hard to Come By
(Hesiod, Works & Days 1–46)

Hesiod was shepherd-poet from cow-country (Boeotia, in Greece), who lived around 750 BCE. The Works & Days is a didactic miscellany, in which Hesiod gives folksy and sometimes practical advice about living in a small community organized around agricultural exchange. The passage here, addressed to his brother Perses (the historicity of whom has been doubted by some scholars), is Hesiod’s opening salvo. In announcing his discovery of a second sort of Strife, one that impels people toward self-improvement, Hesiod sets himself apart from Homeric poetry, which deals in the other, destructive kind of Strife that precipitated the Trojan War. Hesiod, in other words, a farmer, presents himself as a poet of peacetime, where the main adversaries one needs to counter are impudence, laziness, wrongful living, and greed.
Μοῦσαι Πιερίηθεν, ἀοιδήσι κλείουσαι, δεῦτε, Δί᾽ ἐννέπετε σφέτερον πατέρ᾽ ὑμνείουσαι, ὃν τε διὰ βροτοὶ ἄνδρες ὅμως ἄφατοι τε φατοί τε ῥητοὶ τ᾽ ἀρρητοὶ τε Διὸς μεγάλου ἐκκτι.

οὐκ ἄρα μοῦνον ἔην Ἐρίδων γένος, ἀλλ᾽ ἐπὶ γαῖαν
εἰσὶ δύω· τὴν μὲν κεν ἐπαινήσειε νοήσας,
ἡ δ᾽ ἐπιμωμητή· διὰ δ᾽ ἄνδιχα θυμὸν ἔχουσιν.
ἡ μὲν γὰρ πόλεμόν τε κακὸν καὶ δῆριν ὀφέλλει,
σχετλίη· οὗ τις τὴν γε φιλεῖ βροτός, ἀλλ᾽ ὑπ᾽ ἀνάγκης
ἀθανάτων βουλήσιν Ἐριν τιμῶσι βαρεῖαν.
τὴν δ᾽ ἐτέρην προτέρην μὲν ἐγείνατο Νὺξ ἐρεβεννή,
θῆκε δὲ μιν Κρονίδης ψίζυγος, αἰθέρι ναϊών
gαίης τ᾽ ἐν ρίζῃσι καὶ ἀνδράσι πολλὸν ἀμείνω·
Muses of Pieria, bestowers of glory in song, come to me now, singing hymns about Zeus, your father, at whose behest mortals have fame—or do not; they are spoken of—or not, with no clear distinction, but according to great Zeus’s will.

For Zeus easily gives strength. Easily, too, he crushes the strong. With ease he cuts the prominent down to size and raises up the obscure. It is easy for him to straighten the bent and make a mighty man wither and fade—Zeus, roarer above, who dwells in the highest abodes: Hear me, watch and attend, and with justice keep my pronouncements straight while I attempt to speak the truth here to Perses.

So, all this time there’s not been just one goddess Strife engendered on Earth, there are two! One you’d praise, upon seeing her work. But the other is deserving of blame. Their hearts are completely opposed. For one foments evil war and conflicts and she’s savage. There’s not a person alive that loves her. Of necessity, by the Immortals’ decrees, do people give that grievous Strife her due. But the other Strife dark Night birthed first, and the Son of Cronos, seated on high, dwelling in ether, lodged her in the roots of Earth. She’s far better for people. For she rouses even the useless man to work in spite
ἡ τε καὶ ἀπάλαμόν περ ὁμός ἐπὶ ἐργὸν ἔγειρεν.
εἰς ἔτερον γάρ τίς τε ἰδὼν ἐργοῖο χατίζων
πλούσιον, óς σπεύδει μὲν ἄρωμεναι ἥδε φυτεύειν
οίκόν τ’ ἐδ θέσθαι, ζηλοῖ δὲ τε γείτονα γείτων
εἰς ἄφενος σπεύδοντ’ ἀγαθὴ δ’ Ἔρις ἤδε
βροτοῖσιν.

καὶ κεραμεὺς κεραμεῖ κοτέει καὶ τέκτονι τέκτων,
καὶ πτωχὸς πτωχῷ φθονέει καὶ ἀοιδὸς ἀοιδῷ.

ὦ Πέρση, σὺ δὲ ταῦτα τεῷ ἐνικάτθεο θυμῷ,
μηδέ σ’ Ἔρις κακόχαρτος ἀπ’ ἐργοῦ θυμὸν
ἐρύκοι
νείκε’ ὑπιπεύοντ’ ἀγορής ἐπακούον ἐόντα.

ὁρὴ γάρ τ’ ὀλίγη πέλεται νεικέων τ’ ἁγορέων τε,
ζητινι μὴ βίος ἐνδόν ἐπηετανὸς κατάκειται
ὤραῖος, τὸν γαία φέρει, Δημήτερος ἀκτήν.
τοῦ κε κορεσάμενος νείκεα καὶ δὴριν ὀφέλλοις
κτήμασ’ ἐπ’ ἀλλοτρίοις.

σοὶ δ’ οὐκέτι δεύτερον ἔσται

ὁδ’ ἐρδείν, ἀλλ’ αὖθι διακρινώμεθα νεῖκος
ἰθείῃσι δίκης, αἳ τ’ ἐκ Διός εἰσιν ἀρισται.
ὁδὴ μὲν γὰρ κλῆρον ἐδασσάμεθ’, ἀλλὰ τε πολλά
of himself. For when an idle man looks at his neighbor, a rich man, say, who is prompt to plow and sow and to put his house in order, he envies him, because that neighbor is prompt with a view to wealth. This Strife is good for people. And so, as the saying goes,

*Potter vies with potter, carpenters with their kin; beggar rivals beggar, and bard begrudges bard.*

So, you, Perses, take these matters to heart. Do not let the Strife that delights in evil keep your heart from work while you attend hearings and gawk at disputes at assembly. If a man does not have a good year’s livelihood stored indoors, harvested in due season—Demeter’s grain, what the Earth brings forth—he has little concern for disputes and assemblies. Once you’ve sated yourself on *that*, go right ahead and advance your disputes and conflicts in your quest to acquire another man’s goods.

You won’t get a second chance to do this, so let’s decide one dispute right here on the spot using straight judgments—the best kind that come from Zeus. For you and I have already divided our plot...
ἁρπάζων ἐφόρεις μέγα κυδαίνων βασιλῆας
dωροφάγους, οἱ τήνδε δίκην ἐθέλουσι δικάσσαι,

νήπιοι, οὐδὲ ἰσασιν ὧσο πλέον ἥμισυ παντός,
οὐδ᾽ ὃσον ἐν μαλάχη τε καὶ ἀσφοδέλῳ μέγ᾽ ὄνειαρ.

κρύψαντες γὰρ ἔχουσι θεοὶ βίον ἀνθρώποισιν·
ῥηιδίως γὰρ κεν καὶ ἐπ᾽ ἤματι ἐργάσσαιο
ὡστέ σε κεῖς ἐνιαυτὸν ἔχειν καὶ ἀεργὸν ἐόντα·

αἰψά κε πηδάλιον μὲν ὑπὲρ καπνοῦ καταθεῖο,
ἔργα βοῶν δ᾽ ἀπόλοιτο καὶ ἡμῖνων ταλαιργῶν.
of land. Yet you keep snatching it up and carrying it off with much else besides, gratifying the rulers, those gift-eaters, who stand ready to pass judgment on this question. Those fools! They have no idea how much more the half is than the whole, or what a banquet there is in mallow and asphodel!²

For the gods have kept livelihood hidden from humankind.³ If that were not so, it might be easy to work only a day and have enough for a year—without even working. You could store your steering-oar up in the smoke right now,⁴ and the oxen’s work and that of toiling mules could go to hell.⁵