

former envy, welcomed the blushing bride, who was happy ever after.

The ancients, for whom Cupid was an emblem of the heart, considered Psyche the personification of the soul, and represented her with butterfly wings; that little insect being another symbol of the soul, which cannot die.

One of the latest myths concerning Venus is that of Berenice, who, fearing for her beloved husband's life, implored the goddess

Berenice's to protect him in battle, vowing to sacrifice her **Hair.** luxuriant hair if he returned home in safety. The prayer was granted, and Berenice's beautiful locks laid upon Venus' shrine, whence they, however, very mysteriously disappeared. An astrologer, consulted concerning the supposed theft, solemnly pointed to a comet rapidly coming into view, and declared that the gods had placed Berenice's hair among the stars, there to shine forever in memory of her wifely sacrifice.

Venus, goddess of beauty, is represented either entirely naked, or with some scanty drapery called a "cestus." Seated in her chariot, formed of a single pearl shell, and drawn **Worship of** by snow-white doves, her favorite birds, she jour- **Venus.** neyed from shrine to shrine, complacently admiring the lavish decorations of jewels and flowers her worshipers provided. The offerings of young lovers were ever those which found most favor in her sight.

"Venus loves the whispers
Of plighted youth and maid,
In April's ivory moonlight
Beneath the chestnut shade."

MACAULAY.

Numerous ancient and some modern statues of this goddess grace the various art galleries, but among them all the most perfect is the world-renowned Venus de Milo.

Venus' festivals were always scenes of graceful amusements; and her votaries wore wreaths of fresh, fragrant flowers, the emblem of all natural beauty.

CHAPTER VIII.

MERCURY.

As already repeatedly stated in the course of this work, Jupiter was never a strictly faithful spouse, and, in spite of his wife's remonstrances, could not refrain from indulging **Birth of** his caprice for every pretty face he met along **Mercury.** his way. It is thus, therefore, that he yielded to the charms of Maia, goddess of the plains, and spent some blissful hours in her society. This divine couple's happiness culminated when they first beheld their little son, Mercury (Hermes, Psychopompus, Oneicopompus), who was born in a grotto on Mount Cyllene, in Arcadia,—

"Mercury, whom Maia bore,
Sweet Maia, on Cyllene's hoary top."
VIRGIL (Cowper's tr.).

This infant god was quite unlike mortal children, as will readily be perceived by the numerous pranks he played immediately after his birth. First he sprang from his mother's knee, grasped a tortoise shell lying on the ground, bored holes in its sides, stretched strings across its concavity, and, sweeping his hands over them, produced strains of sweetest music, thus inventing the first lyre.

"So there it lay, through wet and dry,
As empty as the last new sonnet,
Till by and by came Mercury,
And, having mused upon it,

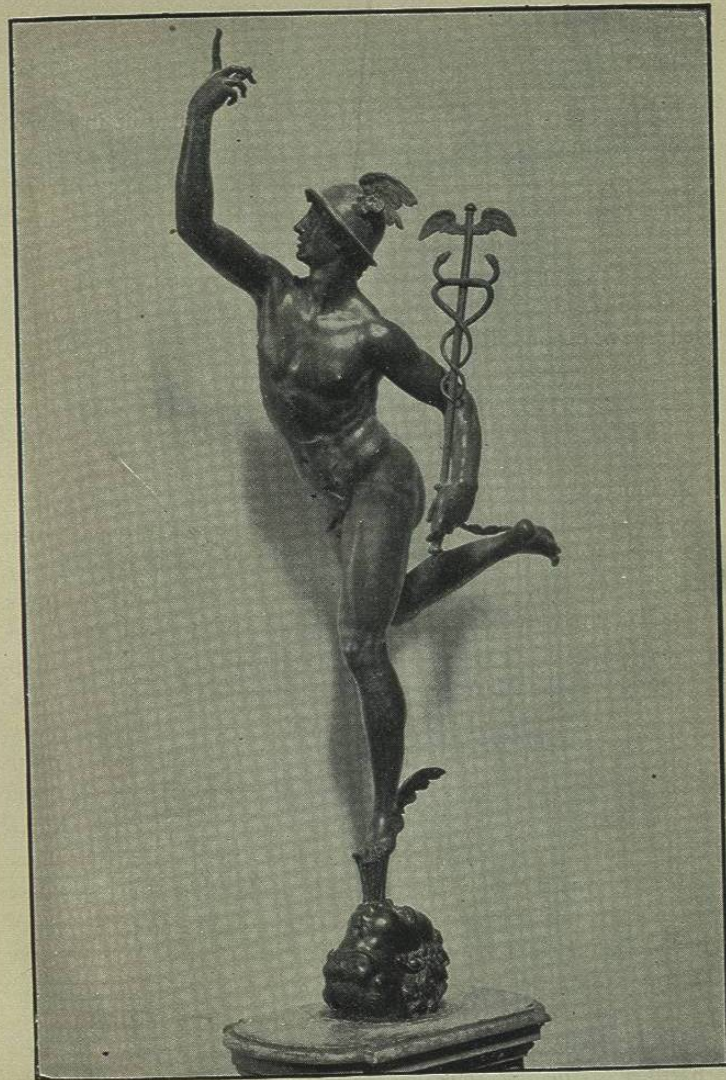
'Why here,' cried he, 'the thing of things
In shape, material, and dimension!
Give it but strings, and, lo, it sings,
A wonderful invention.'"

LOWELL.

Being very hungry toward evening, young Mercury escaped from his sleeping mother, and sallied out in search of food. He had not gone very far, before he came to a wide meadow, where Apollo's herds were at pasture. The oxen were fat and sleek; and the mischievous little god, after satisfying himself that they were young, and therefore promised to be tender and juicy, drove fifty of them off to a secluded spot, taking good care to envelop their feet in leafy branches, so they would leave no traces. Then, his hiding place being reached in safety, Mercury coolly killed two of the oxen, which he proceeded to eat.

Apollo soon missed his cattle, and began to search for some clew to their hiding place or to the thief. He could, however, discover nothing but some broken twigs and scattered leaves. Suddenly he remembered that the babe whose birth had been announced early that morning in high Olympus had been appointed god of thieves. He therefore lost no more time in useless search and conjecture, but strode off to Mount Cyllene, where he found Mercury peacefully sleeping in his cradle. With a rude shake, the sun god roused him from his slumbers, and bade him restore the stolen cattle. Mercury pretended innocence, until Apollo, exasperated, dragged him off to Olympus, where he was convicted of the theft, and condemned to restore the stolen property. Mercury yielded to the decree, produced the remaining oxen, and, in exchange for the two missing, gave Apollo the lyre he had just fashioned.

This, like most other myths, admits of a natural explanation. Apollo (the Sun) was supposed by the ancients to possess great herds of cattle and sheep,—the clouds; and Mercury, the personification of the wind, born in the night, after a few hours' ex-



FLYING MERCURY.—Bologna.
(National Museum, Florence.)

(133)

istence waxes sufficiently strong to drive away the clouds and conceal them, leaving no trace of his passage except a few broken branches and scattered leaves.

The gift of the lyre pleased Apollo so well, that he in return wished to make a present to Mercury, and gave him a magic wand, called Caduceus, which had the power of reconciling all conflicting elements. Mercury, anxious to test it, thrust it between two quarreling snakes, who immediately wound themselves in amity around it. This so pleased him, that he bade them remain there forever, and used the wand on all occasions.

Mercury's
wand, cap,
and shoes.

"A snake-encircl'd wand;
By classic authors term'd Caduceus
And highly fam'd for several uses."

GOLDSMITH.

Mercury was in due time appointed messenger of the gods, who, to make him fleet of foot, presented him with winged sandals, the Talaria, which endowed him with marvelous rapidity of motion. As these sandals did not seem quite sufficient, however, the gods added the winged cap, Petasus, to the winged shoes.

"Foot-feather'd Mercury appear'd sublime
Beyond the tall tree tops; and in less time
Than shoots the slanted hail-storm, down he dropt
Towards the ground; but rested not, nor stopt
One moment from his home; only the sward
He with his wand light touch'd, and heavenward
Swifter than sight was gone."

KEATS.

Mercury was not only the messenger of the gods, but was also appointed god of eloquence, commerce, rain, wind, and the special patron of travelers, shepherds, cheats, and thieves.

Jupiter often intrusted to Mercury messages of a delicate nature, and always found him an invaluable ally; but the faithful messenger was never so much needed or so deeply appreciated as during Jupiter's courtship of Io, the peerless daughter of the river god Inachus.

To avoid Juno's recriminations, Jupiter had carried on this affair with even more than his usual secrecy, visiting his beloved only when quite certain that his wife was asleep, and taking the further precaution of spreading a cloud over the spot where he generally met her, to shield her from all chance of being seen from Olympus.

One fine afternoon, all conditions being favorable, Jupiter hastened down to earth to see Io, and began to stroll with her up and down the river edge. They heeded not the noonday heat, for the cloud over their heads screened them from the sun's too ardent rays.

From some cause Juno's slumbers were less protracted than usual, and she soon arose from her couch to look about her realm, the atmosphere, and convince herself that all was well. Her attention was soon attracted by an opaque, immovable cloud near the earth,—a cloud which had no business there, for had she not bidden them all lie still on the blue until she awoke? Her suspicions being aroused by the presence of this cloud, she sought her husband in Olympus, and, not finding him, flew down to earth, brushing the cloud aside in her haste.

Jupiter, thus warned of her coming, had but time to change the maiden beside him into a heifer, ere his wife alighted and inquired what he was doing there. Carelessly the god pointed to the heifer, and declared he had been whiling away the time by creating it; but the explanation failed to satisfy Juno, who, seeing no other living creature near, suspected that her spouse had been engaged in a clandestine flirtation, and had screened its fair object from her wrath only by a sudden transformation.

Dissimulating these suspicions with care, Juno begged her husband to give her his new creation, which request he could not refuse, but granted most reluctantly, thus adding further confirmation to her jealous fears. The Queen of Heaven then departed, taking Io with her, and placed her under the surveillance of Argus, one of her servants, who possessed myriad eyes, but one half of which he closed at a time.

"The eyes of Argus, sentinel of Heaven:
Those thousand eyes that watch alternate kept,
Nor all o'er all his body waked or slept."

STATIUS (Elton's tr.).

She bade him watch the heifer closely, and report anything unusual in its actions. One day, therefore, as he was watching his charge pasture by the river, Argus heard her relate to her father, Inachus, the story of her transformation, and immediately imparted his discovery to Juno, who, advising still closer watchfulness, sent him back to his post.

Jupiter, in the mean while, was in despair; for days had passed without his being able to exchange a word with Io, or deliver her from her imprisonment. Finally he called Mercury to his aid, and bade him devise some plan to rescue her. Armed with a handful of poppies, Mercury approached Argus, and offered to while away the time by telling him tales.

As Mercury was the prince of story-tellers, this offer was not to be despised, and Argus joyfully accepted; but instead of exerting himself to be entertaining, Mercury droned out such lengthy, uninteresting stories, that Argus soon closed half his eyes in profound sleep. Still talking in the same monotonous way, Mercury softly shook the poppies over the giant's head, until one by one the remaining eyelids closed, and Argus was wrapped in complete slumber.

Then Mercury seized the giant's sword, and with one well-directed blow severed his head from the huge trunk. Only one half of the task was successfully accomplished; and while Mercury was driving the heifer away, Juno discovered his attempt, and promptly sent an enormous gadfly to torment the poor beast, who, goaded to madness by its cruel stings, fled wildly from one country to another, forded streams, and finally plunged into the sea, since called Ionian. After swimming across it, she took refuge in Egypt, where Jupiter restored her to all her girlish loveliness, and where her son Epaphus was born, to be the first king and the founder of Memphis.

"In coming time that hollow of the sea
Shall bear the name Ionian, and present
A monument of Io's passage through,
Unto all mortals."

E. B. BROWNING.

Juno mourned the loss of her faithful Argus most bitterly, and, gathering up his myriad eyes, scattered them over the tail of her favorite bird, the peacock, to have some memento of her faithful servant ever near her.

"From Argus slain a painted peacock grew,
Fluttering his feathers stain'd with various hue."

MOSCHUS.

This story also is an allegory. Io personifies the moon, restlessly wandering from place to place; Argus, the heavens, whose starry eyes keep ceaseless watch over the moon's every movement; Mercury is the rain, whose advent blots out the stars one by one, thus killing Argus, who else was never known to close all his eyes at once.

To Mercury was intrusted the charge of conducting the souls of the departed to Hades, and when occupied in this way he bore the name of Psychopompus, while, when addressed as conductor of Dreams, he was Oneicopompus.

Mercury's
offices and
worship.

"Gently as a kiss came Death to sever
From spirit flesh, and to the realm of gloom
The pallid shades with fearless brow descended
To Hades, by the winged god attended."

BOYSEN.

He was one of the twelve principal gods of Olympus, and was widely worshiped. Temples, altars, and shrines were dedicated to his service throughout the ancient countries. His statues were considered sacred boundary marks, and their removal punished by death. Solemn annual festivals were held in Rome in Mercury's honor in the month of May, and from him received their name of Mercuralia.