



HEPHAESTUS, the god of smiths and fire, was the son of Zeus and Hera. He was a hard-working, peace-loving god and was very fond of his mother. Often he tried to soothe her temper with gentle words. Once he had even dared to step between his quarreling parents. He sided with Hera, and that made Zeus so angry that he seized his son by the legs and flung him out of Olympus. For a whole day, Hephaestus hurtled through the air. In the evening he fell on the island of Lemnos, with a thump so hard that the island shook. Thetis, a gentle sea goddess, found him all broken and bruised. She bound his wounds and nursed him back to health.

Zeus forgave him and Hephaestus returned to Olympus, but ever after, he walked like a flickering flame. His body was big and strong and his hands were wonderfully skilled, but his weak legs could not support him for long. He built for himself two robots of gold and silver to help him about. They had mechanical brains and could think for themselves. They even could speak with their tongues of silver. They also served him as helpers in his workshop on Olympus. It was there that Hephaestus made the twelve golden thrones of the gods and their marvelous weapons, chariots, and jewels.

He also had forges inside volcanoes on earth. His helpers there were the one-eyed Cyclopes. They worked his bellows and swung his heavy hammers. When Hephaestus was at work, the din of the hammers could be heard for miles and sparks flew out of the tops of the mountains.

All the Olympian gods were fond of Hephaestus and often went to his forge to admire his work. When Aphrodite, his lovely wife, came to his workshop to look at the matchless jewels he was fashioning for her, she daintily lifted her trailing garments out of the soot.