



Son of Zeus, god of trickery; as an infant was already clever and scheming

Hermes

Chapter 2

Presently, when Hermes tired of his new toy, he laid it in his cradle and slipped forth again to get into some real mischief. Just as the sun was going down, he found a mountain side where a great herd of snow-white cattle grazed, the cattle of the sun. Fifty of these the baby god of thieves separated from the herd and began to drive away, down past the sandy river bed to the hard ground beyond, where it would be more difficult to trace their footprints. To make all safe, with much shouting and running, he turned the cattle and forced them to walk backwards through the sandy place so that Apollo might think they were coming to, not going from, their pasture. To conceal his own footprints from the god, he tied branches, leaves and all, under his feet, making great, shuffling tracks, as though someone had been sweeping the sand with a broom.

In spite of all his cunning he did not get away unseen, for an old man working in a vineyard looked up in wonder as the baby god came past. Hermes had his hands full at the time. He was hurrying to get the cattle away before the sun found out they were gone. Consequently he merely called out to the man and promised him good crops if he would keep silent. Then he raced off after the cattle, letting the old man think what he would.

Hermes drove the herd to a distant meadow by a river and penned them there. He killed two of them in sacrifice to the twelve gods of Olympus, thinking perhaps that before very long he might be in trouble and need the Olympians' aid. Then he hurried back to his home, stole silently into the hall, and jumped into his cradle. There he covered himself up and tried to look like an innocent little baby, though with the left hand he still kept fingering his lyre beneath the clothes.