

THE
MYTHS AND LEGENDS
OF
ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME.

BY

E. M. BERENS.

__ILLUSTRATED FROM ANTIQUE SCULPTURES.__

[Illustration]

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PREFACE.

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The want of an interesting work on Greek and Roman mythology, suitable for the requirements of both boys and girls, has long been recognized by the principals of our advanced schools. The study of the classics themselves, even where the attainments of the pupil have rendered this feasible, has not been found altogether successful in giving to the student a clear and succinct idea of the religious beliefs of the ancients, and it has been suggested that a work which would so deal with the subject as to render it

at once interesting and instructive would be hailed as a valuable introduction to the study of classic authors, and would be found to assist materially the labours of both master and pupil.

In endeavouring to supply this want I have sought to place before the reader a lifelike picture of the deities of classical times as they were conceived and worshipped by the ancients themselves, and thereby to awaken in the minds of young students a desire to become more intimately acquainted with the noble productions of classical antiquity.

It has been my aim to render the Legends, which form the second portion of the work, a picture, as it were, of old Greek life; its customs, its superstitions, and its princely hospitalities, for which reason they are given at somewhat greater length than is usual in works of the kind.

In a chapter devoted to the purpose some interesting particulars have been collected respecting the public worship of the ancient Greeks and Romans (more especially of the former), to which is subjoined an account of their principal festivals.

I may add that no pains have been spared in order that, without passing over details the omission of which would have {ii} marred the completeness of the work, not a single passage should be found which could possibly offend the most scrupulous delicacy; and also that I have purposely treated the subject with that reverence which I consider due to every religious system, however erroneous.

It is hardly necessary to dwell upon the importance of the study of Mythology: our poems, our novels, and even our daily journals teem with classical allusions; nor can a visit to our art galleries and museums be fully enjoyed without something more than a mere superficial knowledge of a subject which has in all ages inspired painters, sculptors, and poets. It therefore only remains for me to express a hope that my little work may prove useful, not only to teachers and scholars, but also to a large class of general readers, who, in whiling away a leisure hour, may derive some pleasure and profit from its perusal.

E. M. BERENS.

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MYTHS AND LEGENDS OF ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME.

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PART I.--MYTHS.

* * * * *

INTRODUCTION.

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 {8} 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 Grecian mythology we meet with some {9}
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. {10}

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.

* * * * *

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ORIGIN OF THE WORLD.--FIRST DYNASTY.

URANUS AND GÆA. (COELUS AND TERRA.)

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, {12} 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 Nephelæe. These were their restless and wandering sisters, who existed in the form of clouds, ever {13} 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, Phoebe, and Tethys.

Now Uranus, the chaste light of heaven, the essence of all that is bright and pleasing, held in abhorrence his {14} 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.

CRONUS (SATURN).

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
{15} 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.

[Illustration]

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 Melissæ, 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 throve
rapidly, developing great physical powers, combined with
{16} extraordinary

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