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We normally try to present articles that either inform about the metal casting industry or provide value to senior management. This time we thought it would be fun to take a look at two patrons of the metal casting industry – the mythical Roman god Vulcan and the Roman Catholic patron saint of metal casting, St. Eligius. It would be hard to find two more different patrons.

VULCAN

Vulcan is the Roman re-incarnation of the Greek god, Hephaestus. Most of the Roman gods were Greek gods renamed and slightly revised. What we know of the Roman and Greek gods was not documented until writing was developed about 1,000 B.C.E. Before then, poets were the reservoirs of history. They recited long poems and told them at festivals, major gatherings and weddings. The poems were first notably documented by Homer in 800 B.C.E. when he wrote the epic poem, the Iliad. Much of Vulcan's history was really Greek history but we will use the Roman god names. When we first introduce them, we will provide the Greek name as well.

If you've ever been to Birmingham, Alabama, you may have had the opportunity to visit Vulcan Park on Red Mountain. The focus of the park is a 56 foot tall iron statue of Vulcan perched on top a 124 foot concrete pedestal. At 101,200 pounds this is the largest iron statue ever made. Vulcan was sculpted by New York City artist Giuseppe Moretti on behalf of Birmingham for the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. He was to originally be 50 feet tall but when Birmingham learned that a pagan Buddha in Tokyo was 52 feet tall, they made Vulcan four feet taller. Vulcan was cast by the Birmingham Iron and Steel Company, an early McWane Company. In 1905, the statue was dismantled and returned to Birmingham where a dispute arose on where to place him. The problem was, Vulcan is virtually naked. He finally was erected at the Alabama State Fairgrounds where he stayed for almost thirty years. Mr. Moretti wasn't there to supervise his reconstruction and his left hand was turned the wrong way. It had to be supported with a timber

and he couldn't hold his spear. He could, however, hold other various objects for advertising purposes such as a giant ice cream cone, a pickle sign and a Coke bottle. Vulcan was painted with a giant pair of Liberty overalls for modesty's sake. In 1936, Vulcan was moved to Red Mountain as part of a WPA project. Red Mountain is a most appropriate name since the red color of the soil is due to its high iron content. The hollow statue was filled to the shoulders with concrete to help anchor it in place, a big mistake. In 1946, safety minded citizens replaced his spear with a cone shaped lighted beacon. The light glowed green on days when there were no deaths in auto accidents and red when there were. In 1999, the incompatible expansion and contraction of the concrete filling and the iron shell caused cracking and deterioration. The statue was dismantled and sent to Robinson Iron, Alexander City, Alabama, for repair. Robinson has an iron foundry history that predates the Civil War. Joe Robinson, a leader in the modern foundry industry, made sure to tell us on our first visit from the North that Yankees had burned is great-great grandfather's foundry to the ground for making cannons for the Army of the South during the Civil War (or War Between the States, if you're from south of the Mason-Dixon line).

Birmingham's Vulcan heroic statue is magnificent but historically inaccurate. You see, Vulcan was a cripple. Some poets even describe him as a crippled dwarf. Vulcan was the son of Jupiter (Greek: Zeus) and Juno (Greek: Hera). He was born crippled and the poets disagree on which parent threw him out of heaven. When the gods throw someone out, they throw them out. It took a full day for Vulcan to fall from heaven to earth. Some poets say he was thrown by Hera because he was crippled. Some say he was thrown by Jupiter because Jupiter doubted he was Vulcan's father. While Hera was noted for being relatively faithful, Jupiter was a notorious philanderer. One version is that Vulcan was Hera's retribution for Jupiter's straying. We tend to think Hera threw him out based on later events.

Vulcan landed on the island of Lemnos where he was raised by nymphs. These knowledgeable nymphs taught him metal working. Vulcan was a very talented metal worker who was also blessed by being the son of gods. Vulcan is credited with making fresh thunderbolts for Jupiter, a helmet for Pluto that caused invisibility, a trident for Neptune that shook both earth and sea, a brass dog for Jupiter that performed the functions of nature and the divine armor of Achilles (except, of course for his heel). Vulcan's most notable creation, however, was a golden throne for Hera. When she sat in it, she was immediately entrapped by a very fine golden mesh and unable to get free. Vulcan initially refused to free her leading us to think it may have been Hera who threw him out of heaven. Bacchus, the noted god of wine and partying, took Vulcan out drinking and got him very drunk. Even inebriated, Vulcan was no fool. He agreed to free Hera if Venus (Greek: Aphrodite) would be made his wife. Venus, of course, is the beautiful goddess of sexual love. The poets don't tell us if this was a happy marriage or not but they do tell us that Venus lived up to her name and slept with a number of other gods. Vulcan did not take well to her adventures and frequently took revenge. The lesson to Vulcan may be to be careful what you wish for. The lesson to mortals may be to make sure your mistress's husband can't make thunderbolts. Venus was not Vulcan's first choice for a wife. Earlier, after receiving Jupiter's approval, he approached Minerva to court her. Minerva, however, decided that a life of perpetual virginity was preferable to being married to Vulcan. Vulcan seems to have married Venus on the rebound.

Vulcan was both a respected and feared god. You see, he was also the god of destructive fire. A number of temples were built to Vulcan most notably one by the citizens of Rome. All of the temples to Vulcan were built outside the city walls. No one wanted the god of destructive fire within the city walls. Their respect for him was so great, however, that most important civic meetings were held in Vulcan's temple. Romans believed there was nothing more sacred to confirm their treatises and decisions than the avenging fire of which Vulcan was the symbol. It was the custom of

several nations, after gaining a victory, to pile the enemy's weapons on the field of battle and destroy them with fire in homage to Vulcan.

Worship of the Roman gods ended fairly quickly in the fourth century when the Roman Empire declared Christianity the official religion and banned worship of the old gods.

ST. ELIGIUS

While Vulcan was a mythical god with tremendous powers, St. Eligius was a real person who dedicated himself to helping mankind. Eligius was born about 590 C.E. to Roman parents Eucherius and Terrigia. His father recognized a talent for metal working in his son and sent him to work for the noted goldsmith Abbo who was master of the mint at Limoges. He did well there and later went to Neustria where he worked for the royal treasurer, Babo. Babo recommended Eligius to King Clotaire II to make a throne of gold adorned with precious stones. His honesty in this effort so pleased the king he took him into his household and appointed him master of the mint at Marseilles. After the death of Clotaire in 629, King Dagobert appointed Eligius his chief counselor. His fame spread rapidly and ambassadors first paid their respects to Eligius before meeting with the king. His influence was greatly enhanced when he convinced the Breton King Judicail to submit to Frankish authority. Eligius used this success to his advantage to obtain alms for the poor and to ransom slaves arriving in Marsaille from Italy, Gaul, Breton, Germany and Spain. Eligius went on to establish several monasteries. With the king's consent, he sent servants to take down the bodies of criminals who had been executed and give them a decent burial. The practice, until that time, had been to allow the bodies to hang until animals had picked the bones clean.

Eligius never married. He was a source of edification at the court, where he lived with his friend Dado according to Irish monastic rule. Eligius introduced this rule of living, either entirely or in part, into the monastery of Solignac which he founded in 632 and into a convent in Paris where

three hundred virgins were housed. Eligius built the basilica of St. Paul and restored that of St. Martial in Paris. He erected several fine churches in honor of the relics of St. Martin of Tours, the national saint of the Franks, and St. Denis, who was Dagobert's chosen saint.

Upon the death of Dagobert in 639, Queen Nanthilde took the reins of government. We don't know why, but Eligius and Dado decided to leave the court and become priests. On May 13, 640, Eligius was made the Bishop of Noyon-Tournai with the unanimous agreement of the clergy and people. His diocese was on the outskirts of Christian territories being populated mostly by pagan Flemings, Antwerpians, Frisians, Suevi and barbarian tribes along the coast. Eligius went on to find religious relics including the body of St. Quentin and St. Piatius and companions. In his own city of Noyon he built and endowed another monastery for virgins. Eligius seems to have had issues with sexuality and virginity. Eligius died on December 1, 660, and was buried in Noyon. There is in existence a sermon written by him in which he combats the pagan practices of his time, a homily on the last judgment and a letter written by him to Bishop Desiderius of Cahors where he begs for prayers. There are other homilies attributed to him but are of doubtful authenticity.