

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	ix
1. Keeping Up with the Joneses. Livelihood Is Hard to Come By	1
2. The Benefits of Righteous Living	9
3. On Work and Wealth	15
4. Cultivating Good Neighbors. On Thrift	21
5. Procrastination. Good and Bad Days	27
6. A Bucolic Utopia	31
7. The Philosophy of Compost	55
8. Dedication to Mrs. Farmer. Invocation of Rustic Muses	69
9. The Prestige and Antiquity of Rearing Livestock	77
10. Praise for the Countryside	85
11. Reverie of a Would-Be Farmer	97
12. Simple Tastes	105
13. Avoiding the Rat Race	113

HOW TO BE A FARMER

14. Culture from Agriculture	125
15. The Ideal of Smallholding	135
16. On Barley and Bread-Making	145
17. Getting and Naming a Dog	153
18. On Asses	157
19. What to Look for in a Ram	163
20. The Joint Venture Farm	169
21. Why Farming Is the Best Job for a Philosopher	183
22. A Garden on Lesbos	197
23. The Numinous Landscape	205
24. A Farmer's Memorial	225
NOTES	229
PASSAGES TRANSLATED	245

1 Keeping Up with the Joneses. Livelihood 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.

HOW TO BE A FARMER

Μοῦσαι Πιερίθην, ἀοιδῆσι κλείουσαι,
δεῦτε, Δί' ἐννέπετε σφέτερον πατέρ' ὕμνειουσαι,
ὄν τε διὰ βροτοὶ ἄνδρες ὁμῶς ἄφατοὶ τε φατοὶ τε
ῤητοὶ τ' ἄρρητοὶ τε Διὸς μεγάλοιο ἔκhti.

- 5 ῤέα μὲν γὰρ βριάει, ῤέα δὲ βριάοντα χαλέπτει,
ῤεῖα δ' ἀρίζηλον μινύθει καὶ ἄδηλον ἀέξει,
ῤεῖα δέ τ' ἰθύνει σκολιὸν καὶ ἀγήνορα κάρφει
Ζεὺς ὑψιβρεμέτης ὃς ὑπέρτατα δώματα ναίει.
κλυθὶ ἰδὼν αἰῶν τε, δίκη δ' ἴθυνε θέμιστας
- 10 τύνη· ἐγὼ δέ κε Πέρση ἐτήτυμα μυθησαίμην.

- οὐκ ἄρα μοῦνον ἔην Ἐρίδων γένος, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ
γαῖαν
εἰσὶ δὺω· τὴν μὲν κεν ἐπαινῆσειε νοήσας,
ἣ δ' ἐπιμωμητὴ· διὰ δ' ἄνδιχα θυμὸν ἔχουσιν.
ἣ μὲν γὰρ πόλεμόν τε κακὸν καὶ δῆριν ὀφέλλει,
- 15 σχετλίη· οὗ τις τὴν γε φιλεῖ βροτός, ἀλλ' ὑπ'
ἀνάγκης
ἀθανάτων βουλῆσιν Ἔριν τιμῶσι βαρεῖαν.
τὴν δ' ἑτέρην προτέρην μὲν ἐγείνατο Νῦξ
ἐρεβεννή,
θῆκε δέ μιν Κρονίδης ὑψίζυγος, αἰθέρι ναίων
γαίης τ' ἐν ρίζησι καὶ ἀνδράσι πολλὸν ἀμείνω·

KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES

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!¹ 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

HOW TO BE A FARMER

20 ἢ τε καὶ ἀπάλαμόν περ ὁμῶς ἐπὶ ἔργον ἔγειρεν.
εἰς ἕτερον γάρ τις τε ἰδὼν ἔργοιο χατίζων
πλούσιον, ὃς σπεύδει μὲν ἀρώμενα ἡδὲ φυτεύειν
οἶκόν τ' εὖ θέσθαι, ζηλοῖ δέ τε γείτονα γείτων
εἰς ἄφενος σπεύδοντ'· ἀγαθὴ δ' Ἔρις ἦδε
βροτοῖσιν.

25 καὶ κεραμεὺς κεραμεῖ κοτέει καὶ τέκτονι τέκτων,
καὶ πτωχὸς πτωχῷ φθονέει καὶ αἰδὸς αἰδῶ.

ὦ Πέρση, σὺ δὲ ταῦτα τεῶ ἑνικάτθεο θυμῷ,
μηδέ σ' Ἔρις κακόχαρτος ἀπ' ἔργου θυμὸν
ἐρύκοι

νεῖκε' ὀπιπεύοντ' ἀγορῆς ἐπακουὸν ἔοντα.
30 ὥρη γάρ τ' ὀλίγη πέλεται νεικέων τ' ἀγορέων τε,
ᾧτινι μὴ βίος ἔνδον ἐπηετανὸς κατάκειται
ώραῖος, τὸν γαῖα φέρει, Δημήτερος ἀκτῆν.
τοῦ κε κορεσσάμενος νείκεα καὶ δῆριν ὀφέλλοις
κτῆμασ' ἐπ' ἀλλοτρίοις.

σοὶ δ' οὐκέτι δεύτερον ἔσται

35 ὧδ' ἔρδειν, ἀλλ' αὔθι διακρινόμεθα νεῖκος
ἰθειῆσι δίκης, αἵ τ' ἐκ Διὸς εἰσιν ἄρισται.
ἦδη μὲν γὰρ κληρὸν ἐδασσάμεθ', ἀλλὰ τε πολλὰ

KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES

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

HOW TO BE A FARMER

ἀρπάζων ἐφόρεις μέγα κυδαίνων βασιλῆας
δωροφάγους, οἳ τήνδε δίκην ἐθέλουσι δικάσαι,
40 νήπιοι, οὐδὲ ἴσασιν ὅσῳ πλέον ἤμισυ παντός,
οὐδ' ὅσον ἐν μαλάχῃ τε καὶ ἀσφοδέλῳ μέγ'
ὄνειαρ.

κρύψαντες γὰρ ἔχουσι θεοὶ βίον ἀνθρώποισιν·
ῥηιδίως γάρ κεν καὶ ἐπ' ἤματι ἐργάσαιο
ὥστε σε κεῖς ἐνιαυτὸν ἔχειν καὶ ἀεργὸν ἐόντα·
45 αἶψά κε πηδάλιον μὲν ὑπὲρ καπνοῦ καταθεῖο,
ἔργα βοῶν δ' ἀπόλοιτο καὶ ἡμιόνων ταλαεργῶν.

KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES

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

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