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MYTHS OF GREECE AND ROME.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEGINNING OF ALL THINGS.

MYTHOLOGY is the science which treats of the early traditions, or myths, relating to the religion of the ancients, and includes, besides a full account of the origin of their gods, their theory concerning the beginning of all things.

Among all the nations scattered over the face of the earth, the Hebrews alone were instructed by God, who gave them not only a full account of the creation of the world and of all living creatures, but also a code of laws to regulate their conduct. All the questions they fain would ask were fully answered, and no room remained for conjecture.

It was not so, however, with the other nations. The Greeks and Romans, for instance, lacking the definite knowledge which we obtain from the Scriptures, and still anxious to know everything, were forced to construct, in part, their own theory. As they looked about them for some clue to serve as guide, they could not help but observe and admire the wonders of nature. The succession of day and night, summer and winter, rain and sunshine;

the fact that the tallest trees sprang from tiny seeds, the greatest rivers from diminutive streams, and the most beautiful flowers and delicious fruits from small green buds,—all seemed to tell them of a superior Being, who had fashioned them to serve a definite purpose.

They soon came to the conclusion that a hand mighty enough to call all these wonders into life, could also have created the beautiful Earth whereon they dwelt. These thoughts gave rise to others; suppositions became certainties; and soon the following myth or fable was evolved, to be handed down from generation to generation.

At first, when all things lay in a great confused mass,—

“Ere earth, and sea, and covering heavens, were known,
The face of nature, o'er the world, was one;
And men have call'd it Chaos; formless, rude,
The mass; dead matter's weight, inert, and crude;
Where, in mix'd heap of ill-compounded mold,
The jarring seeds of things confusedly roll'd.”

OVID (Elton's tr.)

The Earth did not exist. Land, sea, and air were mixed up together; so that the earth was not solid, the sea was not fluid, nor the air transparent.

“No sun yet beam'd from yon cerulean height;
No orb'ing moon repair'd her horns of light;
No earth, self-poised, on liquid ether hung;
No sea its world-enclasping waters flung;
Earth was half air, half sea, an embryo heap;
Nor earth was fix'd, nor fluid was the deep;
Dark was the void of air; no form was traced;
Obstructing atoms struggled through the waste;
Where cold, and hot, and moist, and dry rebell'd;
Heavy the light, and hard the soft repell'd.”

OVID (Elton's tr.)

Over this shapeless mass reigned a careless deity called Chaos, whose personal appearance could not be described, as there was

no light by which he could be seen. He shared his throne with his wife, the dark goddess of Night, named Chaos and Nyx or Nox, whose black robes, and still blacker countenance, did not tend to enliven the surrounding gloom.

These two divinities wearied of their power in the course of time, and called their son Erebus (Darkness) to their assistance. His first act was to dethrone and supplant Chaos; Erebus, Æther, and then, thinking he would be happier with a helpmeet, he married his own mother, Nyx. Of course, with our present views, this marriage was a heinous sin; but the ancients, who at first had no fixed laws, did not consider this union unsuitable, and recounted how Erebus and Nyx ruled over the chaotic world together, until their two beautiful children, Æther (Light) and Hemera (Day), acting in concert, dethroned them, and seized the supreme power.

Space, illumined for the first time by their radiance, revealed itself in all its uncouthness. Æther and Hemera carefully examined the confusion, saw its innumerable possibilities, and decided to evolve from it a “thing of beauty;” but quite conscious of the magnitude of such an undertaking, and feeling that some assistance would be desirable, they summoned Eros (Amor or Love), their own child, to their aid. By their combined efforts, Pontus (the Sea) and Gæa (Ge, Tellus, Terra), as the Earth was first called, were created.

In the beginning the Earth did not present the beautiful appearance that it does now. No trees waved their leafy branches on the hillsides; no flowers bloomed in the valleys; no grass grew on the plains; no birds flew through the air. All was silent, bare, and motionless. Eros, the first to perceive these deficiencies, seized his life-giving arrows and pierced the cold bosom of the Earth. Immediately the brown surface was covered with luxuriant verdure; birds of many colors flitted through the foliage of the new-born forest trees; animals of all kinds gamboled over the grassy plains; and swift-darting fishes swam in the limpid streams. All was now life, joy, and motion.

Gæa, roused from her apathy, admired all that had already been done for her embellishment, and, resolving to crown and complete the work so well begun, created Uranus (Heaven).

“Her first-born Earth produc'd,
Of like immensity, the starry Heaven:
That he might sheltering compass her around
On every side.”

HESIOD (Elton's tr.).

This version of the creation of the world, although but one of the many current with the Greeks and Romans, was the one most generally adopted; but another, also very popular, stated that the first divinities, Erebus and Nyx, produced a gigantic egg, from which Eros, the god of love, emerged to create the Earth. The egg myth.

“In the dreary chaotical closet
Of Erebus old, was a privy deposit,
By Night the primæval in secrecy laid;
A Mystical Egg, that in silence and shade
Was brooded and hatched; till time came about:
And Love, the delightful, in glory flew out.”

ARISTOPHANES (Frere's tr.).

The Earth thus created was supposed by the ancients to be a disk, instead of a sphere as science has proved. The Greeks fancied that their country occupied a central position, and that Mount Olympus, a very high mountain, the mythological abode of their gods, was placed in the exact center. Their Earth was divided into two equal parts by Pontus (the Sea,—equivalent to our Mediterranean and Black Seas); and all around it flowed the great river Oceanus in a “steady, equable current,” undisturbed by storm, from which the Sea and all the rivers were supposed to derive their waters. Mount Olympus
and the river
Oceanus.

The Greeks also imagined that the portion of the Earth directly north of their country was inhabited by a fortunate race of men,



(14)

AMOR.—Martin.

the Hyperboreans, who dwelt in continual bliss, and enjoyed a never-ending springtide. Their homes were said to be "inaccessible by land or by sea." They were "exempt from disease, old age, and death," and were so virtuous that the gods frequently visited them, and even condescended to share their feasts and games. A people thus favored could not fail to be happy, and many were the songs in praise of their sunny land.

"I come from a land in the sun-bright deep,
Where golden gardens grow;
Where the winds of the north, becalm'd in sleep,
Their conch shells never blow.

"So near the track of the stars are we,
That oft, on night's pale beams,
The distant sounds of their harmony
Come to our ears, like dreams.

"The Moon, too, brings her world so nigh,
That when the night-seer looks
To that shadowless orb, in a vernal sky,
He can number its hills and brooks.

"To the Sun god all our hearts and lyres
By day, by night, belong;
And the breath we draw from his living fires
We give him back in song."

MOORE.

South of Greece, also near the great river Oceanus, dwelt another nation, just as happy and virtuous as the Hyperboreans,—the Ethiopians. They, too, often enjoyed the company of the gods, who shared their innocent pleasures with great delight.

And far away, on the shore of this same marvelous river, according to some mythologists, were the beautiful Isles of the Blest, where mortals who had led virtuous lives, and had thus found favor in the sight of the gods, were transported without

The Hyperboreans.

The Ethiopians and the Isles of the Blest.

tasting of death, and where they enjoyed an eternity of bliss. These islands had sun, moon, and stars of their own, and were never visited by the cold wintry winds that swept down from the north.

"The Isles of the Blest, they say,
The Isles of the Blest,
Are peaceful and happy, by night and by day,
Far away in the glorious west.

"They need not the moon in that land of delight,
They need not the pale, pale star;
The sun is bright, by day and night,
Where the souls of the blessed are.

"They till not the ground, they plow not the wave,
They labor not, never! oh, never!
Not a tear do they shed, not a sigh do they heave,
They are happy, for ever and ever!"

PINDAR.

Chaos, Erebus, and Nyx were deprived of their power by Æther and Hemera, who did not long enjoy the possession of the scepter; for Uranus and Gæa, more powerful than their progenitors, soon forced them to depart, and began to reign in their stead. They had not dwelt long on the summit of Mount Olympus, before they found themselves the parents of twelve gigantic children, the Titans, whose strength was such that their father, Uranus, greatly feared them. To prevent their ever making use of it against him, he seized them immediately after their birth, hurled them down into a dark abyss called Tartarus, and there chained them fast.

This chasm was situated far under the earth; and Uranus knew that his six sons (Oceanus, Cœus, Crius, Hyperion, Iapetus, and Cronus), as well as his six daughters, the Titanides (Ilia, Rhea, Themis, Thetis, Mnemosyne, and Phoebe), could not easily escape from its cavernous depths. The Titans did not long remain sole occupants of Tartarus, for one day the brazen doors were again

Uranus and Gæa.

Titans, Cyclopes, and Centimani.

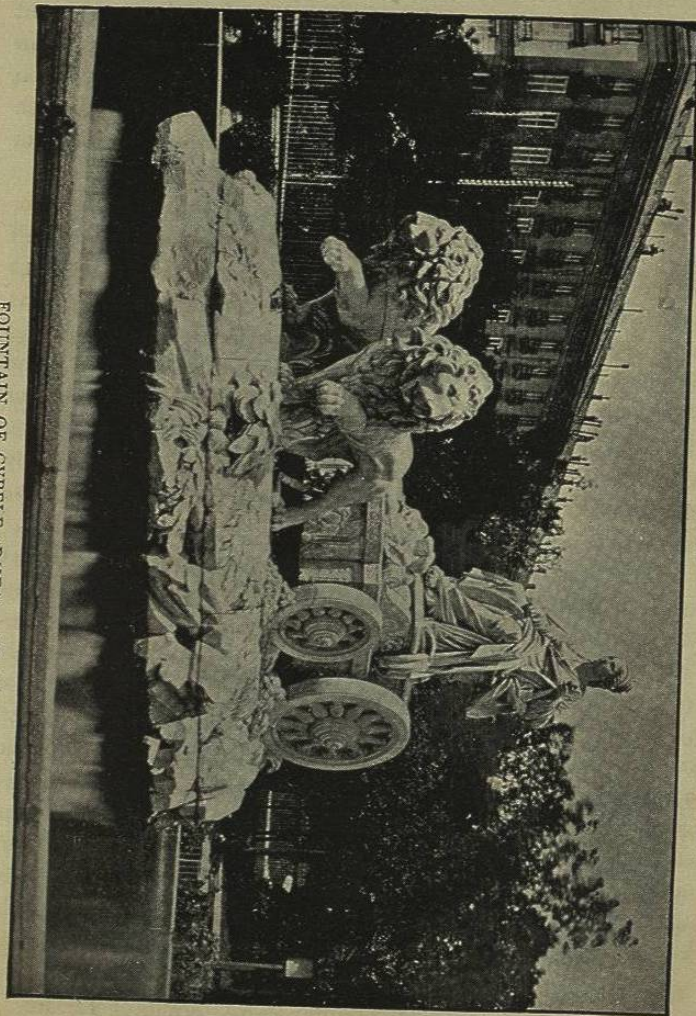
thrown wide open to admit the Cyclopes,—Brontes (Thunder), Steropes (Lightning), and Arges (Sheet-lightning),—three later-born children of Uranus and Gæa, who helped the Titans to make the darkness hideous with their incessant clamor for freedom. In due time their number was increased by the three terrible Centimani (Hundred-handed), Cottus, Briareus, and Gyes, who were sent thither by Uranus to share their fate.

Greatly dissatisfied with the treatment her children had received at their father's hands, Gæa remonstrated, but all in vain. Uranus would not grant her request to set the giants free, and, whenever their muffled cries reached his ear, he trembled for his own safety. Angry beyond all expression, Gæa swore revenge, and descended into Tartarus, where she urged the Titans to conspire against their father, and attempt to wrest the scepter from his grasp.

All listened attentively to the words of sedition; but none were courageous enough to carry out her plans, except Cronus, the youngest of the Titans, more familiarly known as Saturn or Time, who found confinement and chains peculiarly galling, and who hated his father for his cruelty. Gæa finally induced him to lay violent hands upon his sire, and, after releasing him from his bonds, gave him a scythe, and bade him be of good cheer and return victorious.

Thus armed and admonished, Cronus set forth, came upon his father unawares, defeated him, thanks to his extraordinary weapon, and, after binding him fast, took possession of the vacant throne, intending to rule the universe forever. Enraged at this insult, Uranus cursed his son, and prophesied that a day would come when he, too, would be supplanted by his children, and would suffer just punishment for his rebellion.

Cronus paid no heed to his father's imprecations, but calmly proceeded to release the Titans, his brothers and sisters, who, in their joy and gratitude to escape the dismal realm of Tartarus, expressed their willingness to be ruled by him. Their satisfaction was complete, however, when he chose his own sister Rhea



FOUNTAIN OF CYBELE (RHEA). (Madrid.)

(Cybele, Ops) for his consort, and assigned to each of the others some portion of the world to govern at will. To Oceanus and Cronus and Rhea. Thetis, for example, he gave charge over the ocean and all the rivers upon earth; while to Hyperion and Phœbe he intrusted the direction of the sun and moon, which the ancients supposed were daily driven across the sky in brilliant golden chariots.

Peace and security now reigned on and around Mount Olympus; and Cronus, with great satisfaction, congratulated himself on the result of his enterprise. One fine morning, however, his equanimity was disturbed by the announcement that a son was born to him. The memory of his father's curse then suddenly returned to his mind. Anxious to avert so great a calamity as the loss of his power, he hastened to his wife, determined to devour the child, and thus prevent him from causing further annoyance. Wholly unsuspecting, Rhea heard him inquire for his son. Gladly she placed him in his extended arms; but imagine her surprise and horror when she beheld her husband swallow the babe!

Time passed, and another child was born, but only to meet with the same cruel fate. One infant after another disappeared down the capacious throat of the voracious Cronus, — a personification of Time, who creates only to destroy. In vain the bereaved mother besought the life of one little one: the selfish, hard-hearted father would not relent. As her prayers seemed unavailing, Rhea finally resolved to obtain by stratagem the boon her husband denied; and as soon as her youngest son, Jupiter (Jove, Zeus), was born, she concealed him.

Cronus, aware of his birth, soon made his appearance, determined to dispose of him in the usual summary manner. For some time Rhea pleaded with him, but at last pretended to yield to his commands. Hastily wrapping a large stone in swaddling clothes, she handed it to Cronus, simulating intense grief. Cronus was evidently not of a very inquiring turn of mind, for he swallowed the whole without investigating the real contents of the shapeless bundle.

“To th’ imperial son of Heaven,
 Whilom the king of gods, a stone she gave
 Inwraught in infant swathes; and this with grasp
 Eager he snatch’d, and in his ravening breast
 Convey’d away: unhappy! nor once thought
 That for the stone his child behind remain’d
 Invincible, secure; who soon, with hands
 Of strength o’ercoming him, should cast him forth
 From glory, and himself th’ immortals rule.”

HESIOD (Elton's tr.).

Ignorant of the deception practiced upon him, Cronus then took leave, and the overjoyed mother clasped her rescued treasure to her breast. It was not sufficient, however, to have saved young Jupiter from imminent death: it was also necessary that his father should remain unconscious of his existence.

To insure this, Rhea intrusted her babe to the tender care of the Melian nymphs, who bore him off to a cave on Mount Ida. There a goat, Amalthea, was procured to act as nurse, and fulfilled her office so acceptably that Jupiter's infancy. she was eventually placed in the heavens as a constellation, a brilliant reward for her kind ministrations. To prevent Jupiter's cries being heard in Olympus, the Curetes (Corybantes), Rhea's priests, uttered piercing screams, clashed their weapons, executed fierce dances, and chanted rude war songs.

The real significance of all this unwonted noise and commotion was not at all understood by Cronus, who, in the intervals of his numerous affairs, congratulated himself upon the cunning he had shown to prevent the accomplishment of his father's curse. But all his anxiety and fears were aroused when he suddenly became aware of the fraud practiced upon him, and of young Jupiter's continued existence. He immediately tried to devise some plan to get rid of him; but, before he could put it into execution, he found himself attacked, and, after a short but terrible encounter, signally defeated.

Jupiter, delighted to have triumphed so quickly, took possession

of the supreme power, and aided by Rhea's counsels, and by a nauseous potion prepared by Metis, a daughter of Oceanus, compelled Cronus to produce the unfortunate children he had swallowed; i.e., Neptune, Pluto, Vesta, Ceres, and Juno.

Following the example of his predecessor, Jupiter gave his brothers and sisters a fair share of his new kingdom. The wisest among the Titans—Mnemosyne, Themis, Oceanus, and Hyperion—submitted to the new sovereign without murmur, but the others refused their allegiance; which refusal, of course, occasioned a deadly conflict.

“When gods began with wrath,
And war rose up between their starry brows,
Some choosing to cast Cronus from his throne
That Zeus might king it there, and some in haste
With opposite oaths that they would have no Zeus
To rule the gods forever.”

E. B. BROWNING.

Jupiter, from the top of Mount Olympus, discerned the superior number of his foes, and, quite aware of their might, concluded that reinforcements to his party would not be superfluous. In haste, therefore, he released the Cyclopes from Tartarus, where they had languished so long, stipulating that in exchange for their freedom they should supply him with thunderbolts,—weapons which only they knew how to forge. This new engine caused great terror and dismay in the ranks of the enemy, who, nevertheless, soon rallied, and struggled valiantly to overthrow the usurper and win back the sovereignty of the world.

During ten long years the war raged incessantly, neither party wishing to submit to the dominion of the other, but at the end of that time the rebellious Titans were obliged to yield. Some of them were hurled into Tartarus once more, where they were carefully secured by Neptune, Jupiter's brother, while the young conqueror joyfully proclaimed his victory.

“League all your forces then, ye powers above,
Join all, and try th' omnipotence of Jove:
Let down our golden everlasting chain,
Whose strong embrace holds heaven and earth and main:
Strive all, of mortal and immortal birth,
To drag, by this, the Thunderer down to earth,
Ye strive in vain! if I but stretch this hand,
I heave the gods, the ocean, and the land;
I fix the chain to great Olympus' height,
And the vast world hangs trembling in my sight!
For such I reign, unbounded and above;
And such are men and gods, compar'd to Jove.”

HOMER (Pope's tr.).

The scene of this mighty conflict was supposed to have been in Thessaly, where the country bears the imprint of some great natural convulsion; for the ancients imagined that the gods, making the most of their gigantic strength and stature, hurled huge rocks at each other, and piled mountain upon mountain to reach the abode of Jupiter, the Thunderer.

“Mountain on mountain, as the Titans erst,
My brethren, scaling the high seat of Jove,
Heaved Pelion upon Ossa's shoulders broad
In vain emprise.”

LOWELL.

Saturn, or Cronus, the leader and instigator of the revolt, weary at last of bloodshed and strife, withdrew to Italy, or Hesperia, where he founded a prosperous kingdom, and reigned in peace for many long years.

Jupiter, having disposed of all the Titans, now fancied he would enjoy the power so unlawfully obtained; but Gæa, to punish him for depriving her children of their birth-right, created a terrible monster, called Typhœus, or Typhon, which she sent to attack him. This Typhœus was a giant, from whose trunk one hundred dragon heads arose; flames shot from his eyes, nostrils, and mouths; while he incessantly uttered such blood-curdling screams, that the gods, in terror, fled

Death
of Typhœus.