

GREEK MYTHS RETOLD FOR CHILDREN

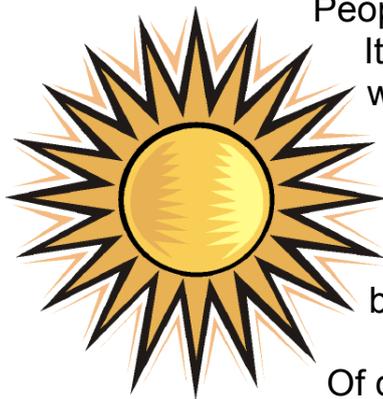


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The End Of The Golden Age

Zeus and his mighty company had not always lived amongst the clouds on the mountain top. A very long time ago, a family called Titans had lived there and had ruled over all the world. There were twelve Titans - six brothers and six sisters - and they said that their father was the Sky and their mother the Earth. They had the form and looks of men and women, but they were much larger and far more beautiful.

The name of the youngest of these Titans was Cronus, and yet he was so very old that men often called him Father Time. He was the king of the Titans, and so, of course, was the king of all the earth besides.



People were never as happy as they were during Cronus's reign. It was the true Golden Age then. Spring lasted all year. The woods and meadows were always full of blossoms, and the music of singing birds was heard every day and every hour. It was summer and autumn, too, at the same time. Apples and figs and oranges always hung ripe from the trees, and there were purple grapes on the vines, and melons and berries of every kind, which everybody could pick and eat.

Of course nobody had to do any kind of work in that happy time! There was no such thing as sickness or sorrow or old age. Men and women lived for hundreds and hundreds of years and never became gray or wrinkled or ill, but were always handsome and young. They had no need of houses, for there were no cold days or storms, or indeed anything to make them afraid.

Nobody was poor, for everybody had the same precious things - the sunlight, the pure air, the good water from the springs, the grass for a carpet, the blue sky for a roof and the fruits and flowers of the woods and meadows. No one was richer than anyone else, and there was no money. There was no need for locks or bolts, because everybody was everybody's friend, and everybody was content.

When these happy people had lived long enough they fell asleep, and their bodies were seen no more. They flitted away through the air, and over the mountains, and across the sea, to a flowery land in the distant west. And some men say that, even to this day, they are wandering happily here and there about the earth, causing babies to smile in their cradles, easing the pain of the sad and the sick, and blessing mankind everywhere.

What a pity it is that this Golden Age should have come to an end! But it was Zeus and his brothers who brought about the change.

The stories tell that Zeus was the son of the old Titan king, Cronus. Did I warn you that these stories are wonderful and terrible? I think I did. Well, here is the first of the terrible things that we will read about. Cronus was told that his own child would one day kill him, and he did not want this to happen. So, as his children were born, he swallowed them up! But when his youngest child, Zeus, was born, he was tricked into swallowing a rock instead, and Zeus was saved to grow up elsewhere, plotting his revenge against his father. As soon as he was a man, he made his father vomit up his brothers, Poseidon and Hades, and his sisters, Hestia, Demeter and Hera. Then he persuaded his brothers and sisters to join him, and together they vowed that they would drive the Titans from the earth.

There followed a long and terrible war. But Zeus had many mighty helpers. A company of one-eyed monsters called Cyclopes were kept busy all the time, forging thunderbolts in the fire of burning mountains. Three other monsters, each with a hundred hands, were called in to throw rocks and trees against the castle of the Titans, and Zeus himself hurled his sharp lightning bolts so thick and fast that the woods were set on fire and the water in the rivers boiled with the heat.

Of course the Titans could not hold out against such terrible enemies as these. At the end of ten years they had to give up and beg for mercy. They were bound in chains of the hardest rock and thrown into a prison in the Lower Worlds, and the Cyclopes and the hundred-handed monsters were sent there to be their jailers and to keep guard over them forever.

But then the people began to grow unhappy with their lives. Some wanted to be rich and own all the good things in the world. Some wanted to be kings and rule over the others. Some who were strong wanted to make slaves of those who were weak. Some broke down the fruit trees in the woods, to stop others eating of the fruit. Some, just for fun, hunted the timid animals which had always been their friends.

Eventually, instead of everybody being everybody's friend, everybody was everybody's enemy.

So, in all the world, instead of peace, there was war; instead of plenty, there was hunger; instead of innocence, there was crime; and instead of happiness, there was misery.

So the Golden Age had come to an end, and that was the way in which Zeus made himself so mighty.

