

Prometheus

There were two Titan brothers who inhabited the earth, and both of them, Prometheus and Epimetheus, could do marvelous things with their hands. Prometheus took a little of the new earth in his hands and as he looked it over he saw, hidden in it, some heavenly seeds, very tiny of course but they gave him an idea about something wonderful that he might be able to do. So Prometheus mixed some water with this handful of earth and seed; he kneaded it well, and then he skillfully moulded it into a form as nearly like the gods as he could make it. This figure of clay stood upright. Instead of turning its eyes down to the ground as four-footed creatures did, this form that Prometheus had made looked up toward the sky where the sun and the stars shone now that the air had cleared.

Prometheus had made man.

While the giant was accomplishing this, his brother, Epimetheus, had been busy with the task of equipping the other creatures of the earth so that they could take care of themselves. To some, he gave the gift of great strength; to others, he gave great speed. Each creature was given that which it most needed. It was then that the slow moving tortoise was given his shell and the eagle his talons. The deer was given his slender limbs and the dove his wings. The sheep put on his woolly covering that was to be renewed as often as man sheared it, and the horse, the camel and the elephant were provided with such great strength in their backs that they were able to draw and carry heavy loads.

Epimetheus was greatly interested in the man that his brother had made and he felt concerned that the man might be in danger from the wild beasts that were now so numerous in every corner of the earth. So he suggested something to his brother and Prometheus took a wooden torch up to the heavens and lighted it at the chariot of the sun. In this way, he brought down fire to the earth.

Fire was the most useful gift he could possibly have given to man. This first man had begun to dig caves and make leafy covers in the woods and huts woven of twigs to be his shelters. Now that fire had come to the earth, he was able to light a forge and shape metals into weapons and tools. He could defend himself from wild beasts with the spear he made, and cut down trees with his axe for building a stronger home. He made a ploughshare and harnessed Epimetheus' oxen to it as he planted his fields with food grains.

It seemed as if the earth was going to be a very good place indeed for man and his children, but after awhile all kinds of unexpected things began to happen. The strange part about it was that man, Prometheus' mixture of clay and heavenly seed, seemed to be at the bottom of most of the trouble. Men used the axe to rob the forests of timber for building war ships and fortifications around the towns, and they forged swords and helmets and shields. Sailors spread their fabric sheets to the wind to vex the face of the ocean. Men were not satisfied with what the surface of the earth could give them, but dug deep down into it and brought up gold and precious stones about which they fought among themselves, each wanting to possess more than his neighbor. The land was divided into shares and this was another cause of war, for each landowner wanted to take away his neighbor's grant and add it to his own.

Even the gods began to augment the troubles of the earth.

In the beginning, before the forge fires were lighted, there had been a Golden Age, when the fields had given all the food that man needed. Flowers came up without the planting of seeds, the rivers flowed with milk, and thick, yellow honey was distilled by the honey bees. But the gods sent the Silver Age, not so pleasant as the one of gold. Zeus, the king of the gods, shortened the spring and divided the year into seasons. Man learned then what it was to be too cold in the winter and too warm in the summer. Then came the Bronze and the Iron Ages, when war and greed broke out.

Zeus decided that the people of the earth should be punished for their discord. He imprisoned the north wind which scatters the clouds and sent out the south wind to cover the face of the sky with pitchy darkness. The clouds were driven together with a crash and torrents of rain fell. The crops were laid low so that all the year's labor of the mankind was destroyed. Zeus even called upon his brother, Poseidon, who was the god of the sea,

to let loose the rivers and pour them over the land. He tore the land with an earthquake so that even the sea overflowed its shores. Such a flood followed that the earth was nearly all sea without shore! The hills were the only land, and people were obliged to ride from one island to another in boats while the fish swam among the tree tops. If an anchor was dropped, it found a place in a garden. Awkward manatees gamboled about where there had once been lambs playing in green pastures; wolves struggled in the water among sheep, and lions and tigers were submerged by the rushing waters.

It really seemed as if the earth was about to be lost in a second chaos, but at last a green mountain peak appeared above the waste that the waters had made and on it a man and woman of the race the giant Prometheus had made took refuge. Remembering the heavenly seed that was part of their birthright, they looked up toward the sky and begged Zeus to take pity on them. Zeus, flattered by the voices of the people, ordered the north wind to drive away the clouds, and Poseidon sounded his horn to order the waters to retreat. The waters obeyed, and the sea returned to its basins.

It was a bare and desolate earth upon which the people looked down from the Mount of Parnassus. They had not forgotten how to build and mine and plant and harvest and keep a home. They would have to begin things all over again, they knew, and there were two ways of going about it.

One way would be to leave the earth the barren place which it now was and try to wreak vengeance on Zeus for the destruction he had brought upon the earth. Prometheus, the Titan, still lived and he was possessed of a secret by means of which he could take Zeus' throne away from him. He would probably never have used this secret, but the fact that he had it came to the ears of the mighty Zeus and caused much consternation among the gods. Zeus ordered Hephaestus, the god of blacksmithery, to forge some great links for a heavy chain. With these, he chained Prometheus to a rock and sent a vulture to eat his flesh which grew again continually so that Prometheus suffered terrible pain as the vulture returned each day.

His torture would come to an end the moment he told his secret, Zeus assured Prometheus, but the giant would not speak because of the harm his words might cause the men and women of earth. He suffered there

without any rest, and the earth began to take on its former guise of fertility and prosperity as man tried to bring back the Golden Age through his own efforts. And whenever a man felt like giving up the task, which was indeed a mighty one, he would think of Prometheus chained to the rock. His flesh that came from the earth was the prey of the vulture, but the seed of the gods which was hidden in every mortal, gave him strength to resist what he believed to be wrong and continue to bear the suffering.

A strange old story, is it not? But it is also a story of today. Ours is the same earth with its fertile fields and wide forests, its rich mines and its wealth of flocks and herds. They are all given to us, just as the gods gave them to the first men, for the development of peace and plenty. And man, himself, is still a mixture of earth stuff and something else, too, that Prometheus called heavenly seed and we call soul. When selfishness and greed guide our uses of land and food and the natural resources of the earth, there is apt to be pretty nearly as bad a time on the earth as when Zeus and Poseidon flooded it. But there is always a chance to be a Prometheus who can forget about everything except the right, and so help in bringing again the Golden Age to the world.