

mass within our reach may cause difficulty, but guidance can be easily obtained, and the earlier in his course that a man habituates himself to such reading the stronger and better informed man will he be in the end.

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## LITERATURE.

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### THE MYTH OF PROMETHEUS IN HESIOD AND AESCHYLUS.

#### I.

**T**HIS is one of the most significant stories of ancient mythology. It has in a pre-eminent degree that wonderful suggestiveness which often lies in the naive creations of the young Greek mind. The figure of Prometheus opens up a boundless vista to the imagination; it is capable of being viewed in many lights, in each presenting a different aspect.

We shall content ourselves with examining how Hesiod and Aeschylus treat the story. In Hesiod the homely peasants' poet, pious, practical and rustic, we shall meet a crude old-world version of it, such as would find fit audience by the winter fire-side of Bœotian or Arcadian farms. From Aeschylus, the spokesman of a riper time and of a society so unmeasureably more keen-witted and various in its interests, we may expect a much deeper and more complete interpretation. Aeschylus is the teacher of the Athenian heroic age; the sacred bard of the men who fought at Marathon and Salamis. In him and his generation we see on the one hand, still intact, the pious faith in the gods of their fathers, whose worship was indissolubly connected with that beloved city for which they had fought and suffered, the gods whose reality and power had been made manifest to the blindest in the miraculous triumph of so small a people over the countless hordes of Asia; in perfect harmony with this on the other hand the full pulse of a heightened intellectual and moral life which impels irresistibly towards the search after hidden meanings, the reconciliation of inconsistencies, the removal or transfiguration by allegorical interpretations of unworthiness in the received traditions concerning gods and heroes. This attitude to the popular faith, at once reverent and critical, though as yet we might say only instinctively and half-consciously critical, is an outstanding characteristic of Aeschylus and is well-illustrated, as we shall see, in his treatment of the story of Prometheus.

Hesiod's narrative brings before us in lively colours that suspicious awe with which early man (and rural man down to comparatively recent times) regards his own conquests over nature. It seems as if every new step in mastery over his surroundings were an added offence against the gods, on

whom he appears thereby to become less and less dependent. There are various other expressions of this feeling in Greek Mythology and elsewhere. Take for instance the legend of Otus and Ephialtes as Homer tells it. They represent one great upward step in the development of man—the change from the pastoral to the agricultural stage. Puny at first, they grow to gigantic stature, being nourished by the grain-giving earth. They bind Ares and all but succeed in keeping him permanently imprisoned. That is to say war is checked and curtailed by the peaceful pursuits of the husbandman. The spear tends to be turned into a pruning-hook. So mighty do they grow that they pile Pelion on Ossa and threaten to climb up into Olympus and make themselves masters of the gods' bliss. But ere they have come to their full strength they are slain by the arrows of Apollo. Compare with this the preference given to the offering of Abel, the shepherd, over that of Cain, the husbandman, as well as the more obvious parallel of the tower of Babel.

Prometheus, too, the fore-seer, is for Hesiod the representative of that inventive spirit in man which passes so readily into self-sufficiency and forgetfulness of his essential dependence on the helps of heaven. He belongs to the race of the Titans, the wild powers which Zeus had to overthrow before he could establish his beneficent and ordered rule. For Zeus, who represents to Hesiod and all Greeks the perfect order of the Universe, is not from everlasting. There was a time when he was not. Kronos and the Titans were before him. Here, then, we are met by a certain crude conception of development in the old Theogony. There were, according to it, several ascending stages in the history of the world and its rulers. The more perfect is always preceded by the more imperfect order, and the transition is always effected by violence. It is only by the conquest and destruction of the lower that the higher can assert itself. Zeus then has a fierce and prolonged warfare to wage before he can finally triumph over and hurl his Titan enemies into the depths of Tartarus. And among the most irreconcilable of these enemies are the father of Prometheus, Iapetus (from *ἰάπτω* to fling), his brothers Menoitios (he who shrinks not from doom), and Atlas (the enduring one), personifications of the rebellious passions and defiant endurance of mankind, as Prometheus himself represents its pride of intellect. He has another brother, or we might say a double, Epimetheus, who is the symbol of the intellect of man on its weaker side. As Prometheus is the man "wise before the event," so Epimetheus is "wise after the event."

In thorough harmony with his descent and connections is the part which Prometheus plays in the