

Epode 2

by Horace

Trans. Michael Chernicoff

“A man is blessed who, free from any buisness deals,
As were the mortal race of old,
With his own oxen works among ancestral fields,
Free from debts of any sort,
5 He hears no martial trumpet calling him to war
Nor fears to face the angry sea,
And he avoids the forum and the haughty gates
Of influential citizens.
And thus, he either weds developed layered vines
10 Onto the lofty poplar trees,
Or he looks out from a secluded vale upon
The wand’ring herds of rumbling beasts,
Or, pruning unproductive branches with his *falx*,
He grafts more fruitful ones in place;
15 He stores extracted honey in clean *amphorae*
Or shears the weak and sickly sheep;
Or he, when Autumn lifts his comely head, arrayed
With ripened fruit, out of the ground,
Rejoices, plucking grafted pears and grapes whose skin
20 Compares in hue with purple dye,
To honor you, o Priapus, and you, the guard
Of boundaries, father Silvanus.
At times he likes to lie beneath an old holm-oak,
At times in tightly clinging grass;
25 While waters glide between high river banks, and birds
And make plaintive sounds among the trees,
And from the springs the sound of clearest water comes,
Which oft invites a gentle sleep.
But when the winter, season of thundering Jove,
30 Makes ready storms of rain and snow,
He drives fierce boars from here and there with many dogs
To hunting nets placed in the way
Or stretches out from fowler’s pole nets widely meshed,
A trick to snare the greedy thrush;
35 He catches fleeing hares and migratory cranes,
Delightful prizes, in a snare.
Who cannot but forget among such a scene as this
What cares love has of evil things?
But if a modest woman should, for her part, help
40 With dearest children and the home,
As if she were a Sabine or the sunburnt wife
Of a robust Apulian,

Then may she build the sacred hearth with firewood
Before her weary husband comes,
45 Squeeze dry the swollen udders of the fertile flock
Enclosed by pens of wicker-work,
Bring forth in storage vessels sweet new wine,
And cook unpurchased feasts,
Such that no Lucrine oyster would have pleased me more
50 Nor turbot nor the parrot-wrasse
If thund'ring over winter storms had brought it to
Italian seas from eastern waves.
Into my belly guinea fowl would not descend,
Nor an Ionian grouse,
55 More joyfully to me than olives chosen from
The plumpest branches of the tree
Or herbs of sorrel, fond of fields, and mallow plants,
Which are both cures for stopped up bowels,
Or lamb, killed for the feast of Terminia,
60 Or kid, reclaimed from lupine jaws.
Between these meals it pleases him to see the sheep
In pasture hurry to the house,
To see the tired oxen as they drag with necks
Held low the now inverted plow,
65 And then the home-born slave, a household swarm of wealth,
Around the gleaming Lares crowds.”
And when the loanshark Alfius has said these things,
A future farmer as of now,
He repossesses all his money on the Ides,
70 And on the Kalends loans it out.