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Odes of Horace Book II Ode 13

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ODES OF HORACE — Book II, Ode 13

Some wretch it was, that luckless, ill-omened day,
Who planted you with impious hand, O tree,
And reared you to his shame to be the
Bane of posterity and the village;

I could believe he strangled his aged sire;
In dead of night he spattered his inner rooms
With blood and gore of trusting guests; oh,
He was a dealer in Colchian poisons,

And anywhere a horrible crime was hatched,
He planned it,—he who stood you within my field,
You sorry log, and destined you to
Crash on the head of your guiltless master!

What each should shun as peril from hour to hour
Man never knows sufficient to guard against:
The Punic sailor greatly dreads the
Bosphorus, fearing no fate hid elsewhere;

The soldier fears the Parthian’s arrowed flight,
The Parthian fears chains and Italian strength;
And yet death’s unexpected blight has
Seized and will seize every race and nation.

We almost saw Proserpina’s gloomy realms,
Almost saw Aeacus on the judgment seat,
Abodes where dwell the blessed host, and
Where with her Lesbian lyre sad Sappho

Complains and sighs for girls of her native land;
And you, Alcaeus, sound with your golden quill
More loudly on your fuller strings the
Hardships of sailing and war and exile.
The shades, amazed, in reverent silence stand
To hear these stories worthy of sacred awe,
But shoulder close to drink the magic
Tales of great battles and banished tyrants.

What wonder is it then that the spellbound beast
At songs like these his hundred black ears drops down,
That snakes entwined among the Furies’
Locks cease to writhe and are lulled to quiet?

Prometheus and Tantalus are beguiled
By this sweet sound to rest from their endless toil;
Orion cares no more for hunting,
Lion and lynx rest in timid safety.

(Metre: Alcaic Strophe)

ODES OF HORACE — Book III, Ode 30

More enduring than bronze I’ve built my monument
Overtopping the royal pile of the pyramids,
Which no ravenous rain, neither Aquilo’s rage
Shall suffice to destroy, nor the unnumbered years
As they pass one by one, nor shall the flight of time.
I shall not wholly die; no, a great part of me
Shall escape from death’s Queen; still shall my fame rise fresh
In posterity’s praise while to the Capitol
Still the high priest and mute maiden ascend the Hill.
From where Aulidus brawls and from that thirsty land
In which Daunus once ruled over his rustic tribes,
I, grown great though born low, I shall be named as first
To have spun Grecian song into Italian strands
With their lyrical modes. Take this proud eminence
Won by your just deserts; and with the Delphic bay,
O Melpomene, now graciously bind my hair.

(Metre: 1st Asclepiadean)

—trans. by Helen Rowe Henze