

Greek Mythology -
Mabelle Selby -

Table of Contents.

Greek Mythology :- Definition of Mythology . - 1. - (Page)	
Myth and story discriminated . - 1.	
Greek deities innumerable . 1-2-	
List of important gods and -	
Legends connected with them - 2-5.	
Ancestral worship. - 5-	
Mythology - the noblest form of idolatry. 5-6.	
Games - Festivals - Oracles - 6-	
Prepared the way for Christianity. 7-8-	

Greek Mythology -

What is Mythology? Webster defines it as "a system of fables - or a treatise upon fables - The collective body of traditions of any heathen nation, respecting its gods and other fabulous, supernatural beings." These traditions differ from an allegory in, that they are spontaneous, not reflective. It is characteristic of a myth that nobody knows when, where or under what conditions it originated. A myth and a mere story are discriminated by the fact that a myth is allied to a certain, although now antiquated, bit of history. It is a story which, when deprived of its clothing and ornamentation and left bare, becomes a fact in the history of remote ages. It is poetical as well as historical and may be either credible or incredible. Some one has said of the ancients that "where we have recourse to a scientific theorem, they were contented with a myth."

For the Greeks nature overflowed with deities.

Every stream had its protecting god - every fountain, its presiding nymph - every grove and forest was the home of some deity - that the Greeks loved as ardently

as they did their nearest friends. Their gods were intense personalities possessing human passions, human desires and holding council on the summit of Mt. Olympus, which was beyond the impenetrable mists. Disbelievers in the gods were called heretics and provoked the vengeance of the gods.

A man, struck by lightning was refused burial, because his death was considered a direct-punishment-from the gods.

The Greeks had implicit-faith in the reality-of their legendary personages and actually existing work was ascribed to them.

Was the fair youth drowned in the sea? The sea-nymphs, seeing his beauty, took him to their blissful abode where he would no longer feel the pains of earth.

A lovely maiden was gathering flowers on the plain and is lost! Is she dead? She was claimed by gay spirits-who took her to their home where she is now reigning in pomp and grandeur.

Jens, the greatest-of Olympian gods, the father of gods and men, was the son of Cronos and Rhea. When a distribution of the government-of the world was made between Jens and his brothers, Poseidon was given dominion over the sea, Hades the lower world and Jens-the heavens-the earth being common to all. An old legend is this that-within his temple

neither man nor animal cast a shadow and that to enter it, intentionally or otherwise, meant death within twelve months. It has been said of Zeus that he avenged those who were wronged and punished those who had committed a crime, for he watched the doings and sufferings of all men.

Poseidon was the ruler of the sea and is represented as gathering clouds and calling forth storms. His was the power that could grant successful voyages and save those who were in danger. When Poseidon and Athena disputed as to supremacy over Attica, the gods decided that the one bestowing the greatest gift on man should be victorious. Poseidon created the horse - Athena, the olive tree. The latter being victorious, Poseidon became indignant, thrust his trident into a barren rock, brought forth a well of sea-water and caused the earth to be inundated.

Hades, who was the god of the depths underground, was supposed to receive the dead.

Hera, wife of Zeus, was queen of the skies, and her jealous disposition created disturbances in celestial circles.

Demeter was goddess of harvests and her symbols were ears of corn and a car drawn by winged serpents.

Hephaestus, god of volcanic fires and skilled metal work, was the deformed son of Zeus and Hera. An old

story is that - his parents - threw him out - but - reconciliation was soon brought - about - by means of his accomplishments. He then used Mt. Etna as his forge and from this forge Prometheus obtained, his sacred fire which he gave to man.

Vesta, goddess of domestic affairs, at whose shrine all family events were celebrated, had for her symbol an altar flame.

Mars was the god of war.

Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, is supposed to have arisen from the foam of the sea. Hera, Aphrodite and Athena engaged in a contest - to see which was the most - beautiful. Eris (strife) decided the contest in favor of Aphrodite - and awarded a golden apple as a prize. She is often represented as holding this apple in her hand.

Apollo was the god of music and poetry.

Artemis, protector of water nymphs, used the moon for her chariot. All young girls were under her care.

Hermes, god of eloquence and cunning, was often accused of stealing but in Athens was very popular, so much so that - at nearly every street - crossing a pillar was erected on which was a human head. Here they worshipped Hermes. He it - was who conducted the souls of the dead to Hades and was a winged messenger of the gods having for his ensign, the cock.

Dionysus, god of wine, ruled the fruit-season.

There were innumerable deities of minor importance, such as the "Three Fates" upon whose spindle was spun the thread of every life. "Three Graces" representing the different qualities of summer. "Three Furies" who pursued criminals.

In Greece, the ancestors or founders of a tribe were remembered and worshiped and all their daring deeds were made sacred and related - their success being attributed to their divinity. The date of birth of these ancestors was unknown and so came the conclusion that they sprang from some unknown source. All inventors were supposed to have super-human power and all were thought to be the direct work of the gods. Thus when the circumstances and time of the birth were unknown, the Greeks concluded that the person was an offspring of the gods, or that he arose from the sea etc. Likewise his death - "He vanished among the stars and became a presiding deity over men."

This was the noblest form of idolatry. They thought of God simply as father of their deities and as superior only in years. The Greeks nourished the germ of true religion. There was a worship of humanity. No one can worship something of which he knows nothing whatever and so the Greeks attributed to

their gods those qualities of which they were conscious. They worshiped man as he is - pure or inebriate - generous or selfish - benign or ravenous - with his soul appetites and his vile passions. Their gods are represented as beings readily influenced and easily provoked - as ideals of physical perfection. Their ideas of beauty were innate and it is not strange that the Greeks loved beauty in form - beauty in everything since their surrounding scenery was well adapted to the cultivation of the aesthetic side of their natures. Their temples were made by the best sculptors in order that the gods might be pleased to dwell within. They were not massive, tomb like structures nor were they edifices with pinnacles and domes towering toward heaven. They were simple and artistic ideal homes - well worthy of the gods who were simply deified men and women.

The Greeks were a devoted people and games and festivals were held regularly. The Olympian games were held at Olympia in honor of Zeus, once in four years. Here the Greeks came from all parts of the country to worship. All quarrels were suppressed by a truce and a prize usually consisting of an olive wreath was given for running, wrestling, chariot racing and boxing. The excitement of the games was added to by the thought that they were acts of worship and that

the gods were looking on with interest.

The Greek faith in the Oracles was implicit. A volcanic site, having a fissure from which gas was escaping, was preferable, and over this, on a tripod, the priestess sat and offered her prophecies. The fumes had a real or an imaginary effect upon her and altered her prophecies. Great stress was laid on the flight of birds, on dreams, and sometimes an army would be kept waiting until the proper sacrifices had been offered and success assured.

But in succeeding generations the faith began to recede. The oracles became voiceless, the temples which were made for the abode of their gods - were deserted - and the religious feeling of the people was less capable of being influenced than their patriotism.

Mythology had prepared the way for Christianity. It brought about an intellectual change and helped to abolish the worship of material things which had previously been a great barrier to Christianity. It looked forward to greater than human power.

Their religion was practical and was connected with the every day life of the people. The hearth seemed the shrine of domestic affections. Their occupations were really acts of worship.

Grecian Mythology revealed the grand idea of immortality, although no definite idea of after-

life was given - Theirs was a pure and practical religion void of indelicacy in any particular. Whatever belonged to their poetry belonged also to their religion.

Mythology held hope as a motive instead of fear - The intellect - was developed, morals were inculcated and aesthetic taste - became preeminent.

Mabelle Selby -