

TERTULLIAN

A FRAGMENT CONCERNING THE EXECRABLE GODS OF THE HEATHEN.

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So great blindness has fallen on the Roman race, that they call their enemy Lord, and preach the filcher of blessings as being their very giver, and to him they give thanks. They call those (deities), then, by human names, not by their own, for their own names they know not. That they are daemons they understand: but they read histories of the old kings, and then, though they see that their character was mortal, they honour them with a deific name.

As for him whom they call Jupiter, and think to be the highest god, when he was born the years (that had elapsed) from the foundation of the world to him were some three thousand. He is born in Greece, from Saturnus and Ops; and, for fear he should be killed by his father (or else, if it is lawful to say so, should be begotten anew), is by the advice of his mother carried down into Crete, and reared in a cave of Ida; is concealed from his father's search) by (the aid of) Cretans--born men!--rattling their arms; sucks a she-goat's dugs; flays her; clothes himself in her hide; and (thus) uses his own nurse's hide, after killing her, to be sure, with his own hand! but he sewed thereon three golden tassels worth the price of an hundred oxen each, as their author Homer relates, if it is fair to believe it. This Jupiter, in adult age, waged war several years with his father; overcame him; made a parricidal raid on his home; violated his virgin sisters; selected one of them in marriage; drave his father by dint of arms. The remaining scenes, moreover, of that act have been recorded. Of other folks' wives, or else of violated virgins, he begat him sons; defiled freeborn boys; oppressed peoples lawlessly with despotic and kingly sway. The father, whom they erringly suppose to have been the original god, was ignorant that this (son of his) was lying concealed in Crete; the son, again, whom they believe the mightier god, knows not that the father whom himself had banished is lurking in Italy. If he was in heaven, when would he not see what was doing in Italy? For the Italian land is "not in a corner." And yet, had he been a god, nothing ought to have escaped

him. But that he whom the Italians call Saturnus did lurk there, is clearly evidenced on the face of it, from the fact that from his lurking the Hesperian tongue is to this day called Latin, as likewise their author Virgil relates. (Jupiter,) then, is said to have been born on earth, while (Saturnus his father) fears lest he be driven by him from his kingdom, and seeks to kill him as being his own rival, and knows not that he has been stealthily carried off, and is in hiding; and afterwards the son-god pursues his father, immortal seeks to slay immortal (is it credible?), and is disappointed by an interval of sea, and is ignorant of (his quarry's) flight; and while all this is going on between two gods on earth, heaven is deserted. No one dispensed the rains, no one thundered, no one governed all this mass of world. For they cannot even say that their action and wars took place in heaven; for all this was going on on Mount Olympus in Greece. Well, but heaven is not called Olympus, for heaven is heaven.

These, then, are the actions of theirs, which we will treat of first--nativity, lurking, ignorance, parricide, adulteries, obscenities--things committed not by a god, but by most impure and truculent human beings; beings who, had they been living in these days, would have lain under the impeachment of all laws--laws which are far more just and strict than their actions. "He drave his father by dint of arms." The Falcidian and Sempronian law would bind the parricide in a sack with beasts. "He violated his sisters." The Papinian law would punish the outrage with all penalties, limb by limb. "He invaded others' wedlock." The Julian law would visit its adulterous violator capitally. "He defiled freeborn boys." The Cornelian law would condemn the crime of transgressing the sexual bond with novel severities, sacrilegiously guilty as it is of a novel union. This being is shown to have had no divinity either, for he was a human being; his father's flight escaped him. To this human being, of such a character, to so wicked a king, so obscene and so cruel, God's honour has been assigned by men. Now, to be sure, if on earth he were born and grew up through the advancing stages of life's periods, and in it committed all these evils, and yet is no more in it, what is thought (of him) but that he is dead? Or else does foolish error think wings were born him in his old age, whence to fly heavenward? Why, even this may possibly find credit among men bereft of sense, if indeed they believe, (as they do,) that he turned into a swan, to beget the Castors; an eagle, to contaminate Ganymede; a bull, to violate Europa; gold, to violate Danae; a horse,

to beget Pirithous; a goat, to beget Egyppa from a she-goat; a Satyr, to embrace Antiope. Beholding these adulteries, to which sinners are prone, they therefore easily believe that sanctions of misdeed and of every filthiness are borrowed from their reigned god. Do they perceive how void of amendment are the rest of his career's acts which can find credit, which are indeed true, and which, they say, he did without self transformation? Of Semele, he begets Liber; of Latona, Apollo and Diana; of Maia, Mercury; of Alcmena, Hercules. But the rest of his corruptions, which they themselves confess, I am unwilling to record, lest turpitude, once buried, be again called to men's ears. But of these few (offsprings of his) I have made mention; off-springs whom in their error they believe to be themselves, too, gods--born, to wit, of an incestuous father; adulterous births, supposititious births. And the living, eternal God, of sempiternal divinity, prescient of futurity, immeasurable, they have dissipated (into nothing, by associating Him) with crimes so unspeakable.