

The study of the fabulous accounts which the pagans have given of their gods is called Mythology, which title is derived from a word signifying a fictitious tale. The most ancient stories that have come down to us in their entirety are those myths. The ancient pagans never thought of worshipping a supreme Creator at all, but they deified every part of the universe that appealed to their awe or their admiration. It was for this reason that the apostle Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans, said they worshipped the creature instead of the creator.

Very beautiful are those ancient myths, when considered as the expressions of ideas so poetically graceful or sublime, that all modern nations have contributed to their boundless fame. Nor are they undeserving of this general favour. The great imaginative thinkers and writers who wove garlands of immortelles around the brows of the gods were the greatest geniuses the world has ever seen. Their literary work is commensurate with their surpassing endowments, and for originality, colour, subdued passion, and pantheistic devotion, these fables defy the blighting disapproval of frigid criticism. Like the fabled fountain of the Azores, but with a more various power, the magic of their art, by interpreting to us the lessons and the mysteries of nature, leads us in higher and healthier ways than those of the world. Although mythology apparently dealt with deified personages, in reality it was only a system of Pantheism. But no sooner was the darkness of paganism dispelled by the light of Christianity, than those ingenious "hymns to the gods" lost all claim on human reverence except what they still retained as glowing descriptions of the earth and the heavens, or as unintentional tributes to the one true God.

The many attributes and properties of the sun and moon as might be expected, gave rise to various and special divinities. The heavens, that is, the atmosphere, the sky, were worshipped under the title of Zeus, or Jupiter, sometimes called Jove. They worshipped the earth under the title of Demeter, or Cybele, and the sea under the title of Neptune. The sun was worshipped by many different nations under half a hundred names, with none of which shall I cumber the text. The moon was worshipped as Diana, Juno, Athene, Luna, Io, Venus, Astarte, and various other titles. This kind of religious homage reached its climax in ancient Egypt, where almost everything was worshipped, from the bountiful Nilus to the meanest of quadrupeds. Man is a being born to believe. Voltaire, for once, spoke a profound truth when, in a burst of inspiration, he said that if we had no God we should have to invent one.

If ancient mythologies were thoroughly examined, they would, for the most part, resolve themselves into a simple, beautiful and elevating adoration of the great powers of nature; which is an indirect adoration of Almighty God. Next to Christianity, those old religious romances contain more devotional poetry than any other system of faith, to which great multitudes have rendered themselves amenable. But, as the allegory is not always perceptible to the casual glance, it may abuse no leisure if we briefly dwell upon one or two of the most remarkable myths with a view of demonstrating the intellectual quality and tenor of the whole.

The spread of corn, its mysterious growth, the constantly recurring deaths and resurrections of the flowers and foliage, as described with exquisite grace and sweetness in the tales of Ceres, Proserpine and Pluto. The amours of Jupiter and the Mountain Nymphs express, in playful and elegant terms, the condensation of vapour on the tops of hills, and the swelling of waters in the mountain streams. The fairies are striking emblems of conscience, or remorse, and very edifying figures they are. The twins that live and die by turns are only stars that rise and set alternately. The bow shape of the wandering moon made of Diana a huntress, and the cold purity of the planet connected the idea of chastity with the goddess. Apollo slaying the great serpent emblemizes the purifying powers of sunlight. The twelve labours of Hercules figure the sun passing through the twelve signs of the Zodiac, by which journey he produces the fruits of the earth. Jupiter descending in a shower of gold perfectly symbolizes the showers of sunlight falling on the willing soil. Danae is but an epithet of the earth. The Isis, whose veil may never be uplifted, and the shifting Proteus on the brown sea sand, are the figures of Nature, whose secret no wisdom or curiosity will ever resolve, and whose swift subtlety no ken of human intelligence will ever follow. All this, as we have said, is the worship of the Creator in His works, and a fitting satire on our age, wherein the greater

number of fictions that daily issue from our press are sent from expressing devotion to the Almighty that they reveal materialism, sensuality and infidelity.

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## LENT AND PASSION TIDE.

It is now more than four weeks since we entered on the penitential season of Lent, and as that holy season progresses and we approach nearer and nearer to the great feast for which we are preparing, the scenes of our Lord's Passion and Death are represented to us more vividly until we arrive at the great week (Holy Week) when every day is, so to speak, taken up with the last and most touching scenes of the great drama of Calvary.

Before Lent began, during the preparatory season of Septuagesima as well as during the Lenten season, the Church set before our minds the various stages of our Saviour's sufferings by commemorating one of them weekly. Commencing on the Tuesday (or Friday) at Septuagesima we have the "Prayer of our Lord" (in the Garden of Gethsemane) The Tuesday (or Friday) at Sexagesima, the "Sufferings of our Lord;" on the five Fridays in Lent, respectively: the Coronation of our Lord; the "Piercing of our Lord" (with the spear and nails); the "Enshrouding of our Lord" (in His most holy winding sheet); the "Wounds of our Lord," the "Compassion of our Lady." The sixth Friday of Lent is Good Friday, and of this we will speak when treating of Holy Week.

Similar to the other penitential seasons of the year there is a great divergence in the customs observed in the various parts of the world concerning the fasting during Lent. Our modern ideas and sensitiveness would be shocked if anything approaching to the fasting and abstinence formerly practised were even suggested. For many centuries the use of flesh-meat, even on Sundays, was wholly forbidden, while eggs and milk, as well as fish, were most sparingly used, on some days not at all. The use of wine was also forbidden for many centuries.

In primitive times the sole meal was taken at sun down and even Mass was not celebrated till after the canonical hour of None (3 o'clock p.m. of our time). Gradually however, this rigour was relaxed and in the present day Mass is said at the customary hour and the one full meal may be taken at midday or even a little earlier. In our day the regulations as to the quality of the food differ in different countries and dioceses, but are so much modified that any one in ordinarily good health can easily comply with them. For the sick, weak, and hardworking dispensations can be obtained, for the Church is a mother and not a tyrant, and while all are called on to do penance for their soul's sake, none are called on to injure their health and disable themselves from performing the duties of their state of life.

The number of fasting days in Lent is forty, in imitation of our Lord's forty days fast. This number has been arrived at in different ways at different periods and in different countries, but the present universal custom is to take the forty week days immediately preceding Easter Sunday, commencing on the Wednesday of the seventh week before Easter. This Wednesday is now universally known as Ash Wednesday on account of the ceremony on that day, when all the faithful approach the altar to have the sign of salvation marked on their foreheads with ashes by the priest, who bids them remember that they are but dust and unto dust shall return. On the Thursday after the Third Sunday, the twentieth fast day in Lent, is the quasi feast of *mi-carême*, a break in Lenten austerities observed in many Catholic countries, but not recognized by the Church, which postpones till the following Sunday that momentary pause in the penitential career which is intended to give a fresh impulse to the piety and devotion of the faithful, but in no way to invite them to indulgence in worldly amusements and dissipation.

The name applied to this Fourth Sunday in Lent by

(1) This is very seldom done now, in this country I never saw it done. This Sunday is a sort of departure for greater strictness and recollection, for we are approaching the awful days of Calvary.