

## HORACE

### The Secular Hymn

Horace, *The Secular Hymn*. From: William Stearns Davis, ed., *Readings in Ancient History: Illustrative Extracts from the Sources*, 2 Vols. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1912-13), Vol. II: Rome and the West, pp. 174-179.

*In 17 BCE Augustus celebrated the "Secular Games," a peculiarly solemn event, supposedly permitted only once in a century. The occasion was one of general jubilation over the notable peace and prosperity of the age. The "Secular Hymn" by the court poet Horace is perhaps the most successful poem of occasion ever written. It fits admirably into the spirit of the occasion with its references to the old divinities and the contemporary rulers and their triumphs. It was probably sung on the third day of the festival at the temple of Apollo on the Palatine by a choir of twenty-seven noble boys and maidens.*

Phoebus! and Dian, you whose sway,  
Mountains and woods obey!  
Twin glories of the skies, forever worshiped, hear!  
Accept our prayer this sacred year  
When, as the Sibyl's voice ordained  
For ages yet to come,  
Pure maids and youths unstained  
Invoke the Gods who love the sevenfold hills of Rome.

All bounteous Sun!  
Forever changing, and forever one!  
Who in your lustrous car bear'st forth light,  
And hid'st it, setting, in the arms of Night,  
Look down on worlds outspread, yet nothing see  
Greater than Rome, and Rome's high sovereignty.  
You Ilithyia, too, whatever name,  
Goddess, you do approve,  
Lucina, Genitalis, still the same  
Aid destined mothers with a mother's love;

Prosper the Senate's wise decree,  
Fertile of marriage faith and countless progeny!  
As centuries progressive wing their flight  
For you the grateful hymn shall ever sound;  
Thrice by day, and thrice by night  
For you the choral dance shall beat the ground.

Fates! whose unfailing word  
Spoken from lips Sibylline shall abide,  
Ordained, preserved and sanctified  
By Destiny's eternal law, accord  
To Rome new blessings that shall last  
In chain unbroken from the Past.  
Mother of fruits and flocks, prolific Earth!  
Bind wreaths of spiked corn round Ceres's hair:  
And may soft showers and Jove's benignant air  
Nurture each infant birth!

Lay down your arrows, God of day!  
Smile on your youths elect who singing pray.  
You, Crescent Queen, bow down your star-crowned head  
And on your youthful choir a kindly influence shed.  
If Rome be all your work—if Troy's sad band  
Safe sped by you attained the Etruscan strand,  
A chosen remnant, vowed  
To seek new Lares, and a changed abode—  
Remnant for whom thro Ilion's blazing gate  
Aeneas, orphan of a ruined State,  
Opened a pathway wide and free  
To happier homes and liberty:—  
Ye Gods! If Rome be yours, to placid Age  
Give timely rest: to docile Youth  
Grant the rich heritage  
Of morals, modesty, and truth.  
On Rome herself bestow a teaming race  
Wealth, Empire, Faith, and all befitting Grace.

Vouchsafe to Venus' and Anchises' heir,  
Who offers at your shrine  
Due sacrifice of milk-white kine,  
Justly to rule, to pity and to dare,  
To crush insulting hosts, the prostrate foeman spare  
The haughty Mede has learned to fear  
The Alban axe, the Latian spear,  
And Scythians, suppliant now, await  
The conqueror's doom, their coming fate.  
Honor and Peace, and Pristine Shame,  
And Virtue's oft dishonored name,  
Have dared, long exiled, to return,  
And with them Plenty lifts her golden horn.

Augur Apollo! Bearer of the bow!  
Warrior and prophet! Loved one of the Nine!  
Healer in sickness! Comforter in woe!  
If still the templed crags of Palatine  
And Latium's fruitful plains to you are dear,  
Perpetuate for cycles yet to come,  
Mightier in each advancing year,  
The ever growing might and majesty of Rome.  
You, too, Diana, from your Aventine,  
And Algidus deep woods, look down and hear  
The voice of those who guard the books Divine,  
And to your youthful choir incline a loving ear.

Return we home! We know that Jove  
And all the Gods our song approve  
To Phoebus and Diana given;  
The virgin hymn is heard in Heaven.