**PROMETHEUS AND PANDORA**

**From *Bulfinch’s Mythology: The Age of Fable or Stories of Gods & Heroes***

**By Thomas Bulfinch (1855)**

The creation of the world is a problem naturally fitted to excite the liveliest interest of man, its inhabitant. The ancient pagans, not having the information on the subject which we derive from the pages of Scripture, had their own way of telling the story, which is as follows:

Before earth and sea and heaven were created, all things wore one aspect, to which we give the name of Chaos- a confused and shapeless mass, nothing but dead weight, in which, however, slumbered the seeds of things. Earth, sea, and air were all mixed up together; so the earth was not solid, the sea was not fluid, and the air was not transparent. God and Nature at last interposed, and put an end to this discord, separating earth from sea, and heaven from both. The fiery part, being the lightest, sprang up, and formed the skies; the air was next in weight and place. The earth, being heavier, sank below; and the water took the lowest place, and buoyed up the earth.

Here some god—it is not known which—gave his good offices in arranging and disposing the earth. He appointed rivers and bays their places, raised mountains, scooped out valleys, distributed woods, fountains, fertile fields, and stony plains. The air being cleared, the stars began to appear, fishes took possession of the sea, birds of the air, and four-footed beasts of the land.

But a nobler animal was wanted, and Man was made. It is not known whether the creator made him of divine materials, or whether in the earth, so lately separated from heaven, there lurked still some heavenly seeds. Prometheus took some of this earth, and kneading it up with water, made man in the image of the gods. He gave him an upright stature, so that while all other animals turn their faces downward, and look to the earth, he raises his to heaven, and gazes on the stars.

Prometheus was one of the Titans, a gigantic race, who inhabited the earth before the creation of man. To him and his brother Epimetheus was committed the office of making man, and providing him and all other animals with the faculties necessary for their preservation. Epimetheus undertook to do this, and Prometheus was to overlook his work, when it was done. Epimetheus accordingly proceeded to bestow upon the different animals the various gifts of courage, strength, swiftness, sagacity; wings to one, claws to another, a shelly covering to a third, etc. But when man came to be provided for, who was to be superior to all other animals, Epimetheus had been so prodigal of his resources that he had nothing left to bestow upon him. In his perplexity he resorted to his brother Prometheus, who, with the aid of Minerva, went up to heaven, and lighted his torch at the chariot of the sun, and brought down fire to man. With this gift man was more than a match for all other animals. It enabled him to make weapons wherewith to subdue them; tools with which to cultivate the earth; to warm his dwelling, so as to be comparatively independent of climate; and finally to introduce the arts and to coin money, the means of trade and commerce.

Woman was not yet made. The story (absurd enough!) is that Jupiter made her, and sent her to Prometheus and his brother, to punish them for their presumption in stealing fire from heaven; and man, for accepting the gift. The first woman was named Pandora. She was made in heaven, every god contributing something to perfect her. Venus gave her beauty, Mercury persuasion, Apollo music, etc. Thus equipped, she was conveyed to earth, and presented to Epimetheus, who gladly accepted her, though cautioned by his brother to beware of Jupiter and his gifts. Epimetheus had in his house a jar, in which were kept certain noxious articles for which, in fitting man for his new abode, he had had no occasion. Pandora was seized with an eager curiosity to know what this jar contained; and one day she slipped off the cover and looked in. Forthwith there escaped a multitude of plagues for hapless man,- such as gout, rheumatism, and colic for his body, and envy, spite, and revenge for his mind,- and scattered themselves far and wide. Pandora hastened to replace the lid! but, alas! the whole contents of the jar had escaped, one thing only excepted, which lay at the bottom, and that was hope. So we see at this day, whatever evils are abroad, hope never entirely leaves us; and while we have that, no amount of other ills can make us completely wretched.

Another story is that Pandora was sent in good faith, by Jupiter, to bless man; that she was furnished with a box containing her marriage presents, into which every god had put some blessing, She opened the box incautiously, and the blessings all escaped, hope only excepted. This story seems more probable than the former; for how could hope, so precious a jewel as it is, have been kept in a jar full of all manner of evils, as in the former statement?…

The comparison of Eve to Pandora is too obvious to have escaped Milton, who introduces it in Book IV. of “Paradise Lost”:

          “More lovely than Pandora, whom the gods  
           Endowed with all their gifts; and O, too like  
           In sad event, when to the unwiser son  
           Of Japhet brought by Hermes, she insnared  
           Mankind with her fair looks, to be avenged  
           On him who had stole Jove's authentic fire.”

Prometheus and Epimetheus were sons of Iapetus, which Milton changes to Japhet. Prometheus has been a favourite subject with the poets. He is represented as the friend of mankind, who interposed in their behalf when Jove was incensed against them, and who taught them civilization and the arts. But as, in so doing, he transgressed the will of Jupiter, he drew down on himself the anger of the ruler of gods and men. Jupiter had him chained to a rock on Mount Caucasus, where a vulture preyed on his liver, which was renewed as fast as devoured. This state of torment might have been brought to an end at any time by Prometheus, if he had been willing, to submit to his oppressor; for he possessed a secret which involved the stability of Jove's throne, and if he would have revealed it, he might have been at once taken into favour. But that he disdained to do. He has therefore become the symbol of magnanimous endurance of unmerited suffering, and strength of will resisting oppression.

Byron and Shelley have both treated this theme. The following are Byron's lines:

            “Titan! to whose immortal eyes  
               The sufferings of mortality,  
               Seen in their sad reality,  
             Were not as things that gods despise;  
             What was thy pity's recompense?  
             A silent suffering, and intense;  
             The rock, the vulture, and the chain;  
             All that the proud can feel of pain;  
             The agony they do not show;  
             The suffocating sense of woe.  
           “Thy godlike crime was to be kind;  
               To render with thy precepts less  
               The sum of human wretchedness,  
             And strengthen man with his own mind.  
               And, baffled as thou wert from high,  
               Still, in thy patient energy  
             In the endurance and repulse  
               Of thine impenetrable spirit,  
             Which earth and heaven could not convulse,  
               A mighty lesson we inherit.”

**How the World and Mankind Were Created**

**From *Mythology***

**By Edith Hamilton (1942)**

With the exception of the story of Prometheus' punishment, told by Aeschylus in the fifth century, I have taken the material of this chapter chiefly from Hesiod, who lived at least three hundred years earlier. He is the principal authority for the myths about the beginning everything. Both the crudity of the story of Cronus and the naïveté of the story of Pandora are characteristic of him.

First there was Chaos, the vast immeasurable abyss, Outrageous as a sea, dark, wasteful, wild. These words are Milton's, but they express with precision what the Greeks thought lay back of the very first beginning of things. Long before the gods appeared, in the dim past, uncounted ages ago, there was only the formless confusion of Chaos brooded over by unbroken darkness. At last, but how no one ever tried to explain, two children were born to this shapeless nothingness. Night was the child of Chaos and so was Erebus, which is the unfathomable depth where death dwells. In the whole universe there was nothing else; all was black, empty, silent, endless.

And then a marvel of marvels came to pass. In some mysterious way, from this horror of blank boundless vacancy the best of all things came into being. A great playwright, the comic poet Aristophanes, describes its coming in words often quoted:—

... Black-winged Night

Into the bosom of Erebus dark and deep

Laid a wind-born egg, and as the seasons rolled

Forth sprang Love, the longed-for, shining, with wings of gold.

From darkness and from death Love was born, and with its birth, order and beauty began to banish blind confusion. Love created Light with its companion, radiant Day.

What took place next was the creation of the earth, but this, too, no one ever tried to explain. It just happened. With the corning of love and light it seemed natural that the earth also should appear. The poet Hesiod, the first Greek who tried to explain how things began, wrote,

Earth, the beautiful, rose up,

Broad-bosomed, she that is the steadfast base

Of all things. And fair Earth first bore

The starry Heaven, equal to herself,

To cover her on all sides and to be

A home forever for the blessed gods….

…By now all was ready for the appearance of mankind. Even the places the good and bad should go to after death had been arranged. It was time for men to be created. There is more than one account of how that came to pass. Some say it was delegated by the gods to Prometheus, the Titan who had sided with Zeus in the war with the Titans, and to his brother Epimetheus. Prometheus, whose name means forethought, was very wise, wiser even than the gods, but Epimetheus, which means afterthought, was a scatterbrained person who invariably followed his first impulse and then changed his mind. So he did in this case. Before making men he gave all the best gifts to the animals, strength and swiftness and courage and shrewd, cunning, fur and feathers and wings and shells and the like—until no good was left for men, no protective covering and no quality to make them a match for the beasts. Too late, as always, he was sorry and asked his brother's help.

Prometheus, then, took over the task of creation and thought out a way to make mankind superior. He fashioned them III a nobler shape than the animals, upright like the gods; and then he went to heaven, to the sun, where he lit a torch and brought down fire, a protection to men far better than anything else, whether fur or feathers or strength or swiftness.

And now, though feeble and short-lived, Mankind has flaming fire and therefrom learns many crafts.

According to another story, the gods themselves created men. They made first a golden race. These, although mortal, lived like gods without sorrow of heart, far from toil and pain. The cornland of itself bore fruit abundantly. They were rich also in flocks and beloved of the gods. When the grave covered them they became pure spirits, beneficent, the guardians of mankind.

In this account of the creation the gods seemed bent on experimenting with the various metals, and, oddly enough, proceeding downward from the excellent to the good to the worse and so on. When they had tried gold they went to silver. This second race of silver was very inferior to the first. They had so little intelligence that they could not keep from injuring each other. They too passed away, but, unlike the gold race, their spirits did not live on after them. The next race was of brass. They were terrible men, immensely strong, and such lovers of war and violence that they were completely destroyed by their own hands.

This, however, was all to the good, for they were followed by a splendid race of godlike heroes who fought glorious wars and went on great adventures which men have talked and sung of through all the ages since. They departed finally to the isles of the blessed, where they lived in perfect bliss forever.

The fifth race is that which is now upon the earth: the iron race. They live in evil times and their nature too has much of evil, so that they never have rest from toil and sorrow. As the generations pass, they grow worse; sons are always inferior to their fathers. A time will come when they have grown so wicked that they will worship power; might will be right to them, and reverence for the good will cease to be. At last when no man is angry any more at wrongdoing or feels shame in the presence of the miserable, Zeus will destroy them too.

And yet even then something might be done, if only the common people would arise and put down rulers that oppress them.

These two stories of the creation,—the story of the five ages, and the story of Prometheus and Epimetheus,—different as they are, agree in one point. For a long time, certainly throughout the happy Golden Age, only men were upon the earth; there were no women. Zeus created these later, in his anger at Prometheus for caring so much for men. Prometheus had not only stolen fire for men; he had also arranged that they should get the best part of any animal sacrificed and the gods the worst. He cut up a great ox and wrapped the good eatable parts in the hide, disguising them further by piling entrails on top. Beside this heap he put another of all the bones, dressed up with cunning and covered with shining fat, and bade Zeus choose between them. Zeus took up the white fat and was angry when he saw the bones craftily tricked out. But he had made his choice and he had to abide by it. Thereafter only fat and bones were burned to the gods upon their altars. Men kept the good meat for themselves.

But the Father of Men and of Gods was not one to put up with this sort of treatment. He swore to be revenged, on mankind first and then on mankind's friend. He made a great evil for men, a sweet and lovely thing to look upon, in the likeness of a shy maiden, and all the gods gave her gifts, silvery raiment and a broidered veil, a wonder to behold, and bright garlands of blooming flowers and a crown of gold— great beauty shone out from it.

Because of what they gave her they called her Pandora, which means "the gift of all." When this beautiful disaster had been made, Zeus brought her out and wonder took hold of gods and men when they beheld her. From her, the first woman, comes the race. Of women, who are an evil to men, with a nature to do evil.

Another story about Pandora is that the source of all misfortune was not her wicked nature, but only her curiosity. The gods presented her with a box into which each had put something harmful, and forbade her ever to open it. Then they sent her to Epimetheus, who took her gladly although Prometheus had warned him never to accept anything from Zeus.

He took her, and afterward when that dangerous thing, a woman, was his, he understood how good his brother's advice had been. For Pandora, like all women, was possessed of a lively curiosity. She had to know what was in the box. One day she lifted the lid— and out flew plagues innumerable, sorrow and mischief for mankind. In terror Pandora clapped the lid down, but too late. One good thing, however, was there—Hope. It was the only good the casket had held among the many evils, and it remains to this day mankind's sole comfort in misfortune. So mortals learned that it is not possible to get the better of Zeus or ever deceive him. The wise and compassionate Prometheus, too, found that out.

When Zeus had punished men by giving them women he turned his attention to the archsinner himself. The new ruler of the gods owed Prometheus much for helping him conquer the other Titans, but he forgot his debt. Zeus had his servants, Force and Violence, seize him and take him to the Caucasus, where they bound him to a high-piercing, headlong rock in adamantine chains that none can break, and they told him,

Forever shall the intolerable present grind you down.

And he who will release you is not born.

Such fruit you reap for your man-loving ways.

A god yourself, you did not dread God's anger,

But gave to mortals honor not their due.

And therefore you must guard this joyless rock—

No rest, no sleep, no moment's respite.

Groans shall your speech be, lamentation your only words.

The reason for inflicting this torture was not only to punish Prometheus, but also to force him to disclose a secret very important to the lord of Olympus. Zeus knew that fate, which brings all things to pass, had decreed that a son should some day be born to him who would dethrone him and drive the gods from their home in heaven, but only Prometheus knew who would be the mother of this son. As he lay bound upon the rock in agony, Zeus sent his messenger, Hermes, to bid him disclose the secret. Prometheus told him:—

Go and persuade the sea wave not to break.

You will persuade me no more easily.

Hermes warned him that if he persisted in his stubborn silence, he should suffer still more terrible things.

An eagle red with blood

Shall come, a guest unbidden to your banquet.

All day long he will tear to rags your body,

Feasting in fury on the blackened liver.

But nothing, no threat, nor torture, could break Prometheus. His body was bound but his spirit was free. He refused to submit to cruelty and tyranny. He knew that he had served Zeus well and that he had done right to pity mortals in their helplessness. His suffering was utterly unjust, and he would not give in to brutal power no matter at what cost. He told Hermes:—

There is no force which can compel my speech.

So let Zeus hurl his blazing bolts,

And with the white wings of the snow,

With thunder and with earthquake,

Confound the reeling world.

None of all this will bend my will.

Hermes, crying out, “Why, these are ravings you may hear from madmen,” left him to suffer what he must. Generations later we know he was released, but why and how is not told clearly anywhere. There is a strange story that the Centaur, Chiron, though immortal, was willing to die for him and that he was allowed to do so. When Hermes was urging Prometheus to give in to Zeus he spoke of this, but in such a way as to make it seem an incredible sacrifice:—

Look for no ending to this agony

Until a god will freely suffer for you,

Will take on him your pain, and in your stead

Descend to where the sun is turned to darkness,

The black depths of death.

But Chiron did do this and Zeus seems to have accepted him as a substitute. We are told, too, that Hercules slew the eagle and delivered Prometheus from his bonds, and that Zeus was willing to have this done. But why Zeus changed his mind and whether Prometheus revealed the secret when he was freed, we do not know. One thing, however, is certain: in whatever way the two were reconciled, it was not Prometheus who yielded. His name has stood through all the centuries, from Greek days to our own, as that of the great rebel against injustice and the authority of power.