

was a prize at the Olympic Games, and these games were held, not merely as a popular amusement or as a means of enabling gamblers to plunder each other, or rogues to obtain more free and easy access to the pockets of simpletons, but as a solemn religious festival at which the wealthiest and noblest thought it an honour to assist, and by which Olympian Jupiter was thought to be especially propitiated. Similar honours were paid at Cirrha to Apollo and at Corinth to Neptune. Gymnastic contests were thought always pleasing to the gods, and were therefore held in connection with the most solemn ceremonies both of mourning and thanksgiving. The gods themselves were supposed to recognize the law of strength as the basis of their polity. Like men they arranged themselves according to a table of precedence in which each individual's place was determined by his abilities for personal combat as compared with those of his neighbours. Jupiter gains his throne by a forcible revolution, defends it successfully against the attacks of the Titans, and afterwards rules the gods by main strength, keeping them in pretty good order among themselves though they always display an interest in terrestrial brawls and a strong propensity to take part in them. He puts Juno in irons for disobedience, and hurls Vulcan bodily out of heaven for trying to set her free. When he prohibits the gods from interfering in the warfare between the Greeks and Trojans, he informs them that those who dare to meddle shall be smitten with divine lightning and chained in Tartarean dungeons, and that they may not consider this an empty menace, he reminds them in homely terms that he is strong enough to put it in execution.⁽¹⁾ But the attractions of force and contention prove stronger than the terrors of thunderbolts and Tartarus. The celestials do repeatedly take part in the strife, and at last when the frantic butcheries of Achilles choking the Xanthus with corpses have intensified the interest to its highest pitch, divine enthusiasm can no longer be retained, and the immortals in ecstasies of excitement commence among themselves a free fight which is unsurpassed by anything in the buffooneries of Burnand or Offenbach. Mars bullies Minerva who replies by knocking him down with a stone and then with a single blow of her fist floors Venus who attempts to come to his assistance. Neptune in the true spirit of Donnybrook *begs* Apollo to come on, observing that since the row has commenced it will be positively disgraceful for them to refrain from taking part in it; the Pythian declines the invitation, not from any sense of what is due to his dignity, but because he fears that if he accepts he will be very likely to get the worst of it. Juno snatches Diana's bow from her hands and boxes her ears with it, while Jove upon his pinnacle laughs joyously at the uproar like a big boy diverting himself with watching a fight between smaller ones, which he knows that he can terminate when he gets tired of it by knocking the heads of the combatants together.⁽²⁾ We may smile at such scenes as these, but the ancient Greeks and Romans saw in them nothing ridiculous. To their apprehensions it was perfectly natural

(1) *Iliad* VIII, 1-25. (2) *Iliad* XXI-V. 380-510.