

THE CLASSICAL MYTHS

were never visited by the cold wintry winds that swept down from the north.

“The Isles of the Blest, they say,
The Isles of the Blest,
Are peaceful and happy, by night and by day,
Far away in the glorious west.

“They need not the moon in that land of delight,
They need not the pale, pale star;
The sun is bright, by day and night,
Where the souls of the blessed are.

“They till not the ground, they plough not the wave,
They labour not, never! oh, never!
Not a tear do they shed, not a sigh do they heave,
They are happy, for ever and ever!”

Pindar.

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Chaos, Erebus, and Nyx were deprived of their power by Æther and Hemera, who did not long enjoy the possession of the sceptre; for Uranus and Gæa, more powerful than their progenitors, soon forced them to depart, and began to reign in their stead. They had not dwelt long on the summit of Mount Olympus, before they found themselves the parents of twelve gigantic children, the Titans, whose strength was such that their father, Uranus, greatly feared them. To prevent their ever making use of it against him, he seized them immediately after their birth, hurled them down into a dark abyss called Tartarus, and there chained them fast.

This chasm was situated far under the earth; and Uranus knew that his six sons (Oceanus, Cœus, Crius, Hyperion, Iapetus, and Cronus), as well as his six daughters, the Titanides (Ilia, Rhea, Themis, Thetis, Mnemosyne, and Phœbe), could not easily escape from its cavernous depths. The Titans did not long remain sole occupants of Tartarus, for one day the brazen

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doors were again thrown wide open to admit the Cyclopes—Brontes (Thunder), Steropes (Lightning), and Arges (Sheet-lightning),—three later-born children of Uranus and Gæa, who helped the Titans to make the darkness hideous with their incessant clamour for freedom. In due time their number was increased by the three terrible Centimani (Hundred-handed), Cottus, Briareus, and Gyes, who were sent thither by Uranus to share their fate.

Greatly dissatisfied with the treatment her children had received at their father's hands, Gæa remonstrated, but all in vain. Uranus would not grant her request to set the giants free, and whenever their muffled cries reached his ear, he trembled for his own safety. Angry beyond all expression, Gæa swore revenge, and descended into Tartarus, where she urged the Titans to conspire against their father, and attempt to wrest the sceptre from his grasp.

All listened attentively to the words of sedition; but none were courageous enough to carry out her plans, except Cronus, the youngest of the Titans, more familiarly known as Saturn or Time, who found confinement and chains peculiarly galling, and who hated his father for his cruelty. Gæa finally induced him to lay violent hands upon his sire, and, after releasing him from his bonds, gave him a scythe, and bade him be of good cheer and return victorious.

Thus armed and admonished, Cronus set forth, came upon his father unawares, defeated him, thanks to his extraordinary weapon, and, after binding him fast, took possession of the vacant throne, intending to rule the universe for ever. Enraged at this insult, Uranus cursed his son, and prophesied that a day would come when he, too, would be supplanted by his children, and would suffer just punishment for his rebellion.

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Cronus paid no heed to his father's imprecations, but calmly proceeded to release the Titans, his brothers and sisters, who, in their joy and gratitude to escape the dismal realm of Tartarus, expressed their willingness to be ruled by him. Their satisfaction was complete, however, when he chose his own sister, Rhea (Cybele, Ops) for his consort, and assigned to each of the others some portion of the world to govern at will. To Oceanus and Thetis, for example, he gave charge over the ocean and all the rivers upon earth; while to Hyperion and Phœbe he entrusted the direction of the sun and moon, which the ancients supposed were daily driven across the sky in brilliant golden chariots.

Peace and security now reigned on and around Mount Olympus; and Cronus, with great satisfaction, congratulated himself on the result of his enterprise. One fine morning, however, his equanimity was disturbed by the announcement that a son was born to him. The memory of his father's curse then suddenly returned to his mind. Anxious to avert so great a calamity as the loss of his power, he hastened to his wife, determined to devour the child, and thus prevent him from causing further annoyance. Wholly unsuspecting, Rhea heard him inquire for his son. Gladly she placed him in his extended arms; but imagine her surprise and horror when she beheld her husband swallow the babe.

Time passed, and another child was born, but only to meet with the same cruel fate. One infant after another disappeared down the capacious throat of the voracious Cronus—a personification of Time, who creates only to destroy. In vain the bereaved mother besought the life of one little one: the selfish, hard-hearted father would not relent. As her prayers seemed unavailing, Rhea finally resolved to obtain by

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stratagem the boon her husband denied; and as soon as her youngest son, Jupiter (Jove, Zeus), was born, she concealed him.

Cronus, aware of his birth, soon made his appearance, determined to dispose of him in the usual summary manner. For some time Rhea pleaded with him, but at last pretended to yield to his commands. Hastily wrapping a large stone in swaddling clothes, she handed it to Cronus, simulating intense grief. Cronus was evidently not of a very inquiring turn of mind, for he swallowed the whole without investigating the real contents of the shapeless bundle.

“To th' imperial son of Heaven,
Whilom the king of gods, a stone she gave
Inwraught in infant swathes; and this with grasp
Eager he snatch'd, and in his ravening breast
Convey'd away: unhappy! nor once thought
That for the stone his child behind remain'd
Invincible, secure; who soon, with hands
Of strength o'ercoming him, should cast him forth
From glory, and himself th' immortals rule.”

Hesiod (Elton's tr.).

Ignorant of the deception practised upon him, Cronus then took leave, and the overjoyed mother clasped her rescued treasure to her breast. It was not sufficient, however, to have saved young Jupiter from imminent death: it was also necessary that his father should remain unconscious of his existence.

To ensure this, Rhea entrusted her babe to the tender care of the Melian nymphs, who bore him off to a cave on Mount Ida. There a goat, Amalthea, was procured to act as nurse, and fulfilled her office so acceptably that she was eventually placed in the heavens as a constellation, a brilliant reward for her kind ministrations. To prevent Jupiter's cries being heard in Olympus, the Curetes (Corybantes), Rhea's priests,

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uttered piercing screams, clashed their weapons, executed fierce dances, and chanted rude war-songs.

The real significance of all this unwonted noise and commotion was not at all understood by Cronus, who, in the intervals of his numerous affairs, congratulated himself upon the cunning he had shown to prevent the accomplishment of his father's curse. But all his anxiety and fears were aroused when he suddenly became aware of the fraud practised upon him, and of young Jupiter's continued existence. He immediately tried to devise some plan to get rid of him; but, before he could put it into execution, he found himself attacked by his son, and, after a short but terrible encounter, he was signally defeated.

Jupiter, delighted to have triumphed so quickly, took possession of the supreme power, and aided by Rhea's counsels, and by a nauseous potion prepared by Metis, a daughter of Oceanus, compelled Cronus to produce the unfortunate children he had swallowed; *i.e.*, Neptune, Pluto, Vesta, Ceres, and Juno.

Following the example of his predecessor, Jupiter gave his brothers and sisters a fair share of his new kingdom. The wisest among the Titans—Mnemosyne, Themis, Oceanus, and Hyperion—submitted to the new sovereign without murmur, but the others refused their allegiance; which refusal, of course, occasioned a deadly conflict.

“When gods began with wrath,
And war rose up between their starry brows,
Some choosing to cast Cronus from his throne
That Zeus might king it there, and some in haste
With opposite oaths that they would have no Zeus
To rule the gods for ever.”

E. B. Browning.



THE
CHILD-
HOOD
OF
ZEUS
FROM THE
PAINTING
BY
G. F.
WATTS

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