

E. M. BERENS

***THE MYTHS
OF ANCIENT
GREECE
AND ROME***

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A black and white photograph of a marble bust of a classical figure, likely a Greek or Roman deity or philosopher. The bust is shown from the chest up, with the face and nose being the central focus. The marble is weathered and cracked, particularly around the eyes and nose. The figure has a serious expression with closed eyes. The background is a plain, light color.

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The Myths of Ancient Greece and Rome

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PART I.—MYTHS.

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INTRODUCTION.

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Before entering upon the many strange beliefs of the ancient Greeks, and the extraordinary number of gods they worshipped, we must first consider what kind of beings these divinities were.

In appearance, the gods were supposed to resemble mortals, whom, however, they far surpassed in beauty, grandeur, and strength; they were also more commanding in stature, height being considered by the Greeks an attribute of beauty in man or woman. They resembled human beings in their feelings and habits, intermarrying and having children, and requiring daily nourishment to recruit their strength, and refreshing sleep to restore their energies. Their blood, a bright ethereal fluid called Ichor, never engendered disease, and, when shed, had the power of producing new life.

The Greeks believed that the mental qualifications of their gods were of a much higher order than those of men, but nevertheless, as we shall see, they were not considered to be exempt from human passions, and we frequently behold them actuated by revenge, deceit, and jealousy. They, however, always punish the evil-doer, and visit with dire calamities any impious mortal who dares to neglect their worship or despise their rites. We often hear of them

visiting mankind and partaking of their hospitality, and not unfrequently both gods and goddesses become attached to mortals, with whom they unite themselves, the offspring of these unions being called heroes or demi-gods, who were usually renowned for their great strength and courage. But although there were so many points of resemblance between gods and men, there remained the one great characteristic distinction, viz., that the gods enjoyed immortality. Still, they were not invulnerable, and we often hear of them being wounded, and suffering in consequence such exquisite torture that they have earnestly prayed to be deprived of their privilege of immortality.

The gods knew no limitation of time or space, being able to transport themselves to incredible distances with the speed of thought. They possessed the power of rendering themselves invisible at will, and could assume the forms of men or animals as it suited their convenience. They could also transform human beings into trees, stones, animals, &c., either as a punishment for their misdeeds, or as a means of protecting the individual, thus transformed, from impending danger. Their robes were like those worn by mortals, but were perfect in form and much finer in texture. Their weapons also resembled those used by mankind; we hear of spears, shields, helmets, bows and arrows, &c., being employed by the gods. Each deity possessed a beautiful chariot, which, drawn by horses or other animals of celestial breed, conveyed them rapidly over land and sea according to their pleasure. Most of these divinities lived on the summit of Mount Olympus, each possessing his or her individual habitation, and all meeting together on festive

occasions in the council-chamber of the gods, where their banquets were enlivened by the sweet strains of Apollo's lyre, whilst the beautiful voices of the Muses poured forth their rich melodies to his harmonious accompaniment. Magnificent temples were erected to their honour, where they were worshipped with the greatest solemnity; rich gifts were presented to them, and animals, and indeed sometimes human beings, were sacrificed on their altars.

In the study of Greek mythology we meet with some curious, and what may at first sight appear unaccountable notions. Thus we hear of terrible giants hurling rocks, upheaving mountains, and raising earthquakes which engulf whole armies; these ideas, however, may be accounted for by the awful convulsions of nature, which were in operation in pre-historic times. Again, the daily recurring phenomena, which to us, who know them to be the result of certain well-ascertained laws of nature, are so familiar as to excite no remark, were, to the early Greeks, matter of grave speculation, and not unfrequently of alarm. For instance, when they heard the awful roar of thunder, and saw vivid flashes of lightning, accompanied by black clouds and torrents of rain, they believed that the great god of heaven was angry, and they trembled at his wrath. If the calm and tranquil sea became suddenly agitated, and the crested billows rose mountains high, dashing furiously against the rocks, and threatening destruction to all within their reach, the sea-god was supposed to be in a furious rage. When they beheld the sky glowing with the hues of coming day they thought that the goddess of the dawn, with rosy fingers, was drawing aside the dark veil of night, to allow

her brother, the sun-god, to enter upon his brilliant career. Thus personifying all the powers of nature, this very imaginative and highly poetical nation beheld a divinity in every tree that grew, in every stream that flowed, in the bright beams of the glorious sun, and the clear, cold rays of the silvery moon; for them the whole universe lived and breathed, peopled by a thousand forms of grace and beauty.

The most important of these divinities may have been something more than the mere creations of an active and poetical imagination. They were possibly human beings who had so distinguished themselves in life by their preeminence over their fellow-mortals that after death they were deified by the people among whom they lived, and the poets touched with their magic wand the details of lives, which, in more prosaic times, would simply have been recorded as illustrious.

It is highly probable that the reputed actions of these deified beings were commemorated by bards, who, travelling from one state to another, celebrated their praise in song; it therefore becomes exceedingly difficult, nay almost impossible, to separate bare facts from the exaggerations which never fail to accompany oral traditions.

In order to exemplify this, let us suppose that Orpheus, the son of Apollo, so renowned for his extraordinary musical powers, had existed at the present day. We should no doubt have ranked him among the greatest of our musicians, and honoured him as such; but the Greeks, with their vivid imagination and poetic license, exaggerated his remarkable gifts, and attributed to his music supernatural influence over animate and inanimate nature. Thus we hear of wild beasts

tamed, of mighty rivers arrested in their course, and of mountains being moved by the sweet tones of his voice. The theory here advanced may possibly prove useful in the future, in suggesting to the reader the probable basis of many of the extraordinary accounts we meet with in the study of classical mythology.

And now a few words will be necessary concerning the religious beliefs of the Romans. When the Greeks first settled in Italy they found in the country they colonized a mythology belonging to the Celtic inhabitants, which, according to the Greek custom of paying reverence to all gods, known or unknown, they readily adopted, selecting and appropriating those divinities which had the greatest affinity to their own, and thus they formed a religious belief which naturally bore the impress of its ancient Greek source. As the primitive Celts, however, were a less civilized people than the Greeks, their mythology was of a more barbarous character, and this circumstance, combined with the fact that the Romans were not gifted with the vivid imagination of their Greek neighbours, leaves its mark on the Roman mythology, which is far less fertile in fanciful conceits, and deficient in all those fairy-like stories and wonderfully poetic ideas which so strongly characterize that of the Greeks.

ORIGIN OF THE WORLD.—FIRST DYNASTY.

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URANUS AND GÆA. (Cœlus and Terra.)

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The ancient Greeks had several different theories with regard to the origin of the world, but the generally accepted notion was that before this world came into existence, there was in its place a confused mass of shapeless elements called Chaos. These elements becoming at length consolidated (by what means does not appear), resolved themselves into two widely different substances, the lighter portion of which, soaring on high, formed the sky or firmament, and constituted itself into a vast, overarching vault, which protected the firm and solid mass beneath.

Thus came into being the two first great primeval deities of the Greeks, Uranus and Ge or Gæa.

Uranus, the more refined deity, represented the light and air of heaven, possessing the distinguishing qualities of light, heat, purity, and omnipresence, whilst Gæa, the firm, flat,¹ life-sustaining earth, was worshipped as the great all-nourishing mother. Her many titles refer to her more or less in this character, and she appears to have been universally revered among the Greeks, there being scarcely a city in Greece which did not contain a temple erected in her honour; indeed Gæa was held in such veneration that her name was always invoked whenever the gods took a solemn oath, made an emphatic declaration, or implored assistance.

Uranus, the heaven, was believed to have united himself in marriage with Gæa, the earth; and a moment's reflection will show what a truly poetical, and also what a logical idea this was; for, taken in a figurative sense, this union actually does exist. The smiles of heaven produce the flowers of earth, whereas his long-continued frowns exercise so

depressing an influence upon his loving partner, that she no longer decks herself in bright and festive robes, but responds with ready sympathy to his melancholy mood.

The first-born child of Uranus and Gæa was Oceanus,² the ocean stream, that vast expanse of ever-flowing water which encircled the earth. Here we meet with another logical though fanciful conclusion, which a very slight knowledge of the workings of nature proves to have been just and true. The ocean is formed from the rains which descend from heaven and the streams which flow from earth. By making Oceanus therefore the offspring of Uranus and Gæa, the ancients, if we take this notion in its literal sense, merely assert that the ocean is produced by the combined influence of heaven and earth, whilst at the same time their fervid and poetical imagination led them to see in this, as in all manifestations of the powers of nature, an actual, tangible divinity.

But Uranus, the heaven, the embodiment of light, heat, and the breath of life, produced offspring who were of a much less material nature than his son Oceanus. These other children of his were supposed to occupy the intermediate space which divided him from Gæa. Nearest to Uranus, and just beneath him, came Aether (Ether), a bright creation representing that highly rarified atmosphere which immortals alone could breathe. Then followed Aër (Air), which was in close proximity to Gæa, and represented, as its name implies, the grosser atmosphere surrounding the earth which mortals could freely breathe, and without which they would perish. Aether and Aër were separated from each other by divinities called Nephelæ. These were their

restless and wandering sisters, who existed in the form of clouds, ever floating between Aether and Aër. Gæa also produced the mountains, and Pontus (the sea). She united herself with the latter, and their offspring were the sea-deities Nereus, Thaumas, Phorcys, Ceto, and Eurybia.

Co-existent with Uranus and Gæa were two mighty powers who were also the offspring of Chaos. These were Erebus (Darkness) and Nyx (Night), who formed a striking contrast to the cheerful light of heaven and the bright smiles of earth. Erebus reigned in that mysterious world below where no ray of sunshine, no gleam of daylight, nor vestige of health-giving terrestrial life ever appeared. Nyx, the sister of Erebus, represented Night, and was worshipped by the ancients with the greatest solemnity.

Uranus was also supposed to have been united to Nyx, but only in his capacity as god of light, he being considered the source and fountain of all light, and their children were Eos (Aurora), the Dawn, and Hemera, the Daylight. Nyx again, on her side was also doubly united, having been married at some indefinite period to Erebus.

In addition to those children of heaven and earth already enumerated, Uranus and Gæa produced two distinctly different races of beings called Giants and Titans. The Giants personified brute strength alone, but the Titans united to their great physical power intellectual qualifications variously developed. There were three Giants, Briareus, Cottus, and Gyges, who each possessed a hundred hands and fifty heads, and were known collectively by the name of the Hecatoncheires, which signified hundred-handed. These mighty Giants could shake the universe and

produce earthquakes; it is therefore evident that they represented those active subterranean forces to which allusion has been made in the opening chapter. The Titans were twelve in number; their names were: Oceanus, Ceos, Crios, Hyperion, Iapetus, Cronus, Theia, Rhea, Themis, Mnemosyne, Phœbe, and Tethys.

Now Uranus, the chaste light of heaven, the essence of all that is bright and pleasing, held in abhorrence his crude, rough, and turbulent offspring, the Giants, and moreover feared that their great power might eventually prove hurtful to himself. He therefore hurled them into Tartarus, that portion of the lower world which served as the subterranean dungeon of the gods. In order to avenge the oppression of her children, the Giants, Gæa instigated a conspiracy on the part of the Titans against Uranus, which was carried to a successful issue by her son Cronus. He wounded his father, and from the blood of the wound which fell upon the earth sprang a race of monstrous beings also called Giants. Assisted by his brother-Titans, Cronus succeeded in dethroning his father, who, enraged at his defeat, cursed his rebellious son, and foretold to him a similar fate. Cronus now became invested with supreme power, and assigned to his brothers offices of distinction, subordinate only to himself. Subsequently, however, when, secure of his position, he no longer needed their assistance, he basely repaid their former services with treachery, made war upon his brothers and faithful allies, and, assisted by the Giants, completely defeated them, sending such as resisted his all-conquering arm down into the lowest depths of Tartarus.

SECOND DYNASTY.

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CRONUS (Saturn).

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Cronus was the god of time in its sense of eternal duration. He married Rhea, daughter of Uranus and Gæa, a very important divinity, to whom a special chapter will be devoted hereafter. Their children were, three sons: Aïdes (Pluto), Poseidon (Neptune), Zeus (Jupiter), and three daughters: Hestia (Vesta), Demeter (Ceres), and Hera (Juno). Cronus, having an uneasy conscience, was afraid that his children might one day rise up against his authority, and thus verify the prediction of his father Uranus. In order, therefore, to render the prophecy impossible of fulfilment, Cronus swallowed each child as soon as it was born,³ greatly to the sorrow and indignation of his wife Rhea. When it came to Zeus, the sixth and last, Rhea resolved to try and save this one child at least, to love and cherish, and appealed to her parents, Uranus and Gæa, for counsel and assistance. By their advice she wrapped a stone in baby-clothes, and Cronus, in eager haste, swallowed it, without noticing the deception. The child thus saved, eventually, as we shall see, dethroned his father Cronus, became supreme god in his stead, and was universally venerated as the great national god of the Greeks.

Anxious to preserve the secret of his existence from Cronus, Rhea sent the infant Zeus secretly to Crete, where he was nourished, protected, and educated. A sacred goat,

called Amalthea, supplied the place of his mother, by providing him with milk; nymphs, called Melissae, fed him with honey, and eagles and doves brought him nectar and ambrosia.⁴ He was kept concealed in a cave in the heart of Mount Ida, and the Curetes, or priests of Rhea, by beating their shields together, kept up a constant noise at the entrance, which drowned the cries of the child and frightened away all intruders. Under the watchful care of the Nymphs the infant Zeus thrived rapidly, developing great physical powers, combined with extraordinary wisdom and intelligence. Grown to manhood, he determined to compel his father to restore his brothers and sisters to the light of day, and is said to have been assisted in this difficult task by the goddess Metis, who artfully persuaded Cronus to drink a potion, which caused him to give back the children he had swallowed. The stone which had counterfeited Zeus was placed at Delphi, where it was long exhibited as a sacred relic.

Cronus was so enraged at being circumvented that war between the father and son became inevitable. The rival forces ranged themselves on two separate high mountains in Thessaly; Zeus, with his brothers and sisters, took his stand on Mount Olympus, where he was joined by Oceanus, and others of the Titans, who had forsaken Cronus on account of his oppressions. Cronus and his brother-Titans took possession of Mount Othrys, and prepared for battle. The struggle was long and fierce, and at length Zeus, finding that he was no nearer victory than before, bethought himself of the existence of the imprisoned Giants, and knowing that they would be able to render him most

powerful assistance, he hastened to liberate them. He also called to his aid the Cyclops (sons of Poseidon and Amphitrite),⁵ who had only one eye each in the middle of their foreheads, and were called Brontes (Thunder), Steropes (Lightning), and Pyracmon (Fire-anvil). They promptly responded to his summons for help, and brought with them tremendous thunderbolts which the Hecatoncheires, with their hundred hands, hurled down upon the enemy, at the same time raising mighty earthquakes, which swallowed up and destroyed all who opposed them. Aided by these new and powerful allies, Zeus now made a furious onslaught on his enemies, and so tremendous was the encounter that all nature is said to have throbbed in accord with this mighty effort of the celestial deities. The sea rose mountains high, and its angry billows hissed and foamed; the earth shook to its foundations, the heavens sent forth rolling thunder, and flash after flash of death-bringing lightning, whilst a blinding mist enveloped Cronus and his allies.

And now the fortunes of war began to turn, and victory smiled on Zeus. Cronus and his army were completely overthrown, his brothers despatched to the gloomy depths of the lower world, and Cronus himself was banished from his kingdom and deprived for ever of the supreme power, which now became vested in his son Zeus. This war was called the Titanomachia, and is most graphically described by the old classic poets.

With the defeat of Cronus and his banishment from his dominions, his career as a ruling Greek divinity entirely ceases. But being, like all the gods, immortal, he was

supposed to be still in existence, though possessing no longer either influence or authority, his place being filled to a certain extent by his descendant and successor, Zeus.

Cronus is often represented as an old man leaning on a scythe, with an hour-glass in his hand. The hour-glass symbolizes the fast-fleeting moments as they succeed each other unceasingly; the scythe is emblematical of time, which mows down all before it.

SATURN.

The Romans, according to their custom of identifying their deities with those of the Greek gods whose attributes were similar to their own, declared Cronus to be identical with their old agricultural divinity Saturn. They believed that after his defeat in the Titanomachia and his banishment from his dominions by Zeus, he took refuge with Janus, king of Italy, who received the exiled deity with great kindness, and even shared his throne with him. Their united reign became so thoroughly peaceful and happy, and was distinguished by such uninterrupted prosperity, that it was called the Golden Age.

Saturn is usually represented bearing a sickle in the one hand and a wheat-sheaf in the other.

A temple was erected to him at the foot of the Capitoline Hill, in which were deposited the public treasury and the laws of the state.

RHEA (Ops).

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Rhea, the wife of Cronus, and mother of Zeus and the other great gods of Olympus, personified the earth, and was regarded as the Great Mother and unceasing producer of all plant-life. She was also believed to exercise unbounded sway over the animal creation, more especially over the lion, the noble king of beasts. Rhea is generally represented wearing a crown of turrets or towers and seated on a throne, with lions crouching at her feet. She is sometimes depicted sitting in a chariot, drawn by lions.

The principal seat of her worship, which was always of a very riotous character, was at Crete. At her festivals, which took place at night, the wildest music of flutes, cymbals, and drums resounded, whilst joyful shouts and cries, accompanied by dancing and loud stamping of feet, filled the air.

This divinity was introduced into Crete by its first colonists from Phrygia, in Asia Minor, in which country she was worshipped under the name of Cybele. The people of Crete adored her as the Great Mother, more especially in her signification as the sustainer of the vegetable world. Seeing, however, that year by year, as winter appears, all her glory vanishes, her flowers fade, and her trees become leafless, they poetically expressed this process of nature under the figure of a lost love. She was said to have been tenderly attached to a youth of remarkable beauty, named Atys, who, to her grief and indignation, proved faithless to her. He was about to unite himself to a nymph called Sagaris, when, in the midst of the wedding feast, the rage of the incensed goddess suddenly burst forth upon all present. A panic seized the assembled guests, and Atys, becoming

afflicted with temporary madness, fled to the mountains and destroyed himself. Cybele, moved with sorrow and regret, instituted a yearly mourning for his loss, when her priests, the Corybantes, with their usual noisy accompaniments, marched into the mountains to seek the lost youth. Having discovered him⁶ they gave full vent to their ecstatic delight by indulging in the most violent gesticulations, dancing, shouting, and, at the same time, wounding and gashing themselves in a frightful manner.

OPS.

In Rome the Greek Rhea was identified with Ops, the goddess of plenty, the wife of Saturn, who had a variety of appellations. She was called Magna-Mater, Mater-Deorum, Berecynthia-Idea, and also Dindymene. This latter title she acquired from three high mountains in Phrygia, whence she was brought to Rome as Cybele during the second Punic war, B.C. 205, in obedience to an injunction contained in the Sybilline books. She was represented as a matron crowned with towers, seated in a chariot drawn by lions.

DIVISION OF THE WORLD.

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We will now return to Zeus and his brothers, who, having gained a complete victory over their enemies, began to consider how the world, which they had conquered, should be divided between them. At last it was settled by lot that Zeus should reign supreme in Heaven, whilst Aïdes governed the Lower World, and Poseidon had full command

over the Sea, but the supremacy of Zeus was recognized in all three kingdoms, in heaven, on earth (in which of course the sea was included), and under the earth. Zeus held his court on the top of Mount Olympus, whose summit was beyond the clouds; the dominions of Aïdes were the gloomy unknown regions below the earth; and Poseidon reigned over the sea. It will be seen that the realm of each of these gods was enveloped in mystery. Olympus was shrouded in mists, Hades was wrapt in gloomy darkness, and the sea was, and indeed still is, a source of wonder and deep interest. Hence we see that what to other nations were merely strange phenomena, served this poetical and imaginative people as a foundation upon which to build the wonderful stories of their mythology.

The division of the world being now satisfactorily arranged, it would seem that all things ought to have gone on smoothly, but such was not the case. Trouble arose in an unlooked-for quarter. The Giants, those hideous monsters (some with legs formed of serpents) who had sprung from the earth and the blood of Uranus, declared war against the triumphant deities of Olympus, and a struggle ensued, which, in consequence of Gæa having made these children of hers invincible as long as they kept their feet on the ground, was wearisome and protracted. Their mother's precaution, however, was rendered unavailing by pieces of rock being hurled upon them, which threw them down, and their feet being no longer placed firmly on their mother-earth, they were overcome, and this tedious war (which was called the Gigantomachia) at last came to an end. Among the most daring of these earth-born giants were Enceladus,

Rhoetus, and the valiant Mimas, who, with youthful fire and energy, hurled against heaven great masses of rock and burning oak-trees, and defied the lightnings of Zeus. One of the most powerful monsters who opposed Zeus in this war was called Typhon or Typhœus. He was the youngest son of Tartarus and Gæa, and had a hundred heads, with eyes which struck terror to the beholders, and awe-inspiring voices frightful to hear. This dreadful monster resolved to conquer both gods and men, but his plans were at length defeated by Zeus, who, after a violent encounter, succeeded in destroying him with a thunderbolt, but not before he had so terrified the gods that they had fled for refuge to Egypt, where they metamorphosed themselves into different animals and thus escaped.

THEORIES AS TO THE ORIGIN OF MAN.

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Just as there were several theories concerning the origin of the world, so there were various accounts of the creation of man.

The first natural belief of the Greek people was that man had sprung from the earth. They saw the tender plants and flowers force their way through the ground in the early spring of the year after the frost of winter had disappeared, and so they naturally concluded that man must also have issued from the earth in a similar manner. Like the wild plants and flowers, he was supposed to have had no cultivation, and resembled in his habits the untamed beasts of the field, having no habitation except that which nature

had provided in the holes of the rocks, and in the dense forests whose overarching boughs protected him from the inclemency of the weather.

In the course of time these primitive human beings became tamed and civilized by the gods and heroes, who taught them to work in metals, to build houses, and other useful arts of civilization. But the human race became in the course of time so degenerate that the gods resolved to destroy all mankind by means of a flood; Deucalion (son of Prometheus) and his wife Pyrrha, being, on account of their piety, the only mortals saved.

By the command of his father, Deucalion built a ship, in which he and his wife took refuge during the deluge, which lasted for nine days. When the waters abated the ship rested on Mount Othrys in Thessaly, or according to some on Mount Parnassus. Deucalion and his wife now consulted the oracle of Themis as to how the human race might be restored. The answer was, that they were to cover their heads, and throw the bones of their mother behind them. For some time they were perplexed as to the meaning of the oracular command, but at length both agreed that by the bones of their mother were meant the stones of the earth. They accordingly took up stones from the mountain side and cast them over their shoulders. From those thrown by Deucalion there sprang up men, and from those thrown by Pyrrha, women.

After the lapse of time the theory of Autochthony (from *autos*, self, and *chthon*, earth) was laid aside. When this belief existed there were no religious teachers whatever; but in course of time temples were raised in honour of the

different gods, and priests appointed to offer sacrifices to them and conduct their worship. These priests were looked upon as authorities in all religious matters, and the doctrine they taught was, that man had been created by the gods, and that there had been several successive ages of men, which were called the Golden, Silver, Brazen, and Iron Ages.

Life in the Golden Age was one unceasing round of ever-recurring pleasures unmarred by sorrow or care. The favoured mortals living at this happy time led pure and joyous lives, thinking no evil, and doing no wrong. The earth brought forth fruits and flowers without toil or labour in plentiful luxuriance, and war was unknown. This delightful and god-like existence lasted for hundreds of years, and when at length life on earth was ended, death laid his hand so gently upon them that they passed painlessly away in a happy dream, and continued their existence as ministering spirits in Hades, watching over and protecting those they had loved and left behind on earth. The men of the Silver Age⁷ were a long time growing up, and during their childhood, which lasted a hundred years, they suffered from ill-health and extreme debility. When they at last became men they lived but a short time, for they would not abstain from mutual injury, nor pay the service due to the gods, and were therefore banished to Hades. There, unlike the beings of the Golden Age, they exercised no beneficent supervision over the dear ones left behind, but wandered about as restless spirits, always sighing for the lost pleasures they had enjoyed in life.

The men of the Brazen Age were quite a different race of beings, being as strong and powerful as those of the Silver

Age were weak and enervated. Everything which surrounded them was of brass; their arms, their tools, their dwellings, and all that they made. Their characters seem to have resembled the metal in which they delighted; their minds and hearts were hard, obdurate, and cruel. They led a life of strife and contention, introduced into the world, which had hitherto known nothing but peace and tranquillity, the scourge of war, and were in fact only happy when fighting and quarrelling with each other. Hitherto Themis, the goddess of Justice, had been living among mankind, but becoming disheartened at their evil doings, she abandoned the earth, and winged her flight back to heaven. At last the gods became so tired of their evil deeds and continual dissensions, that they removed them from the face of the earth, and sent them down to Hades to share the fate of their predecessors.

We now come to the men of the Iron Age. The earth, no longer teeming with fruitfulness, only yielded her increase after much toil and labour. The goddess of Justice having abandoned mankind, no influence remained sufficiently powerful to preserve them from every kind of wickedness and sin. This condition grew worse as time went on, until at last Zeus in his anger let loose the water-courses from above, and drowned every individual of this evil race, except Deucalion and Pyrrha.

The theory of Hesiod,⁸ the oldest of all the Greek poets, was that the Titan Prometheus, the son of Iapetus, had formed man out of clay, and that Athene had breathed a soul into him. Full of love for the beings he had called into existence, Prometheus determined to elevate their minds

and improve their condition in every way; he therefore taught them astronomy, mathematics, the alphabet, how to cure diseases, and the art of divination. He created this race in such great numbers that the gods began to see the necessity of instituting certain fixed laws with regard to the sacrifices due to them, and the worship to which they considered themselves entitled from mankind in return for the protection which they accorded them. An assembly was therefore convened at Mecone in order to settle these points. It was decided that Prometheus, as the advocate of man, should slay an ox, which should be divided into two equal parts, and that the gods should select one portion which should henceforth, in all future sacrifices, be set apart for them. Prometheus so divided the ox that one part consisted of the bones (which formed of course the least valuable portion of the animal), artfully concealed by the white fat; whilst the other contained all the edible parts, which he covered with the skin, and on the top of all he laid the stomach.

Zeus, pretending to be deceived, chose the heap of bones, but he saw through the stratagem, and was so angry at the deception practised on him by Prometheus that he avenged himself by refusing to mortals the gift of fire. Prometheus, however, resolved to brave the anger of the great ruler of Olympus, and to obtain from heaven the vital spark so necessary for the further progress and comfort of the human race. He accordingly contrived to steal some sparks from the chariot of the sun, which he conveyed to earth hidden in a hollow tube. Furious at being again outwitted, Zeus determined to be revenged first on

mankind, and then on Prometheus. To punish the former he commanded Hephæstus (Vulcan) to mould a beautiful woman out of clay, and determined that through her instrumentality trouble and misery should be brought into the world.

The gods were so charmed with the graceful and artistic creation of Hephæstus, that they all determined to endow her with some special gift. Hermes (Mercury) bestowed on her a smooth persuasive tongue, Aphrodite gave her beauty and the art of pleasing; the Graces made her fascinating, and Athene (Minerva) gifted her with the possession of feminine accomplishments. She was called Pandora, which means all-gifted, having received every attribute necessary to make her charming and irresistible. Thus beautifully formed and endowed, this exquisite creature, attired by the Graces, and crowned with flowers by the Seasons, was conducted to the house of Epimetheus⁹ by Hermes the messenger of the gods. Now Epimetheus had been warned by his brother not to accept any gift whatever from the gods; but he was so fascinated by the beautiful being who suddenly appeared before him, that he welcomed her to his home, and made her his wife. It was not long, however, before he had cause to regret his weakness.

He had in his possession a jar of rare workmanship, containing all the blessings reserved by the gods for mankind, which he had been expressly forbidden to open. But woman's proverbial curiosity could not withstand so great a temptation, and Pandora determined to solve the mystery at any cost. Watching her opportunity she raised the lid, and immediately all the blessings which the gods