

MYTH READINGS

How Fire Was Given to Men

In those old, old times, there lived two brothers who were not like other men, nor yet like those Mighty Ones who lived upon the mountain top. They were the sons of one of those Titans who had fought against Jupiter and been sent in chains to the strong prison-house of the Lower World.

The name of the elder of these brothers was Prometheus, or Forethought; for he was always thinking of the future and making things ready for what might happen to-morrow, or next week, or next year, or it may be in a hundred years to come. The younger was called Epimetheus, or Afterthought; for he was always so busy thinking of yesterday, or last year, or a hundred years ago, that he had no care at all for what might come to pass after a while.

For some cause Jupiter had not sent these brothers to prison with the rest of the Titans. Prometheus did not care to live amid the clouds on the mountain top. He was too busy for that. While the Mighty Folk were spending their time in idleness, drinking nectar and eating ambrosia, he was intent upon plans for making the world wiser and better than it had ever been before.

He went out amongst men to live with them and help them; for his heart was filled with sadness when he found that they were no longer happy as they had been during the golden days when Saturn was king. Ah, how very poor and wretched they were! He found them living in caves and in holes of the earth, shivering with the cold because there was no fire, dying of starvation, hunted by wild beasts and by one another—the most miserable of all living creatures. “If they only had fire,” said Prometheus to himself, “they could at least warm themselves and cook their food; and after a while they could learn to make tools and build themselves houses. Without fire, they are worse off than the beasts.”

Then he went boldly to Jupiter and begged him to give fire to men, that so they might have a little comfort through the long, dreary months of winter.

“Not a spark will I give,” said Jupiter. “No, indeed! Why, if men had fire, they might become strong and wise like ourselves, and after a while they would drive us out of our kingdom. Let them shiver with cold and let them live like the beasts. It is best for them to be poor and ignorant, that so we Mighty Ones may thrive and be happy.”

Prometheus made no answer; but he had set his heart on helping mankind, and he did not give up. He turned away, and left Jupiter and his mighty company forever.

As he was walking by the shore of the sea he found a reed, or, as some say, a tall stalk of fennel, growing; and when he had broken it off he saw that its hollow center was filled with a dry, soft pith which would burn slowly and keep on fire a long time. He took the long stalk in his hands and started with it towards the dwelling of the sun in the far east.

“Mankind shall have fire in spite of the tyrant who sits on the mountain top,” he said.

He reached the place of the sun in the early morning just as the glowing, golden orb was rising from the earth and beginning his daily journey through the sky. He touched the end of the long reed to the flames, and the dry pith caught on fire and burned slowly. Then he turned and hastened back to his own land, carrying with him the precious spark hidden in the hollow center of the plant.

He called some of the shivering men from their caves and built a fire for them, and showed them how to warm themselves by it and how to build other fires from the coals. Soon there was a cheerful blaze in every rude home in the land, and men and women gathered round it and were warm and happy, and thankful to Prometheus for the wonderful gift which he had brought to them from the sun.

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After that, Prometheus taught them, little by little, a thousand things. He showed them how to build houses of wood and stone, and how to tame sheep and cattle and make them useful, and how to plow and sow and reap, and how to protect themselves from the storms of winter and the beasts of the woods. Then he showed them how to dig in the earth for copper and iron, and how to melt the ore, and how to hammer it into shape and fashion from it the tools and weapons which they needed in peace and war; and when he saw how happy the world was becoming, he cried out:

“A new Golden Age shall come, brighter and better by far than the old!”

Perdix

While Athens was still only a small city there lived within its walls a man named Daedalus who was the most skillful worker in wood and stone and metal that had ever been known. It was he who taught the people how to build better houses and how to hang their doors on hinges and how to support the roofs with pillars and posts. He was the first to fasten things together with glue; he invented the plumb-line and the auger; and he showed seamen how to put up masts in their ships and how to rig the sails to them with ropes. He built a stone palace for Aegeus, the young king of Athens, and beautified the Temple of Athena which stood on the great rocky hill in the middle of the city.

Daedalus had a nephew named Perdix whom he had taken when a boy to teach the trade of builder. But Perdix was a very apt learner, and soon surpassed his master in the knowledge of many things. His eyes were ever open to see what was going on about him, and he learned the lore of the fields and the woods. Walking one day by the sea, he picked up the backbone of a great fish, and from it he invented the saw. Seeing how a certain bird carved holes in the trunks of trees, he learned how to make and use the chisel. Then he invented the wheel which potters use in molding clay; and he made of a forked stick the first pair of compasses for drawing circles; and he studied out many other curious and useful things.

Daedalus was not pleased when he saw that the lad was so apt and wise, so ready to learn, and so eager to do.

"If he keeps on in this way," he murmured, "he will be a greater man than I; his name will be remembered, and mine will be forgotten."

Day after day, while at his work, Daedalus pondered over this matter, and soon his heart was filled with hatred towards young Perdix. One morning when the two were putting up an ornament on the outer wall of Athena's temple, Daedalus bade his nephew go out on a narrow scaffold which hung high over the edge of the rocky cliff whereon the temple stood. Then, when the lad obeyed, it was easy enough, with a blow of a hammer, to knock the scaffold from its fastenings.

Poor Perdix fell headlong through the air, and he would have been dashed in pieces upon the stones at the foot of the cliff had not kind Athena seen him and taken pity upon him. While he was yet whirling through mid-air she changed him into a partridge, and he flitted away to the hills to live forever in the woods and fields which he loved so well. And to this day, when summer breezes blow and the wildflowers bloom in meadow and glade, the voice of Perdix may still sometimes be heard, calling to his mate from among the grass and reeds or amid the leafy underwoods.

Eros And Psyche

Psyche was a woman gifted with extreme beauty and grace, one of the mortal women whose love and sacrifice for her beloved God Eros earned her immortality.

Attempting to live an ordinary life, Psyche's beauty made her so famous that the whole world rushed to see her.

Jealous of men's admiration for Psyche, the goddess Aphrodite asked her son, the powerful master of love, Eros, to poison men's souls so that they would not desire Psyche. But Eros also fell in love with Psyche and was completely mesmerized by her beauty.

Despite so many men coming her way, Psyche stayed unmarried, as she wanted only to marry someone whom she truly loved. Her parents became so desperate to find a husband for her daughter that they asked for an oracle to explain to them what to do.

Eros then guided Apollo to tell Psyche's parents that Psyche would marry an ugly beast whose face she would never be able to see, and that he would wait for her at the top of the mountain.

Psyche's parents were devastated, but they nevertheless arranged the wedding of their beloved daughter to the beast.

After the wedding, Psyche was able to be with her husband only at night. His tenderness and the enormous love he showed to her made Psyche happy and fulfilled beyond her wildest expectations and dreams. She talked about her happiness with her sisters and told them how sad she was that she couldn't see his face.

Jealous of Psyche's happiness, her sisters lied and persuaded Psyche that her lover was not only an ugly beast but also a monster who would eventually kill her. They told her she needed to kill him first.

So one night, with an oil lamp and knife in her hands, Psyche prepared to kill her husband. But when she saw the face of her husband, she saw the beautiful God Eros. Caught by surprise, she spilled the oil from her lamp on his face. Eros woke up and flew away, wondering why Psyche had betrayed him.

Psyche started searching for her lost love, and finally learned that Aphrodite had imprisoned him in her castle. She begged Aphrodite to be allowed to see him. So, Aphrodite gave her three impossible tasks to accomplish to prove her love.

Driven by her desire to reunite with Eros, she was fearless. After accomplishing the first two tasks, Psyche was forced to go to the Underworld to capture a box filled with what Aphrodite

told her was the Elixir of Beauty. The box actually contained the Elixir of Sleep. When Psyche opened it, she fell into a deep slumber.

When Eros found out what had happened, he escaped from the Palace, and begged Zeus to save his Psyche. Amazed by their love, Zeus went even further – he made Psyche immortal so that two lovers could be together forever.

Pandora's Box

Epimetheus, the Titan who had been put in charge of naming the animals and caring for the Earth, asked Zeus one day to give him a companion because he was lonely. "Wolves run in packs, and birds fly in flocks; and yet I have no one!" he said. Zeus felt sorry for Epimetheus, so he created a woman to be his companion. All of the other gods gave this woman very special gifts. Artemis gave her courage, Athena gave her wisdom and kindness, and Aphrodite gave her beauty. The gods called her Pandora, which means "every gift."

Epimetheus was so pleased with his new wife that he wept with joy at the sight of her. He spent the first day with her showing her their home. "Everything I own is now yours," he lovingly said to her. As he said this, Pandora noticed a box in the corner of the room that he did not show her or even mention.

"What about that box? What is in there?" she asked.

"It is nothing that you ever need to worry about," Epimetheus kindly replied. "It does not concern you." He then made Pandora promise that she would never open or even go near the box. Although she was confused, and somewhat frightened, she agreed to his wishes. But in the back of her mind, she always wondered what was in the box. She never touched the box, and in fact, she seldom even looked at it. Yet, she could not keep her curious mind from thinking about it night and day.

One day while Epimetheus was away, Pandora was sweeping the house when she heard something calling to her from the box. "Pandora, help me, let me out!" the voice from inside the box called out to her. Because Pandora had been given kindness from the gods, Pandora rushed to the box and opened the lid to help whoever was yelling from inside.

The lid flew off with such a great force that it knocked Pandora to the ground. A swarm of creatures flew from the box and attacked Pandora, and as quickly as they had appeared, they flew away. When Epimetheus came home, he found Pandora lying, bruised and scraped on the floor. She explained what she had done and was filled with shame.

"Do not be ashamed," said Epimetheus. "I should have told you what was in the box. It is my fault. After I gave gifts to all the animals, there were horrible things left over that I felt no one deserved to have. Their names were Sorrow, Disease, Misery, and Despair. I put these things in the box in hopes that I could hide them forever. I should have known that I could not keep them, and now the world will be plagued by these evil things forever." What Pandora and Epimetheus did not realize is that lying in the box was Hope. Hope remained with the two of them, and it is Hope that we all carry with us today in order to fight against the evil things in this world.

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