Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes

SET TWO: Creation Myths

CHAPTER TWO
The Two Great Gods of Earth:
Dionysus and Demeter

For the most part the immortal gods were of little use to human beings and often they were quite the reverse of useful: Zeus a dangerous lover for mortal maidens and completely incalculable in his use of the terrible thunderbolt; Ares the maker of war and a general pest; Hera with no idea of justice when she was jealous as she perpetually was; Athena also a war maker, and wielding the lightning's sharp lance quite as irresponsibly as Zeus did; Aphrodite using her power chiefly to ensnare and betray. They were a beautiful, radiant company, to be sure, and their adventures made excellent stories; but when they were not positively harmful, they were capricious and undependable and in general mortals got on best without them.

There were two, however, who were altogether different and who were, indeed, mankind's best friends: Demeter, in Latin Ceres, the Goddess of the Corn; and Dionysus, also called Bacchus, the God of Wine. Demeter was the older, as was natural. Corn was sowed long before vines were planted. The first cornfield was the beginning of settled life on earth. Vineyards came later. It was natural, too, that the divine power which brought forth the grain should be thought of as a goddess, not a god. When the business of men was hunting and fighting, the care of the fields belonged to the women, and as they plowed and scattered the seed and reaped the harvest, they felt that a woman divinity could best understand and help woman's work.

Her chief festival, of course, came at the harvest time. In earlier days it must have been a simple reapers' thanksgiving day when the first loaf baked from the new grain was broken and reverently eaten with grateful prayers to the goddess from whom had come this best and most necessary gift for human life. In later years the humble feast grew into a mysterious worship, about which we know little. Those who beheld it were bound by a vow of silence and they kept it so well that we know only stray bits of what was done.

The great temple was at Eleusis, a little town near Athens, and the worship was called the Eleusinian Mysteries. Cicero, writing in the century before Christ, says: "Nothing is higher than these mysteries. They have sweetened our characters and softened our customs; they have made us pass from the condition of savages to true humanity. They have not only shown us the way to live joyfully, but they have taught us how to die with a better hope."

In some way, no one knows clearly how or when, the God of the Vine, Dionysus, came to take his place, too, at Eleusis, side by side with Demeter.

It was natural that they should be worshiped together, both divinities of the good gifts of earth, both present in the homely daily acts that life depends on, the breaking of bread and the drinking of wine. The harvest was Dionysus' festival, too, when the grapes were brought to the wine-press.

But he was not always a joy-god, nor was Demeter always the happy goddess of the summertime. Each knew pain as well as joy. In that way, too, they were closely linked together; they were both suffering gods.

What happens to the corn plants and the luxuriant branching vines when the grain is harvested, the grapes gathered, and the black frost sets in, killing the fresh green life of the fields? That is what men asked themselves when the first stories were told to explain what was so mysterious, the changes always passing before their eyes, of day and night and the seasons and the stars in their courses. Though Demeter and Dionysus were the happy gods of the harvest, during the winter it was clear that they were altogether different. They sorrowed, and the earth was sad. The men of long ago wondered why this should be, and they told stories to explain the reason.
DEMETER (CERES)

Demeter had an only daughter, Persephone (in Latin Proserpine), the maiden of the spring. She lost her and in her terrible grief she withheld her gifts from the earth, which turned into a frozen desert. The green and flowering land was icebound and lifeless because Persephone had disappeared.

The lord of the dark underworld, the king of the dead, carried her off when, enticed by the wondrous bloom of the narcissus, she strayed too far from her companions. In his chariot drawn by coal-black steeds he rose up through a chasm in the earth, and grasping the maiden by the wrist set her beside him. He bore her away wailing, down to the underworld. The high hills echoed her cry and the depths of the sea, and her mother heard it. She sped like a bird over sea and land seeking her daughter. But no one would tell her the truth. Nine days Demeter wandered, and all that time she would not taste of ambrosia or put sweet nectar to her lips. At last she came to the Sun and he told her all the story: Persephone was down in the world beneath the earth, among the shadowy dead.

Then a still greater grief entered Demeter's heart. She left Olympus; she dwelt on earth, but so disguised that none knew her, and, indeed, the gods are not easily discerned by mortal men. In her desolate wanderings she came to Eleusis and sat by the wayside near a well. She seemed an aged woman, such as in great houses care for the children or guard the storerooms.

That year was most dreadful and cruel for mankind over all the earth. Nothing grew; no seed sprang up; in vain the oxen drew the plowshare through the furrows. It seemed the whole race of men would die of famine. At last Zeus saw that he must take the matter in hand. He sent the gods to Demeter, one after another, to try to turn her from her anger, but she listened to none of them. Never would she let the earth bear fruit until she had seen her daughter. Then Zeus realized that his brother must give way. He told Hermes to go down to the underworld and to bid the lord of it let his bride go back to Demeter.

Hermes found the two sitting side by side, Persephone shrinking away, reluctant because she longed for her mother. At Hermes' words she sprang up joyfully, eager to go. Her husband knew that he must obey the word of Zeus and send her up to earth away from him, but he prayed her as she left him to have kind thoughts of him and not be so sorrowful that she was the wife of one who was great among the immortals. And he made her eat a pomegranate seed, knowing in his heart that if she did so she must return to him.

He got ready his golden chariot and Hermes took the reins and drove the black horses straight to the temple where Demeter was. She ran out to meet her daughter. Persephone sprang into her arms and was held fast there. All day they talked of what had happened to them both, and Demeter grieved when she heard of the pomegranate seed, fearing that she could not keep her daughter with her.

Then Zeus sent another messenger to her, his revered mother Rhea, the oldest of the gods. Swiftly she hastened down from the heights of Olympus to the barren, leafless earth, and standing at the door of the temple she spoke to Demeter, telling her that Persephone must return to the underworld for four months each year.

Demeter did not refuse, poor comfort though it was that she must lose Persephone for four months every year and see her young loveliness go down to the world of the dead. But she was kind; the "Good Goddess," men always called her. She was sorry for the desolation she had brought about. She made the fields once more rich with abundant fruit and the whole world bright with flowers and green leaves. Also she went to the princes of Eleusis who had built her temple and she chose one, Triptolemus, to be her ambassador to men, instructing them how to sow the corn. She taught him and Celeus and the others her sacred rites, "mysteries which no one may utter, for deep awe checks the tongue. Blessed is he who has seen them; his lot will be good in the world to come."

In the stories of both goddesses, Demeter and Persephone, the idea of sorrow was foremost. Demeter, goddess of the harvest wealth, was still more the divine sorrowing mother who saw her daughter die each year. Persephone was the radiant maiden of the spring and the summertime, whose light step upon the dry, brown hillside was enough to make it fresh and blooming. But all the while Persephone knew how brief that beauty was; fruits, flowers, leaves, all the fair growth of earth, must end with the coming of the cold and pass like
herself into the power of death. After the lord of the dark world below carried her away she was never again the gay young creature who had played in the flowery meadow without a thought of care or trouble. She did indeed rise from the dead every spring, but she brought with her the memory of where she had come from; with all her bright beauty there was something strange and awesome about her. She was often said to be "the maiden whose name may not be spoken."

**DIONYSUS (OR BACCHUS)**

Thebes was Dionysus' own city, where he was born, the son of Zeus and the Theban princess Semele. He was the only god whose parents were not both divine.

Semele was the most unfortunate woman of all those Zeus fell in love with, and in her case too the reason was Hera. Zeus was madly in love with her and told her that anything she asked of him he would do; he swore it by the river Styx, the oath which not even he himself could break. She told him that what she wanted above all else was to see him in his full splendor as King of Heaven and Lord of the Thunderbolt. It was Hera who had put that wish into her heart. Zeus knew that no mortal could behold him thus and live, but he could do nothing. He had sworn by the Styx. He came as she had asked, and before that awful glory of burning light she died. But Zeus snatched from her her child that was near birth, and hid it in his own side away from Hera until the time had come for it to be born.

So the God of the Vine was born of fire and nursed by rain, the hard burning heat that ripens the grapes and the water that keeps the plant alive.

Grown to manhood, Dionysus wandered far to strange places. Everywhere he taught men the culture of the vine and the mysteries of his worship and everywhere they accepted him as a god until he drew near to his own country.

One day over the sea near Greece a pirates' ship came sailing. On a great headland by the shore they saw a beautiful youth. His rich dark hair flowed down over a purple cloak that covered his strong shoulders. He looked like a son of kings, one whose parents could pay a great ransom. Exulting, the sailors sprang ashore and seized him. On board the ship they fetched rude bonds to fetter him with, but to their amazement they were unable to bind him; the ropes would not hold together; they fell apart when they touched his hands or feet. And he sat looking at them with a smile in his dark eyes.

Alone among them the helmsman understood and cried out that this must be a god and should be set free at once or deadly harm would come to them. But the captain mocked him for a silly fool and bade the crew hasten to hoist the sail. The wind filled it and the men drew taut the sheets, but the ship did not move. Then wonder upon wonder happened. Fragrant wine ran in streams down the deck; a vine with many clusters spread out over the sail; a dark green ivy-plant twined around the mast like a garland, with flowers in it and lovely fruits. Terror-stricken, the pirates ordered the helmsman to put in to land. Too late, for as they spoke their captive became a lion, roaring and glaring terribly. At that, they leaped overboard and instantly were changed into dolphins, all except the good helmsman. On him the god had mercy. He held him back and bade him take courage, for he had found favor with one who was indeed a god—Dionysus.

When he passed through Thrace on his way to Greece, the god was insulted by one of the kings there, Lycurgus, who bitterly opposed this new worship. Dionysus retreated before him and even took refuge from him in the depths of the sea. But later he came back, overpowered him and punished him for his wickedness.

Some time during his wanderings, Dionysus came upon the princess of Crete, Ariadne, when she was utterly desolate, having been abandoned on the shore of the island of Naxos by the Athenian prince, Theseus, whose life she had saved. Dionysus had compassion upon her. He rescued her, and in the end loved her. When she died Dionysus took a crown he had given her and placed it among the stars.

The mother whom he had never seen was not forgotten. He longed for her so greatly that at last he dared the terri-ble descent to the lower world to seek her. When he found her, he defied the power of Death to keep her from him; and Death yielded. Dionysus brought her away, but not to live on earth. He took her up to Olympus, where the gods consented to receive her as one of themselves, a mortal, indeed, but the mother of a god and therefore fit to dwell with immortals.
The God of Wine could be kind and beneficent. He could also be cruel and drive men on to frightful deeds. Often he made them mad. The Maenads, or the BACCHANTES, as they were also called, were women frenzied with wine. They rushed through woods and over mountains uttering sharp cries, waving pine-cone-tipped wands, swept away in a fierce ecstasy. Nothing could stop them. They would tear to pieces any creature they met.

The gods of Olympus loved order and beauty in their sacrifices and their temples. The madwomen, the Baccantes, had no temples. They went to the wilderness to worship, to the wildest mountains, the deepest forests, as if they kept to the customs of an ancient time before men had thought of building houses for their gods. There was much that was lovely, good, and freeing in this worship under the open sky and the ecstasy of joy it brought in the wild beauty of the world. And yet always present, too, was the horrible bloody feast.

The worship of Dionysus was centered in these two ideas so far apart---of freedom and ecstatic joy and of savage brutality. The God of Wine could give either to his worshipers. Throughout the story of his life he is sometimes man's blessing, sometimes his ruin. Of all the terrible deeds laid to his account the worst was done in Thebes, his mother's city.

Dionysus came to Thebes to establish his worship there. He was accompanied, as was his custom, by a train of women dancing and singing exultant songs, wearing fawn-skins over their robes, waving ivy-wreathed wands. They seemed mad with joy.

Pentheus, the King of Thebes, was the son of Semele's sister, but he had no idea that the leader of this band of excited, strange-acting women was his own cousin. He did not know that when Semele died Zeus had saved her child. The wild dancing and the loud joyous singing and the generally queer behavior of these strangers seemed to him highly objectionable, and to be stopped at once. Pentheus ordered his guards to seize and imprison the visitors, especially the leader, "whose face is flushed with wine, a cheating sorcerer from Lydia." But as he said these words he heard behind him a solemn warning: "The man you reject is a new god. He is Semele's child, whom Zeus rescued. He, with divine Demeter, is greatest upon earth for men."

The speaker was the old blind prophet Teiresias, the holy man of Thebes who knew as no one else the will of the gods. Pentheus laughed mockingly as he looked him over and then ordered him with contempt out of his sight. Thus he brought upon himself his doom; he would not hear when the gods spoke to him.

Dionysus was led in before him by a band of his soldiers. They said he had not tried to flee or to resist, but had done all possible to make it easy for them to seize and bring him until they felt ashamed and told him they were acting under orders, not of their own free will. They declared, too, that the maidens they had imprisoned had all escaped to the mountains. The fetters would not keep fastened; the doors unbarred themselves. "This man," they said, "has come to Thebes with many wonders--"

Pentheus by now was blind to everything except his anger and his scorn. He spoke roughly to Dionysus, who answered him with entire gentleness, seeming to try to reach his real self and open his eyes to see that he was face to face with divinity. He warned him that he could not keep him in prison, "for God will set me free."

"God?" Pentheus asked jeeringly.

"Yes," Dionysus answered. "He is here and sees my suffering."

"Not where my eyes can see him," Pentheus said.

"He is where I am," answered Dionysus. "You cannot see him for you are not pure."

Pentheus angrily ordered the soldiers to bind him and take him to the prison and Dionysus went, saying, "The wrongs you do to me are wrongs done to the gods."

But the prison could not hold Dionysus. He came forth, and going to Pentheus again he tried to persuade him to yield to what these wonders plainly showed, that he was divine, and to welcome this new worship of a new and great god. When, however, Pentheus only heaped insults and threats upon him, Dionysus left him to his doom. It was the most horrible that there could be.

Pentheus went to pursue the god's followers among the hills where the maidens had fled when they escaped from prison. Many of the Theban women had joined them; Pentheus' mother and her sisters were there. And there Dionysus showed himself in his most
terrible aspect. He made them all mad. The women thought Pentheus a wild beast, a mountain lion, and they rushed to destroy him, his mother first. As they fell upon him he knew at last that he had fought against a god and must pay with his life. They tore him limb from limb, and then, only then, the god restored their senses, and his mother saw what she had done. Looking at her in her agony the maidens, all sobered now, the dancing over and the singing and the wild wand-waving.

The ideas about Dionysus in these various stories seem at first sight contradictory. In one he is the joy-god. In another he is the heartless god, savage, brutal.

The truth is, however, that both ideas arose quite simply and reasonably from the fact of his being the god of wine. Wine is bad as well as good. It cheers and warms men’s hearts; it also makes them drunk. The Greeks were a people who saw facts very clearly. They could not shut their eyes to the ugly and degrading side of wine-drinking and see only the delightful side. Dionysus was the God of-the Vine; therefore he was a power which sometimes made men commit frightful and atrocious crimes. No one could defend them; no one would ever try to defend the fate Pentheus suffered. But, the Greeks said to each other, such things really do happen when people are frenzied with drink. This truth did not blind them to the other truth, that wine was "the merry-maker," lightening men’s hearts, bringing careless ease and fun and gaiety.

The reason that Dionysus was so different at one time from another was because of this double nature of wine and so of the god of wine. He was man’s benefactor and he was man’s destroyer.

Under his influence courage was quickened and fear banished, at any rate for the moment. He uplifted his worshipers; he made them feel that they could do what they had thought they could not. All this happy freedom and confidence passed away, of course, as they either grew sober or got drunk, but while it lasted it was like being possessed by a power greater than themselves. So people felt about Dionysus as about no other god. He was not only outside of them, he was within them, too. They could be transformed by him into being like him. The momentary sense of exultant power wine-drinking can give was only a sign to show men that they had within them more than they knew; "they could themselves become divine."

To think in this way was far removed from the old idea of worshiping the god by drinking enough to be gay or to be freed from care or to get drunk. There were followers of Dionysus who never drank wine at all. It is not known when the great change took place, lifting the god who freed men for a moment through drunkenness to the god who freed them through inspiration, but one very remarkable result of it made Dionysus for all future ages the most important of the gods of Greece.

The Eleusinian Mysteries, which were always chiefly Demeter’s, had indeed great importance. For hundreds of years they helped men, as Cicero said, "to live with joy and to die with hope." But their influence did not last, very likely because nobody was allowed to teach their ideas openly or write about them. In the end only a dim memory of them was left. It was quite otherwise with Dionysus. What was done at his great festival was open to all the world and is a living influence today. No other festival in Greece could compare with it. It took place in the spring when the vine begins to put forth its branches, and it lasted for five days. They were days of perfect peace and enjoyment. All the ordinary business of life stopped. No one could be put in prison; prisoners were even released so that they could share in the general rejoicing.

But the place where people gathered to do honor to the god was not a wild wilderness made horrible by savage deeds and a bloody feast; it was not even a temple with ordered sacrifices and priestly ceremonies. It was a theater; and the ceremony was the performance of a play. The greatest poetry in Greece, and among the greatest in the world, was written for Dionysus. The poets who wrote the plays, the actors and singers who took part in them, were all regarded as servants of the god. The performances were sacred; the spectators, too, along with the writers and the performers, were engaged in an act of worship. Dionysus himself was supposed to be present; his priest had the seat of honor.

It is clear therefore, that the idea of the god of holy inspiration who could fill men with his spirit to write gloriously and to act gloriously became far more important than the earlier ideas of him. The first tragic plays, which are among the best there are, never
equaled except by Shakespeare, were produced in the theater of Dionysus. Comedies were produced there, too, but tragedies far outnumbered them, and there was a reason why.

This strange god, the gay reveler, the cruel hunter, was also the sufferer. He, like Demeter, was afflicted, not because of grief for another, as she was, but because of his own pain. He was the vine, which is always pruned as nothing else that bears fruit; every branch cut away, only the bare stock left; through the winter a dead thing to look at, an old gnarled stump seeming incapable of ever putting forth leaves again. Like Persephone Dionysus died with the coming of the cold. Unlike her, his death was terrible: he was torn to pieces, in some stories by the Titans, in others by Hera's orders. He was always brought back to life; he died and rose again. It was his joyful resurrection they celebrated in his theater, but the idea of terrible deeds done to him and done by men under his influence was too closely associated with him ever to be forgotten. He was more than the suffering god. He was the tragic god. There was none other.

He had still another side. He was the assurance that death does not end all. His worshipers believed that his death and resurrection showed that the soul lives on forever after the body dies. This faith was part of the mysteries of Eleusis. At first it centered in Persephone who also rose from the dead every spring. But as queen of the black underworld she kept even in the bright world above a suggestion of something strange and awful: how could she who carried always about her the reminder of death stand for the resurrection, the conquest of death? Dionysus, on the contrary, was never thought of as a power in the kingdom of the dead. He rescued his mother from it. In his resurrection he was the embodiment of the life that is stronger than death. He and not Persephone became the center of the belief in immortality.

CHAPTER THREE
How the World and Mankind Were Created

Long before the gods appeared, before creation itself, uncounted ages ago, there was only the formless confusion of Chaos brooded over by unbroken darkness. At last, but how no one ever tried to explain, two children were born to this shapeless nothingness. Night was the child of Chaos and so was Erebus, which is the unfathomable depth where death dwells. In the whole universe there was nothing else; all was black, empty, silent, endless.

And then a marvel of marvels came to pass. In some mysterious way, from this horror of blank boundless vacancy the best of all things came into being.

From darkness and from death Love was born, and with its birth, order and beauty began to banish blind confusion. Love created Light with its companion, radiant Day.

What took place next was the creation of the earth, but this, too, no one ever tried to explain. It just happened. With the coming of love and light it seemed natural that the earth also should appear.

In all this thought about the past no distinction had as yet been made between places and persons. Earth was the solid ground, yet vaguely a personality, too. Heaven was the blue vault on high, but it acted in some ways as a human being would. To the people who told these stories all the universe was alive with the same kind of life they knew in themselves. They were individual persons, so they personified everything which had the obvious marks of life, everything which moved and changed: earth in winter and summer; the sky with its shifting stars; the restless sea, and so on. It was only a dim personification: something vague and immense which with its motion brought about change and therefore was alive.

But when they told of the coming of love and light the early storytellers were setting the scene for the appearance of mankind, and they began to personify more precisely. They gave natural forces distinct shapes. They thought of them as the precursors of men and they defined them far more clearly as individuals than they had earth and heaven. They showed them acting in every way as human beings did; walking, for instance, and eating, as Earth and Heaven obviously did not. These two were set apart. If they were alive, it was in a way peculiar to them alone.

The first creatures who had the appearance of life were the children of Mother Earth and Father Heaven.
(Gaea and Uranos). They were monsters. Just as we believe that the earth was once inhabited by strange gigantic creatures, so did the Greeks. They did not, however, think of them as huge lizards and mammoths, but as somewhat like men and yet unhuman. They had the shattering, overwhelming strength of earthquake and hurricane and volcano. In the tales about them they do not seem really alive, but rather to belong to a world where as yet there was no life, only tremendous movements of irresistible forces lifting up the mountains and scooping out the seas. The Greeks apparently had some such feeling because in their stories, although they represent these creatures as living beings, they make them unlike any form of life known to man.

Three of them, monstrously huge and strong, had each hundred hands and fifty heads. To three others was given the name of Cyclops (the Wheel-eyed), because each had only one enormous eye, as round and as big as a wheel, in the middle of the forehead. The Cyclopes, too, were gigantic, towering up like mighty mountain crags and devastating in their power. Last came the Titans. There were a number of these and they were in no way inferior to the others in size and strength, but they were not purely destructive. Several of them were even beneficent. One, indeed, after men had been created, saved them from destruction.

It was natural to think of these fearful creations as the children of Mother Earth, brought forth from her dark depths when the world was young. But it is extremely odd that they were also the children of Heaven. However, that was what the Greeks said, and they made Heaven out to be a very poor father. He hated the things with a hundred hands and fifty heads, even though they were his sons, and as each was born he imprisoned it in a secret place within the earth. The Cyclopes and the Titans he left at large; and Earth, enraged at the maltreatment of her other children, appealed to them to help her. Only one was bold enough, the Titan Cronus.

Cronos lay in wait for his father and wounded him terribly. The Giants, the fourth race of monsters, sprang up from his blood. From this same blood, too, the Furies were born. Their office was to pursue and punish sinners. They were called "those who walk in darkness," and they were terrible of aspect, with writhing snakes for hair and eyes that wept tears of blood. The other monsters were finally driven from the earth, but not the Furies. As long as there was sin in the world they could not be banished.

From that time on for untold ages, Cronus, whom as we have seen the Romans called Saturn, was lord of the universe, with his sister-queen, Rhea. Finally one of their Sons, the future ruler of heaven and earth, whose name in Greek is Zeus and in Latin Jupiter, rebelled against him. He had good cause to do so, for Cronus had learned that one of his children was destined some day to dethrone him and he thought to go against fate by swallowing them as soon as they were born. But when Rhea bore Zeus, her sixth child, she succeeded in having him secretly carried off to Crete, while she gave her husband a great stone wrapped in swaddling clothes which he supposed was the baby and swallowed down accordingly. Later, when Zeus was grown, he forced his father with the help of his grandmother, the Earth, to disgorge it along with the five earlier children, and it was set up at Delphi.

There followed a terrible war between Cronus, helped by his brother Titans, against Zeus with his five brothers and sisters—a war that almost wrecked the universe.

The Titans were conquered, partly because Zeus released from their prison the hundred-handed monsters who fought for him with their irresistible weapons—thunder, lightning, and earthquake—and also because one Titan named Prometheus, who was very wise, took sides with Zeus.

Zeus punished his conquered enemies terribly. They were Bound in bitter chains beneath the Wide-wayed earth, As far below the earth as over earth Is heaven, for even so far down lies Tartarus. Nine days and nights would a bronze anvil fall And on the tenth reach earth from heaven. And then again falling nine days and nights, Would come to Tartarus, the brazen-fenced.

Prometheus' brother Atlas suffered a still worse fate. He was condemned To bear on his back forever The cruel strength of the crushing world And the vault of the sky. Upon his shoulders the great pillar
That holds apart the earth and heaven,
A load not easy to be borne.

Bearing this burden he stands forever before the place that is wrapped in clouds and darkness, where Night and Day draw near and greet one another.

Even after the Titans were conquered and crushed, Zeus was not completely victorious. Earth gave birth to her last and most frightful offspring, a creature more terrible than any that had gone before. His name was Typhon

A flaming monster with a hundred heads,
Who rose up against all the gods.
Death whistled from his fearful jaws,
His eyes flashed glaring fire.

But Zeus had now got the thunder and lightning under his own control. They had become his weapons, used by no one else. He struck Typhon down. Cronus himself was exiled forever.

Still later, one more attempt was made to unseat Zeus: the Giants rebelled. But by this time the gods were very strong and they were helped, too, by mighty Hercules, a son of Zeus. The Giants were defeated and hurled down to Tartarus; and the victory of the radiant powers of Heaven over the brutal forces of Earth was complete. From then on, Zeus and his brothers and sisters ruled, undisputed lords of all.

As yet there were no human beings; but the world, now cleared of the monsters, was ready for mankind. It was a place where people could live in some comfort and security, without having to fear the sudden appearance of a Titan or a Giant. The earth was believed to be a round disk, divided into two equal parts by the Sea, as the Greeks called it,—which we know as the Mediterranean,—and by what we call the Black Sea. Around the earth flowed the great river, Ocean, never troubled by wind or storm.

Except in this one country, all those who lived across Ocean were exceedingly fortunate. In the remotest North, so far away it was at the back of the North Wind, was a blissful land where the Hyperboreans lived. Only a few strangers, great heroes, had ever visited it. Not by ship nor yet on foot might one find the road to the marvelous meeting place of the Hyperboreans. But the Muses lived not far from them, such were their ways. For everywhere the dance of maidens swayed and the clear call of the lyre sounded and the ringing notes of flutes. With golden laurel they bound their hair and they feasted merrily. In that holy race, sickness and deathly old age had no part. Far to the south was the country of the Ethiopians, of whom we know only that the gods held them in such favor they would sit at joyful banquets with them in their halls.

On Ocean’s bank, too, was the abode of the blessed dead. In that land, there was no snowfall nor much winter nor any storm of rain; but from Ocean the West Wind sang soft and thrillingly to refresh the souls of men. Here those who kept themselves pure from all wrong came when they left the earth.

By now all was ready for the appearance of mankind. Even the places the good and bad should go to after death had been arranged. It was time for men to be created. There is more than one account of how that came to pass. Some say it was delegated by the gods to Prometheus, the Titan who had sided with Zeus in the war with the Titans, and to his brother, Epimetheus. Prometheus, whose name means forethought, was very wise, wiser even than the gods, but Epimetheus, which means afterthought, was a scatterbrained person who invariably followed his first impulse and then changed his mind. So he did in this case.

Before making men he gave all the best gifts to the animals, strength and swiftness and courage and shrewd cunning, fur and feathers and wings and shells and the like—until no good was left for men, no protective covering and no quality to make them a match for the beasts. Too late, as always, he was sorry and asked his brother’s help. Prometheus, then, took over the task of creation and thought out a way to make mankind superior. He fashioned them in a nobler shape than the animals, upright like the gods; and then he went to heaven, to the sun, where he lit a torch and brought down fire, a protection to men far better than anything else, whether fur or feathers or strength or swiftness.

According to another story, the gods themselves created men. They made first a golden race. These, although mortal, lived like gods without sorrow of heart, far from toil and palm. The land of itself bore fruit
abundantly. They were also in flocks and beloved of the gods. When the grave covered them they became pure spirits, beneficent, the guardians of mankind.

In this account of the creation the gods seemed bent on experimenting with the various metals, and, oddly enough, proceeding downward from the excellent to the good to the worse and so on. When they had tried gold they went to silver. The second race of silver was very inferior to the first. They had so little intelligence that they could not keep from injuring each other. They too passed away, but, unlike the gold race, their spirits did not live on after them. The next race was of brass. They were terrible men, immensely strong, and such lovers of war and violence that they were completely destroyed by their own hands. This, however, was all to the good, for they were followed by a splendid race of godlike heroes who fought glorious wars and went on great adventures which men have talked and sung of through all the ages since. They departed finally to the isles of the blessed, where they lived in perfect bliss forever.

The fifth race is that which is now upon the earth: the iron race. They live in evil times and their nature too has much of evil, so that they never have rest from toil and sorrow. As the generations pass, they grow worse; sons are always inferior to their fathers. A time will come when they have grown so wicked that they will worship power; might will be right to them, and reverence for the good will cease to be. At last when no man is angry any more at wrongdoing or feels shame in the presence of the miserable, Zeus will destroy them too.

These two stories of the creation,--the story of the five ages, and the story of Prometheus and Epimetheus,---different as they are, agree in one point. For a long time, certainly throughout the happy Golden Age, only men were upon the earth; there were no women. Zeus created these later, in his anger at Prometheus for caring so much for men. Prometheus had not only stolen fire for men; he had also arranged that they should get the best part of any animal sacrificed and the gods the worst. He cut up a great ox and wrapped the good eatable parts in the hide, disguising them further by piling entrails on top. Beside this heap he put another of all the bones, dressed up with cunning and covered with shining fat, and bade Zeus choose between them. Zeus took up the white fat and was angry when he saw the bones craftily tricked out. But he had made his choice and he had to abide by it. Thereafter only fat and bones were burned to the gods upon their altars. Men kept the good meat for themselves.

But the Father of Men and of Gods was not one to put up with this sort of treatment. He swore to be revenged, on mankind first and then on mankind's friend. He made a great evil for men, a sweet and lovely thing to look upon, in the likeness of a shy maiden, and all the gods gave her gifts, a wonder to behold, and bright garlands of blooming flowers and a crown of gold--great beauty shone out from it. Because of what they gave her she called her Pandora, which means "the gift of all." When this beautiful disaster had been made, Zeus brought her out and wonder took hold of all the gods and men when they beheld her. From her, the first woman, comes the race of women, who are an evil to men, with a nature to do evil.

Another story about Pandora is that the source of all misfortune was not her wicked nature, but only her curiosity. The gods presented her with a box into which each had put something harmful, and forbade her ever to open it. Then they sent her to Epimetheus, who took her gladly although Prometheus had warned him never to accept anything from Zeus. He took her, and afterward when that dangerous thing, a woman, was his, he understood how good his brother's advice had been. For Pandora, like all women, was possessed of a lively curiosity. She had to know what was in the box. One day she lifted the lid--and out flew plagues innumerable, sorrow and mischief for mankind. In terror Pandora clapped the lid down, but too late. One good thing, however, was there: Hope. It was the only good the casket had held among the many evils, and it remains to this day mankind's sole comfort in misfortune. So mortals learned that it is not possible to get the better of Zeus or ever deceive him. The wise and compassionate Prometheus, too, found that out.

When Zeus had punished men by giving them women, he turned his attention to the arch-sinner himself. The new ruler of the gods owed Prometheus much for helping him conquer the other Titans, but he forgot his debt. Zeus had his servants, Force and
 Violence, seize him and take him to the Caucasus, where they bound him to a rock.

The reason for inflicting this torture was not only to punish Prometheus, but also to force him to disclose a secret very important to the lord of Olympus. Zeus knew that fate, which brings all things to pass, had decreed that a son should some day be born to him who would dethrone him and drive the gods from their home in heaven, but only Prometheus knew who would be the mother of this son. As he lay bound upon the rock in agony, Zeus sent his messenger, Hermes, to bid him disclose the secret. Hermes warned him that if he persisted in his stubborn silence, he should suffer still more terrible things.

An eagle red with blood
Shall come, a guest unbidden to your banquet.
All day long he will tear to rags your body,
Feasting in fury on the blackened liver.

But nothing, no threat, nor torture, could break Prometheus. His body was bound but his spirit was free. He refused to reveal his secret.
All over the earth men grew so wicked that finally Zeus determined to destroy them. He decided To mingle storm and tempest over boundless earth
And make an utter end of mortal man.

He sent the flood. He called upon his brother, the God of the Sea, to help him, and together, with torrents of rain from heaven and rivers loosed upon the earth, the two drowned the land.

Only towering Parnassus was not quite covered, and the bit of dry land on its very topmost peak was the means by which mankind escaped destruction. After it had rained through nine days and nine nights, there came drifting to that spot what looked to be a great wooden chest, but safe within it were two living human beings, a man and a woman. They were Deucalion and Pyrrha—he Prometheus’ son, and she his niece, the daughter of Epimetheus and Pandora. The wisest person in all the universe, Prometheus had well been able to protect his own fam-ily. He knew the flood would come, and he had bidden his son build the chest, store it with provisions, and embark in it with his wife.

Fortunately Zeus was not offended, because the two were pious, faithful worshipers of the gods. When the chest came to land and they got out, to see no sign of life anywhere, only a wild waste of water Zeus pitied them and drained off the flood, Slowly like the ebbing tide the sea and the rivers drew back and the earth was dry again. Pyrrha and Deucalion came down from Parnassus, the only living creatures in a dead world. They found a temple all slimy and moss-grown, but not quite in ruins, and there they gave thanks for their escape and prayed for help in their dreadful loneliness.

They heard a voice. "Veil your heads and cast behind you the bones of your mother." The command struck them with horror. Pyrrha said, "We dare not do such a thing." Deucalion was forced to agree that she was right, but he tried to think out what might lie behind the words and suddenly he saw their meaning. "Earth is the mother of all," he told his wife. "Her bones are the stones. These we may cast behind us without doing wrong." So they did, and as the stones fell they took human shape. They were called the Stone People, and they were a hard, enduring race, as was to be expected and, indeed, as they had need to be, to rescue the earth from the desolation left by the flood.

CHAPTER FOUR
The Earliest Heroes

PROMETHEUS AND IO

In those days when Prometheus had just given fire to men and when he was first bound to the rocky peak on Caucasus, he had a strange visitor. A distracted fleeing creature came clambering awkwardly up over the cliffs and crags to where he lay. It looked like a heifer, but talked like a girl who seemed mad with misery. The sight of Prometheus stopped her short.

Prometheus recognized her. He knew her story and he spoke her name. They talked freely to each other. He told her how Zeus had treated him, and she told him that Zeus was the reason why she, once a princess and a happy girl, had been changed into a cow.

Zeus’s jealous wife, Hera, was the direct cause of her misfor-tunes, but back of them all was Zeus himself.
He fell in love with her. But still greater than Zeus's love was his fear of Hera's jealous. He acted, however, with very little wisdom for the Father of Gods and Men when he tried to hide Io and himself by wrapping the earth in a cloud so thick and dark that a sudden night seemed to drive the clear daylight away. Hera knew perfectly well that there was a reason for this odd occurrence, and instantly suspected her husband.

When she could not find him anywhere in heaven she glided swiftly down to the earth and ordered the cloud off. But Zeus too had been quick. As she caught sight of him he was standing beside a most lovely white heifer—lo, of course. He swore that he had never seen her until just now when she had sprung forth, newborn, from the earth. And this, Ovid says, shows that the lies lovers tell do not anger the gods. However, it also shows that they are not very useful, for Hera did not believe a word of it. She said the heifer was very pretty and would Zeus please make her a present of it. Sorry as he was, he saw at once that to refuse would give the whole thing away. What excuse could he make? An insignificant little cow. He turned Io reluctantly over to his wife and Hera knew very well how to keep her away from him.

She gave her into the charge of Argus, an excellent arrangement for Hera's purpose, since Argus had a hundred eyes. Before such a watchman, who could sleep with some of the eyes and keep on guard with the rest, Zeus seemed helpless. He watched Io's misery, turned into a beast, driven from her home; he dared not come to her help.

At last, however, he went to his son Hermes, the messenger of the gods, and told him he must find a way to kill Argus. There was no god cleverer than Hermes. As soon as he had sprung to earth from heaven he laid aside everything that marked him as a god and approached Argus like a country fellow, playing very sweetly upon a pipe of reeds. Argus was pleased at the sound and called to the musician to come nearer. "You might as well sit by me on this rock," he said, "you see it's shady—just right for shepherds." Nothing could have been better for Hermes' plan, and yet nothing happened. He played and then he talked on and on, as drowsily and monotonously as he could; some of the hundred eye would go to sleep, but some were always awake. At last, however, one story was successful.

All of his eyes went to sleep. Hermes killed him at once, of course, but Hera took the eyes and set them in the tail of the peacock, her favorite bird.

It seemed then that Io was free, but no; Hera at once turned on her again. She sent a gad-fly to plague her, which stung her to madness. Prometheus tried to comfort her, but he could point her only to the distant future. What lay immediately before her was still more wandering and in fearsome lands. To be sure, the part of the sea she first ran along in her frenzy would be called Ionian after her, and the Bosphorus, which means the Ford of the Cow, would preserve the memory of when she went through it, but her real consolation must be that at long last she would reach the Nile, where Zeus would restore her to her human form. She would bear him a son named Epaphus, and live forever after happy and honored. Io's descendant would be Hercules, greatest of heroes, than whom hardly the gods were greater, and to whom Prometheus would owe his freedom.

**EUROPA**

Io was not the only young girl that became famous in mythology because Zeus fell in love with her. There was another young girl that is known far more widely—Europa, the daughter of the king of Sidon. Opposite Io, Europa was very fortunate as she did not suffer at all.

Once early morning Europa was awoken by a very strange and bad dream, in her dream there were two continents, both in the shape of a woman, and they were each trying to possess her. The one continent Asia claimed that she owned her for she gave birth to her, then the other continent that didn't then have a name claimed that Zeus had given her the permission to abduct the maiden. After this horrible dream, she decided not to try to sleep again. She sent for her companion to go out with her to the country side near the sea where they often met to bathe, dance or collect bunches of flowers in a basket.

Europa's beauty was of fragile craftsmanship in the opinion of any man. As she was placing the flowers in the basket, Zeus was conquered, not only by the pretty scent or her beauty but also by the arrow that
the mischievous Cupid had planted in his heart. The great lord of the sky fell madly in love with Europa.

Although Hera, Zeus’ wife was occupied with other things Zeus decided not to risk approaching Europa, so he turned himself in to a bull, a beautiful powerful animal with a gentle appearance that did not frighten Europa or her companions, they all desired to mount this bull.

Europa was the first to mount the bull, and before the others approached the bull rushed and leaped over the wide waters to the shore. On their journey they passed by many sea Gods, they saw Nereids riding dolphins and they even saw Poseidon himself. Europa was afraid of all these creatures and she held on to the bull with all her strength. At this point she was sure that this was no ordinary bull, an animal in appearance but with the mind of a God. She cried and begged the bull to pity her and not abandon her in some unknown place, Zeus calmed her down in a gentle way and they soon reached their destination which was Crete.

The island of Crete belonged to Zeus, everything he could wish for happened there. His marriage to Europa took place there. She gave birth to two sons Minos and Rhadamantus, which were well known for their justice upon the earth, therefore they were announced as the judges of the dead but her own name is still the best known of all.

FLOWER-MYTHS

NARCISSUS

Narcissus is remembered for having fallen in love with his own reflection.

Narcissus was the son of the river god Cephisus and the nymph Liriope; He was greatly loved by Apollo. He was known for his charming and beautiful appearance. His mother was told that he would have a long life, provided he never looked upon his own appearance. All the young nymphs fell in love at first sight with him but he was very vain and they didn’t mean much to him. His rejection, however, of the love of the nymph Echo (whom had previously been punished by Hera for being another one of the women that Zeus fell in love with) or of his lover Ameinias drew upon him the revenge of the gods. He fell in love with his own reflection in the waters of a river, he then realized that he loved himself more than he could ever love anybody else, with that thought he pined away (or killed himself); the flower that bears his name sprang up in the country side where he died.

HYACINTHUS

Hyacinthus was a young handsome Spartan prince loved by the gods Apollon and Zephyros. The West Wind grew jealous of his rival in love, and one day as the pair were playing discus, blew the discus off course causing it to strike Hyakinthos in the head and kill him. The grieving Apollon then transformed the dying youth into a larkspur flower which he inscribed with the wail of mourning AI, AI.

ADONIS

One of the most famous flower deaths was that of Adonis. Every year most girls in Greece mourned for him and then they rejoiced when his flower, the blood-red anemone was seen blooming again. Aphrodite, the goddess of love adored Adonis. She loved him from the moment that he was born; it was then that she decided that he should become hers one day. She carried him to Persephone in order for her to take care of him until he grew up, but Persephone also began to love him and would not return Adonis to Aphrodite, not even when Aphrodite went down to the underworld to get him. Neither goddess would yield. At the end Zeus, himself had to judge between them. He decided that Adonis should spend half of the year with Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty and love, then half the year with Persephone, the goddess of the dead. However Adonis made over to Aphrodite his own share in addition. This is the reason that Adonis can be counted among those who were in the Underworld and came back to be among the living. He lived happily with Aphrodite who sought only to please him, but one sad day he was out hunting when he tracked down a mighty boar. With his dogs, he brought the boar to bay and hurled his spear at it. His spear did not kill the boar but only wounded it, the boar mad with pain attacked him with its great tusks. Aphrodite heard her lovers groan and flew to him in her winged car. She kissed him as he was softly
breathing his last few breathes, the dark red blood was flowing out of his wound on his white skin. As he died he did not realize that although his wound was cruel, the wound his death had created in Aphrodite's heart was deeper. She whispered in his ear even though she realized that he could no longer hear her. Where each drop of Adonis' blood had touched the ground a crimson flower sprang up.

QUIZ QUESTIONS

1. Who became the center of the belief in immortality?
2. How are Demeter and Dionysus different from the other gods and goddesses?
3. What did the Greeks think was at the very beginning of things?
4. What did Love (Eros) create?
5. Which of the following does not describe Cronus?
6. What did Prometheus give men to protect them?
7. Which of the following does not describe Pandora?
8. How did Zeus carry off Europa?
9. Who was the Cyclops whom Odysseus encountered on his way home from the Trojan War.
10. Who does the following describe? Aphrodite and Persephone were both in love with him. Zeus declared that he should spend half of the year with each of them. One day while he was hunting, he was gored by a boar and died.
11. What does Prometheus do to anger Zeus, and how does Zeus punish Prometheus?
12. According to myth, how is Dionysus born? How is this related to Dionysus' association with grapes and wine?
13. Summarize the story of Narcissus.