

CHAPTER IX.

MARS.

MARS (Ares), son of Jupiter and Juno, was the god of war, the personification of the angry clouded sky, and, although but little worshiped in Greece, was one of the principal Roman divinities. He is said to have first seen the light in Thrace, a country noted for its fierce storms and war-loving people.

“ Infant Mars, where Thracia’s mountains rose,
Press’d with his hardy limbs th’ incrusted snows.”

STATIUS (Elton’s tr.).

Never sated with strife and bloodshed, this god preferred the din of battle to all other music, and found no occupation so congenial as the toils and dangers of war. No gentle deeds of kindness were ever expected from him; no loving prayers were ever addressed to him; and the ancients felt no love for him, but, on the contrary, shuddered with terror when his name was mentioned.

Mars was generally represented in a brilliant suit of armor, a plumed helmet on his proud young head, a poised spear in one muscular hand, and a finely wrought shield in the other, showing him ever ready to cope with a foe.

His attendants, or some say his children, sympathized heartily with his quarrelsome tastes, and delighted in following his lead. They were Eris (Discord), Phobos (Alarm), Metus (Fear), Demios (Dread), and Pallor (Terror). Bellona, or Enyo, goddess of war, also accompanied him, drove

MARS.

his chariot, parried dangerous thrusts, and watched over his general safety. Mars and Bellona were therefore worshiped together in the selfsame temple, and their altars were the only ones ever polluted by human sacrifices.

“ And to the fire-ey’d maid of smoky war,
All hot and bleeding, will we offer them:
The mailed Mars shall on his altar sit,
Up to the ears in blood.”

SHAKESPEARE.

As strife was his favorite element, Mars was very active indeed during the war between the gods and giants, but in his martial ardor he frequently forgot all caution. On one occasion he was obliged to surrender to Otus and Ephialtes, — two giants, who, though but nine years of age, were already of immense stature, since they increased in height at the rate of nine inches each month.

Proud of their victory over the God of War, these giants bore him off in triumph, and bound him fast with iron chains slipped through iron rings. Day and night they kept watch over him; and even when they slept, the rattle of the chains, whenever any one of the gods attempted to set him free, woke them up, and frustrated all efforts to deliver him. During fifteen weary months poor Mars lingered there in durance vile, until Mercury, the prince of thieves, noiselessly and deftly slipped the chains out of the rings, and restored him to freedom.

In revenge for the cruel treatment inflicted by Otus and Ephialtes, Mars prevailed upon Apollo and Diana to use their poisoned arrows, and thus rid the world of these two ugly and useless giants.

Of a fiery disposition, Mars was never inclined to forgive an injury; and when Halirrhothius, Neptune’s son, dared to carry off his daughter Alcippe, Mars hotly pursued the abductor, and promptly slew him. Neptune, angry at this act of summary justice, cited the God of War to appear before a tribunal held in the open air, on a hill near the newly founded city of Athens.

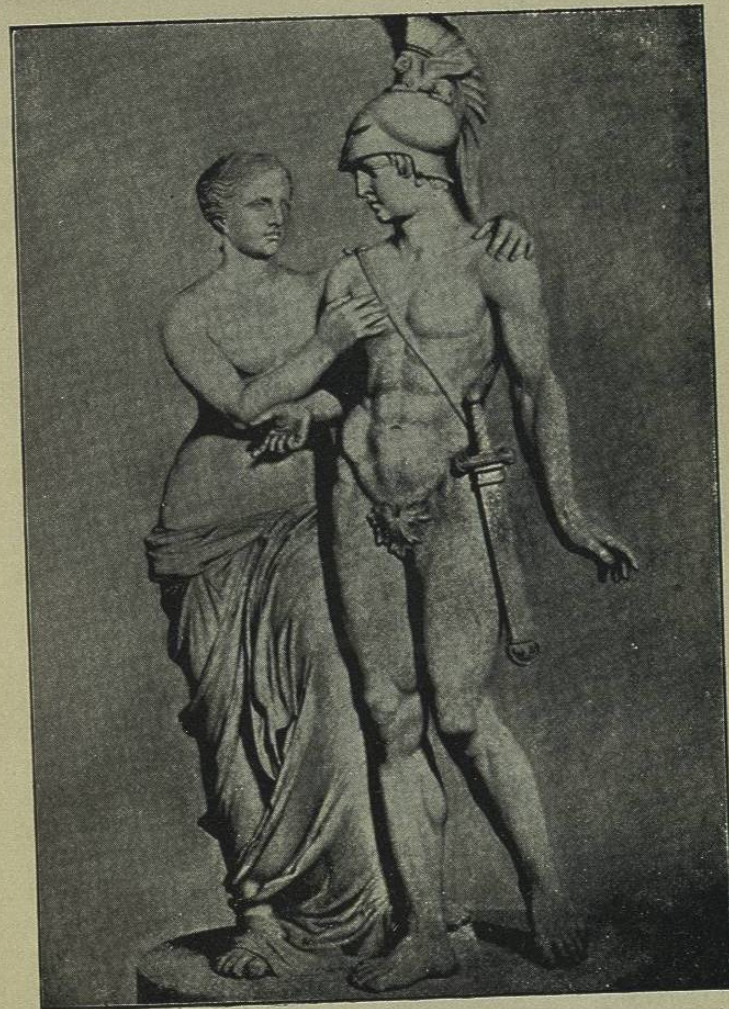
It was then customary for such cases to be tried at night, in utter darkness, so that the judges might not be influenced by the personal appearance of either plaintiff or defendant; and no rhetoric of any kind was allowed, that their minds might remain quite unbiased. Mars appeared before the judges, simply stated his case, and was acquitted. Since then the hill upon which his trial took place has been called the Areopagus (Ares' Hill) or Mars' Hill, and the judges of the principal court of justice at Athens received the name of Areopagitæ.

Although such a partisan of strife, Mars was not impervious to softer emotions, and passionately returned the devotion of Venus, who bore him three beautiful children, — **Mars' children.** Harmonia, Cupid, and Anteros. Mars also fell in love with a beautiful young Vestal named Ilia, a descendant of Æneas, who, in spite of the solemn pledge not to listen to a lover's pleadings until her time of service at the goddess Vesta's altar was accomplished, yielded to Mars' impetuous wooing, and consented to a clandestine union.

Although secretly married, Ilia continued to dwell in the temple until the birth of her twin sons Romulus and Remus.

Romulus and Remus. Her parents, hearing she had broken her vows, commanded that she should suffer the prescribed punishment of being buried alive, and that the children should be exposed to the teeth and claws of the wild beasts of the forest. The double sentence was ruthlessly carried out, and the young mother perished; but, contrary to all previsions, the babes survived, and, after having been suckled for a time by a she-wolf, were found and adopted by a shepherd.

Romulus and Remus thrived under this man's kind care, and grew up strong and fearless. When they reached manhood, they longed for a wider sphere for their youthful activity, and, leaving the mountain where they had grown up, journeyed out into the world to seek their fortunes. After some time they came to a beautiful hilly country, where they decided to found a great city, the capital of their future realm. Accordingly the brothers began



VENUS DE MILO AND MARS.

to trace the outline of their city limits, and, in doing so, quarreled over the name of the prospective town.

Blinded by anger, Romulus suddenly raised the tool he held, and struck Remus such a savage blow that he fell to the ground, slain by his brother in a fit of passion. Alone now, Romulus at first vainly tried to pursue his undertaking, but, being soon joined by a number of adventurers as wicked and unscrupulous as he, they combined their forces, and built the celebrated city of Rome.

“Then, with his nurse’s wolf-skin girt,
Shall Romulus the line assert,
Invite them to his new raised home,
And call the martial city Rome.”

VIRGIL (Conington’s tr.).

As founder of this city, Romulus was its first king, and ruled the people with such an iron hand that his tyranny eventually became unbearable. The senators, weary of his exactions and arbitrary measures, finally resolved to free themselves of his presence. Taking advantage of an eclipse, which plunged the city in sudden darkness at noonday, and which occurred while all were assembled on the Forum, the magistrates slew Romulus, cut his body into pieces, and hid them under their wide togas.

When the light returned, and the terrified and awestruck people, somewhat reassured, looked about them for their king,

Quirinus. they were told he had gone, never to return, carried off by the immortal gods, who wished him to share

their abode and dignity. The senators further informed the credulous population that Romulus was to be henceforth worshiped as a god under the name of Quirinus, and gave orders for the erection of a temple on one of the seven hills, which since then has been known as Mount Quirinal. Yearly festivals in Romulus’ honor were ever after held in Rome, under the name of Quirinalia.

Well pleased with the new city of Rome and its turbulent, lawless citizens, Mars took it under his special protection; and once,

when a plague was raging which threatened to destroy all the people, the Romans rushed in a body to his temple, and clamored for a sign of his favor and protection.

Even while they prayed, it is said, a shield, Ancile, fell from heaven, and a voice was distinctly heard to declare that Rome would endure as long as this token of the god’s good will was preserved. The very same day the plague ceased its frightful ravages, and the Romans, delighted with the result of their petitions, placed the heavenly shield in one of their principal temples. The Ancile.

Then, in constant dread lest some of their enemies should succeed in stealing it, they caused eleven other shields to be made, so exactly like the heaven-sent Ancile, that none but the guardian priests, the Salii, who kept continual watch over them, could detect the original from the facsimiles. During the month of March, which, owing to its blustery weather, was dedicated to Mars and bore his name, the ancilæ were carried in a procession all through the city, the Salii chanting their rude war songs, and executing intricate war dances.

A Roman general, ere setting out on any warlike expedition, always entered the sanctuary of Mars, touched the sacred shield with the point of his lance, shook the spear in the hand of the god’s effigy, and called aloud, “Mars, watch over us!”

A common superstition among the Roman soldiery was, that Mars, under the name of Gradivus, marched in person at the head of their army, and led them on to victory. Mars’ principal votaries were therefore the Roman soldiers and youths, whose exercising ground was called, in his honor, the Campus Martius, or Field of Mars. All the laurel crowns bestowed upon victorious generals were deposited at the foot of his statues, and a bull was the customary thank offering after a successful campaign. Worship of Mars.

“The soldier, from successful camps returning
With laurel wreath’d, and rich with hostile spoil,
Severs the bull to Mars.”

PRIOR.