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The threshing-floor, too, was under her protection. Both were her temples where at any moment she might be present. "At the sacred threshing-floor, when they are winnowing, she herself, Demeter of the corn-ripe yellow hair, divides the grain and the chaff in the rush of the wind, and the heap of chaff grows white." "May it be mine," the reaper prays, "beside Demeter's altar to dig the great winnowing fan through her heaps of corn, while she stands smiling by with sheaves and poppies in her hand."

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. The great festival, in September, came only every five years, but it lasted for nine days. They were most sacred days, when much of the ordinary business of life was suspended. Processions took place, sacrifices were held with dances and song, there was general rejoicing. All this was public knowledge and has been related by many a writer. But the chief part of the ceremony which took place in the precincts of the temple has never been described. 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. Throughout the Greek world and the Roman, too, they were held in especial veneration. 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."

And yet even so, holy and awesome though they were, they kept the mark of what they had sprung from. One of the few pieces of information we have about them is that at a very solemn moment the worshipers were shown "an ear of corn which had been reaped in silence."

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.

Beside Demeter when the cymbals sound
Enthroned sits Dionysus of the flowing hair.

THE TWO GREAT GODS OF EARTH 49

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.

The joy-god Dionysus, the pure star
That shines amid the gathering of the fruit.

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. The other immortals were untouched by lasting grief. "Dwelling in Olympus where the wind never blows and no rain falls ever nor the least white star of snow, they are happy all their days, feasting upon nectar and ambrosia, rejoicing in all-glorious Apollo as he strikes his silver lyre, and the sweet voices of the Muses answer him, while the Graces dance with Hebe and with Aphrodite, and a radiance shines round them all." But the two divinities of Earth knew heart-rending grief.

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)

This story is told only in a very early poem, one of the earliest of the Homeric Hymns, dating from the eighth or the beginning of the seventh century. The original has the marks of early Greek poetry, great simplicity and directness and delight in the beautiful world.

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.

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The lord of the dark underworld, the king of the multitudinous 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 weeping, 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, "no man nor god, nor any sure messenger from the birds." 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. Four lovely maidens, sisters, coming to draw water from the well, saw her and asked her pityingly what she did there. She answered that she had fled from pirates who had meant to sell her as a slave, and that she knew no one in this strange land to go to for help. They told her that any house in the town would welcome her, but that they would like best to bring her to their own if she would wait there while they went to ask their mother. The goddess bent her head in assent, and the girls, filling their shining pitchers with water, hurried home. Their mother, Metaneira, bade them return at once and invite the stranger to come, and speeding back they found the glorious goddess still sitting there, deeply veiled and covered to her slender feet by her dark robe. She followed them, and as she crossed the threshold to the hall where the mother sat holding her young son, a divine radiance filled the doorway and awe fell upon Metaneira.

She bade Demeter be seated and herself offered her honey-sweet wine, but the goddess would not taste it. She asked instead for barley-water flavored with mint, the cooling draught of the reaper at harvest time and also the sacred cup given the worshipers at Eleusis. Thus refreshed she took the child and held him to her fragrant bosom and his mother's heart was glad. So Demeter nursed Demophoön, the son that Metaneira had borne to wise Celeus. And the child grew like a young god, for daily Demeter anointed him with ambrosia



The rape of Persephone (Proserpine)

and at night she would place him in the red heart of the fire. Her purpose was to give him immortal youth.

Something, however, made the mother uneasy, so that one night she kept watch and screamed in terror when she saw the child laid in the fire. The goddess was angered; she seized the boy and cast him on the ground. She had meant to set him free from old age and from death, but that was not to be. Still, he had lain upon her knees and slept in her arms and therefore he should have honor throughout his life.

Then she showed herself the goddess manifest. Beauty breathed about her and a lovely fragrance; light shone from her so that the great house was filled with brightness. She was Demeter, she told the awestruck women. They must build her a great temple near the town and so win back the favor of her heart.

Thus she left them, and Metaneira fell speechless to the earth and all there trembled with fear. In the morning they told Celeus what had happened and he called the people together and revealed to them the command of the goddess. They worked willingly to build her a temple, and when it was finished Demeter came to it and sat there—apart from the gods in Olympus, alone, wasting away with longing for her daughter.

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 car and Hermes took the reins and drove the black horses straight to the temple where Demeter was. She ran out to meet her daughter as swiftly as a Maenad runs down the mountainside. 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, a great personage, none other than 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.

Come, my daughter, for Zeus, far-seeing, loud-thundering, bids you.

Come once again to the halls of the gods where you shall have honor,

Where you will have your desire, your daughter, to comfort your sorrow

As each year is accomplished and bitter winter is ended.

For a third part only the kingdom of darkness shall hold her.

For the rest you will keep her, you and the happy immortals.

Peace now. Give men life which comes alone from your giving.

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."

. . .

Queen of fragrant Eleusis,
Giver of earth's good gifts,
Give me your grace, O Demeter.
You, too, Persephone, fairest,
Maiden all lovely, I offer
Song for your favor.

. . .

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, as Sappho writes,

I heard the footfall of the flower spring . . .

—Persephone's footfall. 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."

The Olympians were "the happy gods," "the deathless gods," far removed from suffering mortals destined to die. But in their grief and at the hour of death, men could turn for compassion to the goddess who sorrowed and the goddess who died.

DIONYSUS OR BACCHUS

This story is very differently told from the story of Demeter. Dionysus was the last god to enter Olympus. Homer did not admit him. There are no early sources for his story except a few brief allusions in Hesiod, in the eighth or ninth century. A late Homeric Hymn, perhaps even as late as the fourth century, gives the only account of the pirates' ship, and the fate of Pentheus is the subject of the last play of Euripides, in the fifth century, the most modern of all Greek poets.

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.

At Thebes alone do mortal women bear
Immortal gods.

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. Then Hermes carried it to be cared for by the nymphs of Nysa—the loveliest of earth's valleys, but no man has ever looked upon Nysa or knows where it lies. Some say the nymphs were the Hyades, whom Zeus afterwards placed in the sky as stars, the stars which bring rain when they near the horizon.

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.

The lands of Lydia rich in gold,
Of Phrygia too; the sun-struck plains
Of Persia; the great walls of Bactria.
The storm-swept country of the Medes;
And Araby the Blest.

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