



Search

Ovid's Metamorphoses

BOOK THE FIRST

The Golden Age

[1:113](#) The **golden age** was first; when Man yet new,
1:114 No rule but uncorrupted reason knew:
1:115 And, with a native bent, did good pursue.
1:116 Unforc'd by punishment, un-aw'd by fear,
1:117 His words were simple, and his soul sincere;
1:118 Needless was written law, where none opprest:
1:119 The law of Man was written in his breast:
1:120 No suppliant crowds before the judge appear'd,
1:121 No court erected yet, nor cause was heard:
1:122 But all was safe, for conscience was their guard.
1:123 The mountain-trees in distant prospect please,
1:124 E're yet the pine descended to the seas:
1:125 E're sails were spread, new oceans to explore:
1:126 And happy mortals, unconcern'd for more,
1:127 Confin'd their wishes to their native shore.
1:128 No walls were yet; nor fence, nor mote, nor mound,
1:129 Nor drum was heard, nor trumpet's angry sound:
1:130 Nor swords were forg'd; but void of care and crime,
1:131 The soft creation slept away their time.
1:132 The teeming Earth, yet guiltless of the plough,
1:133 And unprovok'd, did fruitful stores allow:
1:134 Content with food, which Nature freely bred,
1:135 On wildings and on strawberries they fed;
1:136 Cornels and bramble-berries gave the rest,
1:137 And falling acorns furnish'd out a feast.
1:138 The flow'rs unsown, in fields and meadows reign'd:
1:139 And Western winds immortal spring maintain'd.
1:140 In following years, the bearded corn ensu'd
1:141 From Earth unask'd, nor was that Earth renew'd.
1:142 From veins of vallies, milk and nectar broke;
1:143 And honey sweating through the pores of oak.

The Silver Age

[1:144](#) But when good Saturn, banish'd from above,
1:145 Was driv'n to Hell, the world was under Jove.
1:146 Succeeding times a silver age behold,
1:147 Excelling brass, but more excell'd by gold.
1:148 Then summer, autumn, winter did appear:
1:149 And spring was but a season of the year.
1:150 The sun his annual course obliquely made,
1:151 Good days contracted, and enlarg'd the bad.
1:152 Then air with sultry heats began to glow;
1:153 The wings of winds were clogg'd with ice and snow;
1:154 And shivering mortals, into houses driv'n,
1:155 Sought shelter from th' inclemency of Heav'n.
1:156 Those houses, then, were caves, or homely sheds;
1:157 With twining oziars fenc'd; and moss their beds.
1:158 Then ploughs, for seed, the fruitful furrows broke,
1:159 And oxen labour'd first beneath the yoke.

The Brazen Age

[1:160](#) To this came next in course, the brazen age:
1:161 A warlike offspring, prompt to bloody rage,
1:162 Not impious yet...

The Iron Age

[1:163](#) Hard steel succeeded then:
1:164 And stubborn as the metal, were the men.
1:165 Truth, modesty, and shame, the world forsook:
1:166 Fraud, avarice, and force, their places took.
1:167 Then sails were spread, to every wind that blew.
1:168 Raw were the sailors, and the depths were new:
1:169 Trees, rudely hollow'd, did the waves sustain;
1:170 E're ships in triumph plough'd the watry plain.

[1:171](#) Then land-marks limited to each his right:
1:172 For all before was common as the light.
1:173 Nor was the ground alone requir'd to bear
1:174 Her annual income to the crooked share,
1:175 But greedy mortals, rummaging her store,
1:176 Digg'd from her entrails first the precious oar;
1:177 Which next to Hell, the prudent Gods had laid;
1:178 And that alluring ill, to sight display'd.
1:179 Thus cursed steel, and more accursed gold,
1:180 Gave mischief birth, and made that mischief bold:
1:181 And double death did wretched Man invade,
1:182 By steel assaulted, and by gold betray'd,

1:183 Now (brandish'd weapons glittering in their hands)
1:184 Mankind is broken loose from moral bands;
1:185 No rights of hospitality remain:
1:186 The guest, by him who harbour'd him, is slain,
1:187 The son-in-law pursues the father's life;
1:188 The wife her husband murders, he the wife.
1:189 The step-dame poyson for the son prepares;
1:190 The son inquires into his father's years.
1:191 Faith flies, and piety in exile mourns;
1:192 And justice, here opprest, to Heav'n returns.