



HERMES, merriest of the Olympians, was the god of shepherds, travelers, merchants, thieves, and all others who lived by their wits.

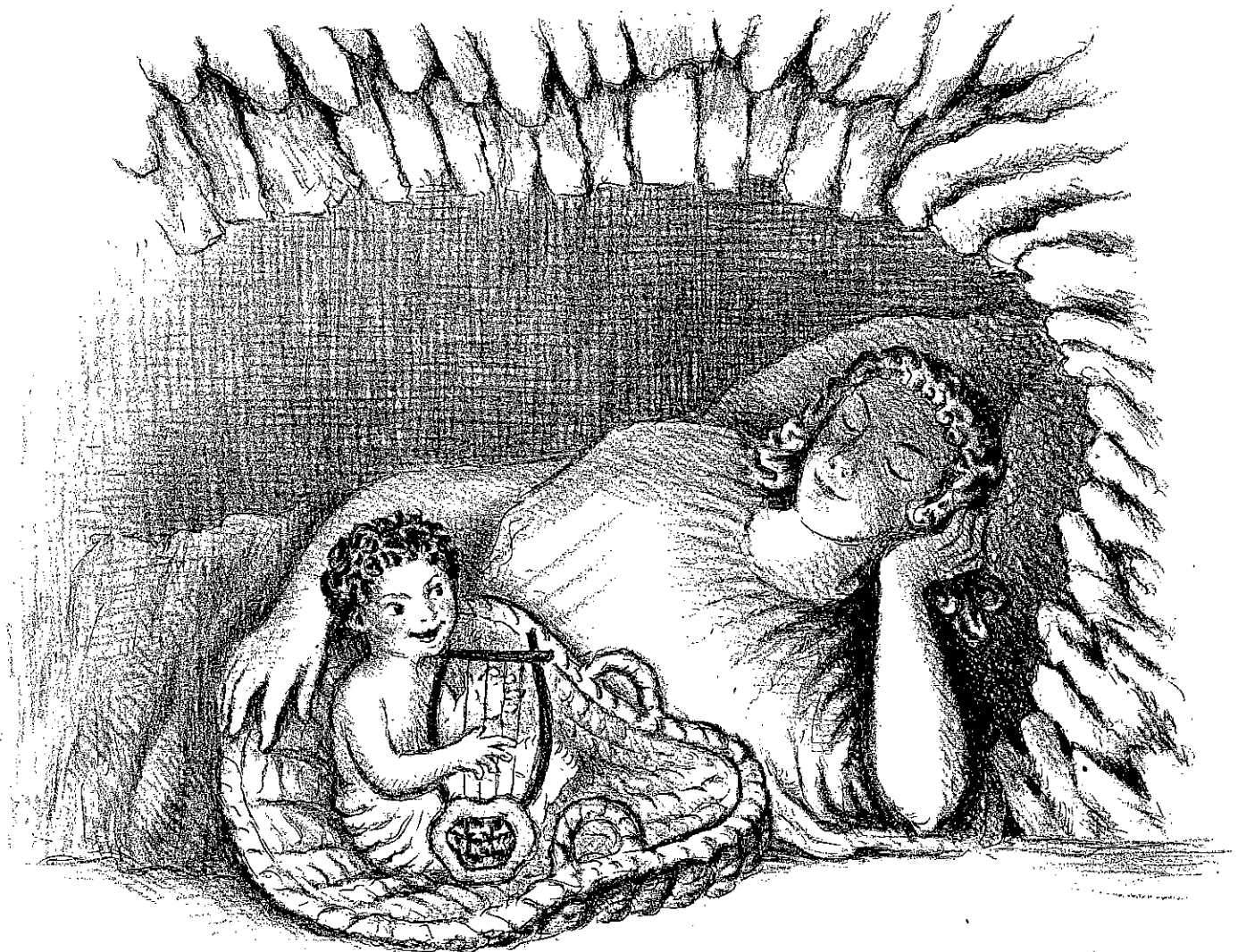
His mother Maia, a Titan's daughter, lived in a cave on lofty Mount Cyllene, a cave so deep that Hera never knew that Maia was one of Zeus's wives. Maia had therefore borne her son Hermes in peace.

Hermes was very precocious, even for a god. His mother had hardly wrapped him and put him into a basket when he began to think of mischief. As soon as she had fallen asleep, he wriggled out of his wrappings and tiptoed out of the cave. In the dark of night he toddled straight to the pasture where Apollo kept a large herd of white cows. Apollo liked music better than cows and he did not even notice that Hermes stole into the pasture and picked out the fifty best cows. To keep Apollo from knowing who had stolen his herd and which way they had been driven, Hermes slyly wrapped the hoofs of the cows with bark to disguise their prints, and tied brooms to their tails so they would erase their own tracks. To confuse Apollo even further, he drove the cows backward out of the pasture, and tied bundles of branches to his own little feet so it looked as if a giant had led something into the pasture, but nothing out. He hurried home to

Mount Cyllene and hid the stolen cows in a grove. Two of them he sacrificed to the twelve Olympian gods, not forgetting to include himself as the twelfth! Then he took the entrails of the sacrificed cows, made seven strings of them, and strung them tautly across an empty tortoise shell. When he plucked the strings, they made lovely music. He had invented the first lyre. Pleased with himself, he hid the lyre under his arm and tiptoed back into the cave. He climbed into his basket, closed his eyes, and pretended to be sound asleep, but he did not fool his mother. She knew what he had been up to.

“Shame on you,” she said, “sneaking out at night and stealing Apollo’s cows.”

“Why, Mother!” said Hermes. “I did what I had to do for you and for me. We don’t want to live in this dark cave forever. Soon I will be seated on high Olympus as one of the twelve great gods, and you too will live there in glory as my mother.” Then he pulled out his lyre and played his mother to sleep with a lullaby.



At dawn Apollo stormed into the cave where Hermes lay in his basket pretending to be asleep. But Apollo wasn't fooled. An oracle had told him who had stolen his herd, and he jerked little Hermes out of his crib and commanded him to return the cows at once.

"How could I have stolen your cows?" Hermes whimpered, "I am only a newborn babe. I don't even know what a cow is. Look for yourself and you can see that there is not a single cow hidden in this cave."

"You are not only a thief but a liar as well," raged Apollo, and chased Hermes out of the cave and straight up to Olympus.

All the gods burst out laughing when they saw innocent-looking little Hermes running with furious Apollo at his heels.

"Tell this thief and liar to give me back my cows at once," said Apollo to their father, Zeus.

"Tell my big brother to stop bullying me. I am a newborn and helpless infant. And I am *not* a liar," said Hermes. "There isn't a cow in my mother's cave."

"If they are not in the cave, then show Apollo where they are," said Zeus, and hid a smile in his beard. He was proud of both his sons and wanted them to be friends.

Hermes had to obey his father, and without any more tricks he led his brother to the woods where the cows were hidden. Apollo forgave him, but when he counted his cows and found that two were missing, his anger flared again. Hermes had expected this and quickly pulled out his lyre and began to play. Apollo listened spellbound to the beautiful sounds from the new musical instrument, and he quite forgot his anger. As the god of music, he must have the lyre and he offered Hermes his whole herd in exchange for the instrument.

Hermes drove a hard bargain and Apollo had to give him his magic wand as well. From then on the two brothers were the best of friends.

Never again did Hermes steal, though he was the god of thieves. He never told a lie, but he didn't always tell the whole truth. His mother, Maia, had no further reasons to be ashamed of him. As the mother of one of the twelve great Olympians, she moved up with him to the glory of Olympus.

Zeus was so delighted with Hermes' ready wit that he made him the herald of the gods. He gave him a golden hat with wings, a pair of winged sandals, and a cape under which he could hide his magic tricks. In a flash

