Saltus Edgar

# Historia Amoris: A History of Love, Ancient and Modern

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**Saltus E.**

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# Содержание

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# Historia Amoris: A History of Love, Ancient and Modern

## PART I

## I
## SUPER FLUMINA BABYLONIS

The first created thing was light. Then life came, then death. In between was fear. But not love. Love was absent. In Eden there was none. Adam and Eve emerged there adult. The phases of the delicate fever which others in paradise since have experienced, left them unaffected. Instead of the reluctances and attractions, the hesitancies and aspirations, the preliminary and common conflagrations which are the beginnings, as they are also the sacraments, of love, abruptly they were one. They were married before they were mated.

The union, entirely allegoric – a Persian conceit – differed, otherwise, only in the poetry of the accessories from that which elsewhere actually occurred.

Primitive man was necessarily speechless, probably simian, and certainly hideous. Women, if possible more hideous still, were joined by him momentarily and immediately forgot. Ultimately, into the desolate poverty of the rudimentary brain there crept a novelty. The novelty was an idea. Women were detained, kept in lairs, made to serve there. Further novelties ensuing, creatures that had learned from birds to talk passed from animality. Subsequent progress originated in a theory that they were very clearly entitled to whatever was not taken away from them. From that theory all institutions proceed, primarily that of family.

In the beginning of things woman was common property. With individual ownership came the necessity of defence. Man defended woman against even herself. He beat her, stoned her, killed her. From the massacre of myriads, constancy resulted. With it came the home: a hut in a forest, a fort on a hill, in the desert a tent, yet, wherever situated, surrounded by foes. The foes were the elements. In the thunderclap was their anger. In the rustle of leaves their threats. They were placatable, however. They could be appeased, as human beings are, by giving them something. Usually the gift was the sacrifice of whatever the owner cared for most; in later days it was love, pleasure, sense, but in these simpler times, when humanity knew nothing of pleasure, less of love, and had no sense, when the dominant sensation was fright, when every object had its spectre, it was accomplished by the immolation of whatever the individual would have liked to have had given to him. As intelligence developed, distinctions necessarily arose between the animate and the inanimate, the imaginary and the real. Instead of attributing a malignant spirit to every element, the forces of nature were conglomerated, the earth became an object of worship, the sun another, that being insufficient they were united in nuptials from which the gods were born – demons from whom descended kings that were sons of heaven and sovereigns of the world.

In the process, man, who had begun by being a brute, succeeded in becoming a lunatic only to develop into a child. The latter evolution was, at the time, remote. Only lunatics abounded. But lunatics may dream. These did. Their conceptions produced after-effects curiously profound, widely disseminated, which, first elaborated by Chaldæan seers, Nineveh emptied into Babylon.

Babylon, Queen of the Orient, beckoned by Semiramis out of myth, was made by her after her image. That image was passion. The city, equivocal and immense, brilliant as the sun, a lighthouse in the surrounding night, was a bazaar of beauty. From the upper reaches of the Euphrates, through great gates that were never closed, Armenia poured her wines where already Nineveh had emptied her rites. In the conjunction were festivals that magnetized the stranger from afar. At the very gates Babylon yielded to him her daughters. He might be a herder, a bedouin, a bondman; indifferently the voluptuous city embraced him, lulled him with the myrrh and cassia of her caresses, sheltering him and all others that came in the folds of her monstrous robe.

In emptying rites into this furnace Nineveh also projected her gods, the princes of the Chaldæan sky, the lords of the ghostland, that, in patient perversities, her seers had devised. Four thousand of them Babylon swallowed, digested, reproduced. Some were nebulous, some were saurian, many were horrible, all were impure. But, chiefly, there was Ishtar. Semiramis conquered the world. Ishtar set it on fire.

Ishtar, whom St. Jerome generically and graphically described as the Dea Meretrix, was known in Babylon as Mylitta. Gesenius, Schrader, Münter, particularly Quinet, have told of the mysteries, Asiatically monstrous, naïvely displayed, through which she passed, firing the trade routes with the flame of her face, adding Tyrian purple and Arabian perfumes to her incandescent robe, trailing it from shore to shore, enveloping kingdoms and satrapies in her fervid embrace, burning them with the fever of her kisses, burning them so thoroughly, to such ashes, that to-day barely the memory of their names endures; multiplying herself meanwhile, lingering there where she had seemed to pass, developing from a goddess into a pantheon, becoming Astarte in Syria, Tanit in Carthage, Ashtaroth in Canaan, Anaïtis in Armenia, yet remaining always love, or, more exactly, what was love in those days.

In Babylon, fronting her temple was a grove in which were dove-cotes, cisterns, conical stones – the emblems of her worship. Beyond were little tents before which girls sat, chapleted with cords, burning bran for perfume, awaiting the will of the first that put a coin in their lap and in the name of the goddess invited them to her rites. Acceptance was obligatory. It was obligatory on all women to stop in the grove at least once. Herodotus, from whom these details are taken, said that the sojourn of those that were fair was brief, but others less favored lingered vainly, insulted by the former as they left.[1]

Herodotus is father of history; perhaps too, father of lies. But later Strabo substantiated his story. There is anterior evidence in the Bible. There is antecedent testimony on a Nineveh brick. There is the further corroboration of Justinus, of St. Augustin, and of Eusebius regarding similar rites in Armenia, in Phœnicia, in Syria, wherever Ishtar passed.[2]

The forms of the ceremony and the duration of it varied, but the worship, always the same, was identical with that of the Hindu bayaderes, the Kama-dasi, literally servants of love, more exactly servants of lust, who, for hire, yielded themselves to any comer, and whose dishonorarium the clergy took.

From Phœnicia the worship passed to Greece. Among local articles of commerce were girls with whom the Phœnicians furnished harems. One of their agencies was at Cythera. From the adjacent waters Venus was rumored to have emerged. The rumor had truth for basis. But the emergence occurred in the form of a stone brought there on a Phœnician galley. The fact, cited by Maximus Tyrius, numismatics confirm. On the old coins of Paphos it was as a stone that Venus appeared, a stone emblematic and phallic, similar to those that stood in the Babylon grove.

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[1] Herodotus, I., 199.

[2] Strabo, XVI., xi., 532. Baruch, VI. Justinus, XVIII. St. Augustin: Civit. Dei, IV., 10. Eusebius: Vita Constantini, III., 53-56. *Cf.* Juvenal, Satir. 9: Nam quo non prostat femina templo?

Venus was even otherwise Phœnician. In Semitic speech girls were called *benoth*, and at Carthage the tents in which the worship occurred were termed *succoth benoth*. In old texts B was frequently changed to V. From benoth came venoth and the final theta being pronounced, as was customary, like sigma, venos resulted and so appears on a Roman medal, that of Julia Augusta, wife of Septimius Severus, where Venus is written Venos.

Meanwhile on the banks of the Indus the stone reappeared. Posterior to the Vedic hymns, it is not mentioned in them. Instead is the revelation of a being purer than purity, excelling excellence, dwelling apart from life, apart from death, ineffably in the solitudes of space. He alone was. The gods were not yet. They, the earth, the sky, the forms of matter and of man, slept in the depths of the ideal, from which at his will they arose. That will was love. The *Mahabhârata* is its history.

There, succeeding the clamor of primal life, come the songs of shepherds, the footfall of apsaras, the murmur of rhapsodies, of kisses and harps. The pages turn to them. Then follow eremites in their hermitages, rajahs in their palaces, chiefs in their chariots, armies of elephants and men, seas of blood, gorgeous pomps, gigantic flowers, marvels and enchantments. Above, on thrones of lotos and gold, are the serene and apathetic gods, limitless in power, complete in perfection, unalterable in felicity, needing nothing, having all. Evil may not approach them. Nonexistent in infinity, evil is circumscribed within the halls of time. The appanage of the gods was love, its revelation light.

That light must have been too pure. Subsequent theology decomposed it. In its stead was provided a glare intolerably crude that disclosed divinities approachable in deliriums of disorder, in unions from which reason had fled, to which love could not come, and on which, in a sort of radiant imbecility, idols semi-Chaldæan, polycephalous, hundred-armed, obese, monstrous, revolting, stared with unseeing eyes.

In the Vedas there is much that is absurd and more that is puerile. The *Mahabhârata* is a fairy-tale, interminable and very dull. But in none of these works is there any sanction of the pretensions of a priesthood to degrade. It was in the name of waters that slake, of fire that purifies, of air that regenerates, of gods dwelling not in images but in infinity, that love was invoked. It was in poetry, not in perversions, that marriage occurred. In the Laws of Manu marriage is defined as the union of celestial musicians, – music then as now being regarded as the food of love.

The Buddhist Scriptures contain passages that were said to charm the birds and beasts. In the Vedas there are passages which, if a soudra overheard, the ignominy of his caste was abolished. The poetry that resided in them, a poetry often childish, but primal, preceding the Pentateuch, purer than it, chronologically anterior to Chaldæan aberrations, Brahmanism deformed into rites that sanctified vice and did so, on a theory common to many faiths, that the gods demand the surrender of whatever is most dear, if it be love that must be sacrificed, if it be decency that must be renounced. The latter refinement which Chaldæa invented, and India retained, Judæa reviled.

# II
# THE CURTAINS OF SOLOMON

In the deluge women must have been swept wholly away. If not, then they became beings to whom genealogy was indifferent. The long list of Noah's descendants, which Genesis provides, contains no mention of them. When ultimately they reappear, their consistency is that of silhouettes. It is as though they belonged to an inferior order. Historically they did.

Woman was not honored in Judæa. The patriarch was chieftain and priest. His tent was visited by angels, occasionally by creatures less beatific. In spite of the terrible pomps that surrounded the advent of the decalogue, there subsisted for his eternal temptation the furnace of Moloch and Baal's orgiastic nights. These things – in themselves corruptions of Chaldæan ceremonies – woman personified. Woman incarnated sin. It was she who had invented it. To Ecclesiasticus, the evil of man excelled her virtue. To Moses, she was dangerously impure. In Leviticus, her very birth was a shame. To Solomon, she was more bitter than death. As a consequence, the attitude of woman generally was as elegiac as that of Jephthah's daughter. When she appeared it was but to vanish. In betrothals there was but a bridegroom that asked and a father that gave. The bride was absent or silent. As a consequence, also, the heroine was rare. Of the great nations of antiquity, Israel produced fewer notable women than any other. Yet, that, it may be, was by way of precaution, in order to reserve the strength of a people for the presentation of one who, transcending all, was to reign in heaven to the genuflections of the earth.

Meanwhile, conjointly with Baal and Moloch, Ishtar – known locally as Ashtaroth – circumadjacently ruled. At a period when these abstractions were omnipresent, when their temples were thronged, when their empires seemed built for all time, the Hebrew prophets, who continuously reviled them, foretold that they would pass and with them the gods, dogmas, states that they sustained. So promptly were the prophecies fulfilled that they must have sounded like the heraldings of the judgment of God. But it may be that foreknowledge of the future rested on a consciousness of the past.

There, in the desert, had stood a bedouin preparing the tenets of a creed; in the remoter past a shadow in which there was lightning, then the splendor of the first dawn where the future opened like a book, and, in that grammar of the eternal, the promise of an age of gold. Through the echo of succeeding generations came the rumor of the impulse that drew the world in its flight. The bedouin had put the desert behind him and stared at another, the sea. As he passed, the land leaped into life. There were tents and passions, clans not men, an aggregate of forces in which the unit disappeared. For chieftain there was Might and, above, were the subjects of impersonal verbs, the Elohim, from whom the thunder came, the rain, darkness and light, death and birth, dream too, nightmare as well. The clans migrated. Goshen called. In its heart Chaldæa spoke. The Elohim vanished and there was El, the one great god and Isra-el, the great god's elect. From heights that lost themselves in immensity, the ineffable name, incommunicable, and never to be pronounced, was seared by forked flames on a tablet of stone. A nation learned that El was Jehovah, that they were in his charge, that he was omnipotent, that the world was theirs. They had a law, a covenant, a deity and, as they passed into the lands of the well beloved, the moon became their servant, to aid them the sun stood still. The terror of Sinai gleamed from their breast-plates. Men could not see their faces and live. They encroached and conquered. They had a home, then a capital, where David founded a line of kings and Solomon, the city of God.

Solomon, typically satrapic, living in what then was splendor; surrounded by peacocks and peris; married to the daughter of a Pharaoh, married to many another as well; the husband of seven hundred queens, the pasha of three hundred favorites, doing, as perhaps a poet may, only what pleased him, capricious as potentates are, voluptuous as sovereigns were, on his blazing throne and particularly in his aromatic harem, presented a spectacle strange in Israel, wholly Babylonian,

thoroughly sultanesque. To local austerity his splendor was an affront, his seraglio a sin, the memory of both became odious, and in the Song of Songs, which, canonically, was attributed to him, but which the higher criticism has shown to be an anonymous work, that contempt was expressed.

Something else was expressed. The Song of Songs is the gospel of love. Humanity at the time was sullen when not base. Nowhere was there love. The anterior stories of Jacob and Rachel, of Rebekah and Isaac, of Boaz and Ruth, are little novels, subsequently evolved, concerning people that had lived long before and probably never lived at all. To scholars they are wholly fabulous. Even otherwise, these legends do not, when analyzed, disclose love. Ruth herself with her magnificent phrase – "Where thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God," – does not display it. Historically its advent is in the Song of Songs.

The poem, perhaps originally a pastoral in dialogue form, but more probably a play, has, for central situation, the love of a peasant for a shepherd, a love tender and true, stronger than death, stronger at least than a monarch's will. The scene, laid three thousand years ago in Solomon's seraglio, represents the triumph of constancy over corruption, the constancy of a girl, unique in her day, who resisted a king, preferring a hovel to his harem. In an epoch more frankly unmoral than any of which history has cognizance, this girl, a native of Shulam, very simple, very ignorant, necessarily unrefined, possessed, through some miracle, that instinctive exclusiveness which, subsequently disseminated and ingrained, refurbished the world. She was the usher of love. The Song of Songs, interpreted mystically by the Church and profanely by scholars, is therefore sacred. It is the first evangel of the heart.

From the existing text, the original plan, and with it the original meaning, have disappeared. Many exegetes, notably Ewald, have demonstrated that the disappearance is due to manipulations and omissions, and many others, Renan in particular, have attempted reconstructions. The version here given is based on his.[3] From it a few expressions, no longer in conformity with modern taste, and several passages, otherwise redundant, have been omited. By way of proem it may be noted that the Shulamite, previously abducted from her native village – a hamlet to the north of Jerusalem – is supposed to be forcibly brought into the presence of the king where, however, she has thought only of her lover.

## THE SONGS OF SONGS

### Act I

### Solomon, in all His Glory, Surrounded by His Seraglio and His Guards

### An Odalisque

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.

[3] Renan: Le Cantique des Cantiques.

**Chorus of Odalisques**

Thy love is better than delicious wine. Thy name is ointment poured forth. Therefore do we love thee.

**The Shulamite**

**(forcibly introduced, speaking to her absent lover.)**

The King hath brought me into his chamber. Draw me away, we will go together.

**The Odalisques**

**(*to* Solomon.)**

The upright love thee. We will be glad and rejoice in thee. We will remember thy love more than wine.

**The Shulamite**

**(*to the* Odalisques.)**

I am black but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, comely as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Do not disdain me because I am a little black. It is the sun that has burned me. My mother's children were angry at me. They made me keeper of the vineyards. Alas! mine own vineyard I have not kept.

**(Thinking of her absent lover.)**

Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou takest thy flocks to rest at noon that I may not wander among the flocks of thy comrades.

**An Odalisque**

If thou knowest not, O thou fairest among women, follow the flock and feed thy kids by the shepherds' tents.

**Solomon**

**(*to the* Shulamite.)**

To my horse, when harnessed to the chariot that Pharaoh sent me, I compare thee, O my love. Thy cheeks are comely with rows of pearls, thy neck with charms of coral. We will make for thee necklaces of gold, studded with silver.

**The Shulamite**

**(aside.)**

While the King sitteth at his divan, my spikenard perfumes me and to me my beloved is a bouquet of myrrh, unto me he is as a cluster of cypress in the vines of Engedi.

**Solomon**

Yes, thou art fair, my beloved. Yes, thou art fair. Thine eyes are the eyes of a dove.

**The Shulamite**

**(thinking of the absent one.)**

Yes, thou art fair, my beloved. Yes, thou art charming, and our tryst is a litter of green.

**Solomon**

**(to whom constancy has no meaning.)**

The beams of our house are cedar and our rafters of fir.

**The Shulamite**

**(singing.)**

I am the rose of Sharon The lily of the valley am I.

**(Enter *suddenly the* Shepherd.)**

**The Shepherd**

As a lily among thorns, so is my love among daughters.

**The Shulamite**

**(running to him.)**

As is the apple among fruit, so is my beloved among men. In delight I have sat in his shadow and his savor was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banquet hall and put o'er me the banner of love.

**(*Turning to the* Odalisques.)**

Stay me with wine, strengthen me with fruit, for I am swooning with love.

**(*Half-fainting she falls in the* Shepherd's *arms.*)**

His left hand is under my head and his right hand doth embrace me.

**The Shepherd**

**(*to the* Odalisques.)**

I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and the hinds of the field, that ye stir not, nor awake my beloved till she will.

**The Shulamite**

**(*dreaming in the* Shepherd's *arms.*)**

My own love's voice. Arise, my fair one, he tells me, arise and let us go…

**The Shepherd**

I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not, nor awake my beloved till she will.

**(Solomon *motions; the* Shepherd *is removed.*)**

**Act II**

**A Street in Jerusalem**

**In the distance is Solomon and his retinue**

**Chorus of Men**

Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness, exhaling the odor of myrrh and of frankincense and all the powders of the perfumer?

**(Solomon *and his retinue advance.*)**

**First Jerusalemite**

Behold the palanquin of Solomon. Three score valiant men are about it. They all hold swords…

**Second Jerusalemite**

King Solomon has had made for him a litter of Lebanon wood. The supports are of silver, the bottom of gold, the covering of purple. In the centre is a loved one, chosen from among the daughters of Jerusalem.

**The Chorus**

**(calling to women in the houses.)**

Come forth, daughters of Zion, and behold the King…

**Act III**

**The Seraglio**

**Solomon**

**(*to the* Shulamite.)**

Yes, thou art fair, my love, yes, thou art fair. Thou hast dove's eyes… Thou art all fair, my love. There is no spot on thee.

**The Shepherd**

**(*without, in the garden, calling to the* Shulamite *and referring in veiled terms to the seraglio and its dangers.*)**

Come to me, my betrothed, come to me from Lebanon. Look at me from the top of Amana, from the summit of Shenir and Hermon, from the lion's den and the mountain of leopards.

**(*The* Shulamite *goes to a window and looks out.*)**

**The Shepherd**

You have strengthened my heart, my sister betrothed, you have strengthened my heart with one of thine eyes, with one of the curls that float on thy neck. How dear is thy love, my sister betrothed! Thy caresses are better than wine, and the fragrance of thy garments is sweeter than spice.

**The Shulamite**

Let my beloved come into his garden and eat its pleasant fruits.

**The Shepherd**

I am come into my garden, my sister betrothed, I have gathered my myrrh with my spice. I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey. I have drunk my wine with my milk.

**(To the chorus.)**

Eat, comrades, drink abundantly, friends.

**(*The* Shepherd *and the chorus withdraw.*)**

**Act IV**

**The Seraglio**

**The Shulamite**

**(musing.)**

I sleep but my heart waketh. I heard the voice of my beloved. He knocked. Open to me! he said. My sister, my love, my immaculate dove, open to me, for my head is covered with dew, the locks of my hair are wet … I rose to open to my beloved … but he was gone. My soul faileth me when he spoke not. I sought him, but I could not find him. I called him but he did not reply.

**(*A pause.* She *relates the story of her abduction.*)**

The watchman that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me, and the keepers of the walls took away my veil.

**(*To the* Odalisques.)**

I pray you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, tell him that I die of love.

**Chorus of Odalisques**

In what is the superiority of thy lover, O pearl among women, that thou beseechest us so?

**The Shulamite**

My beloved's skin is white and ruddy. He is one in a thousand… His eyes are as doves… His cheeks are a bed of flowers… He is charming. Such is my beloved, such is my dear one, O daughters of Jerusalem.

**Chorus of Odalisques**

Whither is thy beloved gone, O pearl among women? Which way did he turn, that we may seek him with thee?

**The Shulamite**

My beloved is gone from the garden… But I am his and he is mine. He feedeth his flocks among lilies.

**(*Enter* Solomon.)**

**(*The* Shulamite *looks scornfully at him.*)**

**Solomon**

Thou art beautiful as Tirzah, my love, and comely as Jerusalem, but terrible as an army in battle. Turn thine eyes away. They trouble me…

**The Shepherd**

**(from without.)**

There are sixty queens, eighty favorites, and numberless young girls. But among them all my immaculate dove is unique, she is the darling of her mother. The young girls have seen her and called her blessed. The queens and the favorites have praised her.

**The Chorus**

**(*astonished at the* Shulamite's *scorn of the King.*)**

Who is it that is beautiful as Tirzah but terrible as an army in battle?

**The Shulamite**

**(impatiently turning her back, and relating again her abduction.)**

I went down into the garden of nuts, to see the green plants in the valley, to see whether the vine budded, and the pomegranates were in flower. But before I was aware of it, I was among the chariots of my princely people.

**The Chorus**

Turn about, turn again, O Shulamite, that we may see thee.

**A Dancer**

What will you see in the Shulamite whom the King has compared to an army?

**Solomon**

**(*to the* Shulamite.)**

How beautiful are thy feet, prince's daughter… How fair and how pleasant art thou…

**The Shulamite**

**(impatiently as before.)**

I am my beloved's and he is sighing for me.

**(*Exit* Solomon. *Enter the* Shepherd.)**

**The Shulamite**

**(hastening to her lover.)**

Come, my beloved, let us go forth to the fields, let us lodge in the villages. We will rise early and see if the vine flourishes and the grape is ripe and the pomegranates bud. There will I caress thee. The love-apples perfume the air and at our gates are all manner of rich fruit, new and old, which I have kept for thee, my beloved. Oh, that thou wert my brother, that, when I am with thee without, I might kiss thee and not be mocked at. I want to take and bring thee into my mother's house. There thou shalt instruct me and I will give thee spiced wine and the juice of my pomegranates.

**(*Falling in his arms and calling to the* Odalisques.)**

His left hand is under my head and his right hand doth embrace me.

**The Shepherd**

**(to the chorus.)**

I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not nor awake my beloved till she will.

## Act V

### The Village of Shulam

**(*The* Shulamite, *who has escaped from the seraglio is carried in by her lover.*)**

### Chorus of Villagers

Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?

### The Shepherd

**(*to the* Shulamite.)**

I awake thee under the apple tree.

**(He points to the house.)**

There thou wert born.

### The Shulamite

Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death, jealousy cruel as the grave; the flashes thereof are flashes of fire, a very flame of the Lord. But many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. The man who seeks to purchase it acquires but contempt.

## EPILOGUE

### A Cottage at Shulam

### First Brother of the Shulamite

**(thinking of a younger sister whom he would sell when she is older.)**

We have a little sister, still immature. What shall we do with her when she is spoken for?

### Second Brother

If by then she is comely, we will get for her silver from a palace. If she is not comely, we will get the value of cedar boards.

### The Shulamite

**(ironically intervening.)**

I am comely, yet I made them let me be.

### First Brother

**(significantly.)**

Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon. He leased it to farmers each of whom was to pay him a thousand pieces of silver.

### The Shulamite

But my vineyard which is mine I still have.

**(Laughing.)**

A thousand pieces for thee, Solomon, and two hundred for the others.

(*At the door the* **Shepherd** *appears. Behind him are comrades.*)

### The Shepherd

Fair one, that dwelleth here, my companions hearken to thy voice, cause me to hear it.

### The Shulamite

Hasten to me, my beloved. Hasten like a roe or a young hart on the mountains of spices.

# III
# APHRODITE URANIA

Greece had many creeds, yet but one religion. That was Beauty. Israel believed in hate, Greece in love. In Judæa the days of the righteous were long. In Greece they were brief. Whom the gods loved died young. The gods themselves were young. With the tribes that took possession of the Hellenic hills they came in swarms. Sprung from the depths of the archaic skies, they were sombre and impure. When they reached Olympus already their Asiatic masks had fallen. Hecate was hideous, Hephæstos limped, but among the others not an imperfection remained. Divested of attributes monstrous and enigmatic, they rejuvenated into divinities of joy. Homer said that their laughter was inextinguishable. He joined in it. So did Greece. The gayety of the immortals was appreciated by a people that counted their years by their games.

As the tribes dispersed the gods advanced. Their passage, marked here by a temple, there by a shrine, had always the incense of legends. These Homer gathered and from them formed a Pentateuch in which dread was replaced by the ideal. Divinities, whom the Assyrian priests barely dared to invoke by name, and whose mention by the laity was forbidden, he displayed, luminous and indulgent, lifting, as he did so, the immense burden of mystery and fear under which humanity had staggered. Homer turned religion into art, belief into poetry. He evolved a creed that was more gracious than austere, more æsthetic perhaps than moral, but which had the signal merit of creating a serenity from which contemporaneous civilization proceeds. Greece to-day lies buried with her gods. She has been dead for twenty centuries and over. But the beauty of which she was the temple existed before death did and survived her.

To Homer beauty was an article of faith. But not the divinities that radiated it. He laughed at them. Pythagoras found him expiating his mirth in hell. A later echo of it bubbled in the farce of Aristophanes. It reverberated in the verses of Euripides. It rippled through the gardens of Epicurus. It amused sceptics to whom the story of the gods and their amours was but gossip concerning the elements. They believed in them no more than we do. But they lived among a people that did. To the Greeks the gods were real, they were neighborly, they were careless and caressing, subject like mortals to fate. From them gifts came, desires as well. The latter idea, precocious in its naïve psychology, eliminated human responsibility and made sin descend from above.

Olympus was not severe. Greece was not, either. The solemnity of other faiths had no place in her creed, which was free, too, of their baseness. It was not Homer only, but the inherent Hellenic love of the beautiful that, in emancipating her from Orientalisms, maintained her in an attitude which, while never ascetic, occasionally was sublime. The tradition of Orpheus and Eurydice, the fable of Psyche and her god, had in them love, which nowhere else was known. They had, too, something of the high morality which the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* depict.

In the *Iliad* a thousand ships are launched for the recovery of an abducted wife. The subject is equivocal, but concerning it there is not a dubious remark. In the *Iliad* as in the *Odyssey* love rested on two distinct principles: First, the respect of natural law; second, the respect of lawful marriage. These principles, the gods, if they willed, could abolish. When they did, their victims were not blamed, they were pitied. Christianity could not do better. Frequently it failed to do as well. But the patricists were not psychologists and the theory of determinism had not come.

Aphrodite had. With love for herald, with pleasure for page, with the Graces and the Hours for handmaids, she had come among the dazzled immortals. Hesiod told about it. So did de Musset.

> Regrettez-vous le temps où le Ciel, sur la terre,
> Marchait et respirait dans un peuple de dieux?
> Où Vénus Astarté, fille de l'onde amère,

Secouait, vierge encor, les larmes de sa mère,
Et fécondait le monde en tordant ses cheveux!

But Astarte was a stone which Aphrodite's eyes would have melted. It may be that they did. The worship of the Dea Meretrix was replaced by the purer rites of this purer divinity, unconscious as yet of the names and shames of Ishtar.

The Aphrodite whom Homer revealed differed from that of Hesiod. In Hesiod she was still a novice, but less austere than she afterward appeared in the conceptions of Pheidias. The latter succeeded in detaining the fluidity of the gods. He reproduced them in stone, sometimes in gold, always in beauty. He created a palpable Olympus. To die without seeing it was thought a great calamity. The universal judgment of antiquity was that art could go no higher. At the sight of the Pheidian Zeus, a barbarian brute, Æmilius Paulus, the Roman invader and victor, shrank back, awe struck, smitten with sacred terror. The image was regarded less as a statue than as an actual revelation of the divine. To have been able to display it, the general assumption was that either Pheidias had ascended above, or else that Zeus had descended to him. The revelation of Aphrodite Urania which he effected for her temple near the Cerameicus must have been equally august, the celestial in its supremest expression.

Thereafter the decadence of the goddess began. Previously she had ruled through her perfection. Subsequently, though the perfection persisted, the stamp of divinity ceased. In lieu of the goddess was a very pretty woman. If that woman did not, as Hesiod claimed, issue from the sea, she at least emerged from marble. The statues differed. Sometimes there were doves on them, sometimes there was a girdle embroidered with caresses and kisses, at times in the hand was an arrow, at others a lance, again Aphrodite was twisting her hair. But chiefly she was assassinated, not like Lais by jealous wives, but by sheer freedom of the chisel. It was these profaner images that inflamed Phædra and Pasiphae. Among them was Praxiteles' Cnidian Aphrodite, a statue which a king tried vainly to buy and a madman offered to marry. The Pheidian Aphrodite belonged to an epoch in which art expressed the eternal; the Praxitelean, to a period in which it suggested the fugitive. One was beauty and also love, the other was beauty and passion.

Originally both were one. It was only the idea of her that varied. Each Hellenic town, each upland and valley had its own faiths, its own myths. Uniformity concerning them was not doctrinal, it was ritualistic. Then, too, Aphrodite, Apollo, Zeus himself, the whole brilliant host of Olympus were once monsters of Asia. However august they had since become, memories and savors of anterior rites followed in their ascensions. These things incited them to resume their primal forms. It was pleasurably that they acceded. Therein is the simple mystery of their double lives, the reason why Aphrodite could be degrading and ideal, celestial and vulgar, yet always Philommeis, Queen of Smiles. In Cythera and Paphos she was but a fresh avatar of Ishtar. In other sites she resembled the picture that Dante made of Fortune and which an artist detached.

"Dante," said Saint-Victor, "displays Fortune turning her wheel, distributing good and evil, success and failure, prosperity and want. Mortals upbraid and accuse her. 'But these she does not hear. Tranquil among primordial things, she turns her sphere and ineffably rejoices.' So does Venus indifferently dispense high aims and viciousness. Curses do not reach her, insults do not touch her, the passions she has unchained cannot rise to where she is. In her high place tranquilly she turns her sphere of stars.

'Volge sua sfera e beata si gode.'"

It was not that serene divinity, it was the more human Aphrodite of Hesiod, that disturbed the Argive Helen. The story of her, the story of the golden fruit tossed into Olympus with its tag, To the Fairest, the rivalries that resulted, the decision of Paris, corrupt yet just, his elopement with Helen, and the war of the world which ensued, these episodes the hexameters of the *Iliad* unfold.

There, drenched with blood and bathed in poetry, is Helen. There, too, is Paris on his scarlet prow. With them you go from Lacedæmon, past the faint, fair rose of Ida's snow, over the green plain of waters, right to the gates of Ilium and within, and see how each man stopped and stood and mused at Helen's face and her undreamed-of beauty.

Her beauty was no doubt surprising. She trailed admiration but also respect. Homer relates that the seated sages rose at her approach. They did not blame her for the conflagration that her face had caused. They knew, as Priam knew, that responsibility rested not with the woman but with the gods. Perhaps she was not responsible. As in an allegory of beauty which itself is for all and yet for none, already she had passed from hand to hand. When she was but a child she had been abducted. Theseus took her from a temple in which she was dancing. Recovered by her brothers, Achilles got her from them but only to cede her to Patroclus. Later she became the wife of Menelaus. Subsequently Aphrodite gave her to Paris. At that she rebelled. But no mortal may resist the divine. Helen accompanied Paris to Troy, where, during the war that was waged for her, he was killed and she remained in his brother's arms until recovered by Menelaus.

Quintus Smyrnæus[4] represented Menelaus, sword in hand, rushing violently at her. A glance of her eyes disarmed him. In the clatter of the falling sword was love's reawakening. Then presently, as an honored wife, she returned to Lacedæmon. Even there her adventures continued. Achilles, haunted in Hades by the memory of her beauty, escaped, and in mystic nuptials conceived with her a winged child, Euphorion. Clearly, as the sages thought and Priam believed, she could not have been responsible. Nor was she so regarded. The various episodes of her career formed a sort of sacred legend for the polluting of which a poet, Stesichorus, was blinded. The blindness of Homer, Plato attributed to the same cause. To degrade beauty is a perilous thing. To preserve it, to make the legend more sacred still, it was imagined that not Helen, but a phantom of her, accompanied Paris to Troy, and that it was for a phantom that men fought and died.

A thousand years later Apollonius of Tyana happened on that romance. Apollonius knew all languages, including that of silence, and all things, save the caresses of women. He knew, too, how to summon the dead. To verify the story, he evoked the shade that once before for Helen had emerged from hell. Apollonius asked: "Is it true that Helen went to Troy?" "We thought so," Achilles answered, "and we fought to get her back. But she was actually in Egypt. When we discovered that we fought for Troy itself."[5]

Achilles may have been right. In the *Odyssey*, in connection with Helen, mention is made of nepenthe. Nepenthe was an Egyptian drug that dispelled the memory of whatever is sad. Helen had much to forget and probably did, even without assistance. She was the personification of passivity. Her little rebellion at Aphrodite was very brief. But, assuming the nepenthe, it has been assumed also that in it was the secret of the spell with which she so promptly disarmed Menelaus. To modern eyes his attitude is ambiguous. His complaisance has an air of complicity. But Menelaus lived in an heroic age. Moreover, when Sarah vacated the palace of the Pharaohs, the complaisance of Abraham was the same.

In both instances the principle involved was one of ownership. In patriarchal and heroic days woman was an asset. She was the living money of the period. Agamemnon, in devising how he might calm the anger of Achilles, offered him a quantity of girls. They were so much current coin. When stolen, recovery was the owner's chief aim. What may have happened in the interim was a detail, better appreciable when it is remembered that booty was treated, as Helen at Ilium was treated, in the light of Paris' lawful wife; for robbery at that time was a highly legitimate mode of acquiring property, provided and on condition that the robber and the robbed were foes. The idea of enticing the property

[4] Paraleipomena, XIII.

[5] Philostratus: Apollonius Tyanensis, IV., 16.

was too complicated for the simplicity of those days. It was in that simplicity, together with the belief that whatever occurred was attributable to the gods, that the morality of the epoch resided.

In the story of Paris and Helen the morality of Aphrodite is as ambiguous as the attitude of Menelaus. She has the air of an *entremetteuse*. But her purpose was not to favorize frailty. Her purpose was the exercise of her sovereign pleasure. Paris, in adjudging to her the prize of beauty, became the object of her special regard, his people became her people, their enemies her own. The latter prevailed, but that was because Destiny – to whose power the gods themselves had to yield – so willed.

In the *Odyssey* the morality of the *Iliad* is enhanced. The enchantments of Calypso, the sorceries of Circe, the seductions of sirens, long years themselves, wanderings over perilous seas, dangers, hardships, temptations, failed to divert Odysseus from his memories of Penelope, who in turn resisted every suitor for his sake. When the later philosophy of Greece inquired what was woman at her best, it answered its own question in looking back at her. A thousand years after she had been sung, Horace, writing to Lollius, said: "I have been re-reading the poet of the Trojan War. No one has told so well as he what is noble and what is base." St. Basilius, writing later still, declared that the Homeric epics were a perpetual praise of right. The fact, he noted, was particularly obvious in the passage in which Odysseus confronted Nausicaa.

That little princess, historically the first who washed household linen in public, was, when so engaged, surprised by the shipwrecked hero. Instead of being alarmed at the appearance of this man whom the waters had disrobed, she was conscious only of a deep respect. St. Basilius gives the reason. In default of clothing Homer had dressed him in virtue.[6]

The deduction is so pleasant that the views of the saint concerning Circe and Calypso would be of interest. But they are unrecorded. It may be that he had none. The enchantresses themselves with their philters and enthralments are supposedly fabulous. Yet in the Homeric account of their seas, once thought to be but a dream of fairyland, mariners have found a log book of Mediterranean facts so accurate that a pilot's guide is but a prose rendering of its indications.[7] As with the seas so with the sirens. Their enchantments were real.

At an epoch when women generally were but things, too passively indifferent and too respectfully obedient to care to attempt, even could they have divined how, to captivate, Circe and Calypso displayed the then novel lures of coquetry and fascination. In the charm of their voices, in the grace of their manners, in the harmony of their dress, in the perfume of their lips, in their use of unguents, in their desire to please joined to the high art of it, was a subtlety of seduction so new and unimagined that it was magical indeed. In the violent *Iliad*, women, hunted like game, were but booty. In the suaver *Odyssey* was their revenge. It was they who captured and detained, reducing the hardiest heroes into servants of their pleasure. It is reasonable that their islands should have been thought enchanted and they enchantresses.

The story of their spells, of their refinements, and of their consequent dominations, exerted gradually an influence wide and profound. Women began to conjecture something else than marriage by right of might. Into the conjecturings came attempts at emancipation that preoccupied husbands and moralists. Hesiod denounced the new ambitions, and, finding denunciation perhaps ineffective, employed irony. He told of Pandora who, fashioned first out of clay, afterward adorned with a parure of beauty, was then given perfidy, falsehood and ruse, that, in being a delight to man, she should be also a disaster.[8]

The picture, interesting in its suggestion of Eve, was originally perhaps a Chaldæan curio, imported by Phœnician traders. Its first Hellenic setting was due probably to Orpheus, the great lost poet of love, whose songs charmed all nature, all hell as well. From him, through problematic hands,

[6] Ethica S. Basilii.

[7] Bérard: Les Phéniciens et l'Odyssée.

[8] Opera et Dies, 70.

it drifted to Hesiod, as already his lyre had drifted to Lesbos. The picture persisted, the lyre as well. To the latter the Mitylenes attributed the wonder of the beauty of their nightingales, chief among whom was Sappho.

# IV
# SAPPHO

Sappho was contemporaneous with Nebuchadnezzar. While he was chastening the Jews, she was creating love. In her day the condition of Hellenic women differed from what it had been. Generally they were shut apart, excluded from any exercise of their possible minds, restricted to strict domesticity. At Athens a girl might not so much as look from a window. If she did, she saw nothing. The window did not give on the street. But in the temples the candor of her eyes was violated. In the festivals of Ceres the modesty of her ears was assailed. Otherwise, she was securely guarded. If, to her detriment, she eluded guardianship, she could be sold. With marriage she entered into a form of superior slavery. When her husband's friends supped with him, she was not permitted to be present. Without permission she could not go from one apartment to the next. Without permission she could not go out. When she did, it was at her husband's side, heavily veiled. With his permission, she might go to the theatre, but only when tragedy was given. At comedies and at the games she was forbidden to assist. In case of disobedience the penalty was death. Pleasures and privileges were limited to housekeeping and motherhood. At the immanence of the latter her surroundings were embellished with beautiful trifles, with objects of art, with whatever influences might prenatally affect, and, in affecting, perfect the offspring. Otherwise, her existence was simple and severe. The peplos tissue of gold was not for her. Garments colored or flowered were not, either. These were reserved for her inferiors and superiors, for the hierodules of Aphrodite Pandemos and the images of the gods. Though her robes were simple, they had to be heavy. If light, a fine was incurred. If they did not hang properly, another fine was imposed. If, to the detriment of her husband, a man succeeded in approaching her, she could be killed or merely repudiated; in the latter case, she could no longer enter a temple, any one might insult her. Still a slave, she was an outcast as well.

Such were the laws. Their observance is a different matter. In Aristophanes and the comic poets generally Athenian women of position were dissolute when they were not stupid, and usually they were both. They may have been. But poets exaggerate. Besides, divorce was obtainable. Divorce was granted on joint request. On the demand of the husband it could be had. In the event of superscandalous conduct on his part, it was granted to the wife, provided she appeared before a magistrate and personally demanded it. The wife of the wicked and winning Alcibiades went on such an errand. Alcibiades met her, caught her in his arms and, to the applause of the wittiest people in the world, carried her triumphantly home. Aristophanes and Alcibiades came in a later and more brilliant epoch. In the days of Sappho severity was the rigorous rule, one sanctioned by the sentiment of a people in whose virile sports clothing was discarded, and in whose plays jest was too violent for delicate ears.

In Sparta the condition of women was similar, but girls had the antique freedom which Nausicaa enjoyed. Destined by the belligerent constitution of Lacedæmon to share, even in battle, the labors of their brothers, they devoted themselves, not to domesticity, but to physical development. They wrestled with young men, raced with them, swam the Eurotas, preparing themselves proudly and purely to be mothers among a people who destroyed any child that was deformed, fined any man that presumed to be stout, forced debilitated husbands to cede their wives to stronger arms, and who, meanwhile, protected the honor of their daughters with laws of which an infraction was death.

The marriage of Spartan girls was so arranged that during the first years of it they saw their husbands infrequently, furtively, almost clandestinely, in a sort of hide-and-go-seek devised by Lycurgus in order that love, instead of declining into indifference, should, while insensibly losing its illusions, preserve and prolong its strength. Otherwise, the Spartan wife became subject to the common Hellenic custom. Her liberty departed with her girlhood. Save her husband, no man might see her, none could praise her, none but he could blame. Her sole jewels were her children. Her

richest garments were stoicism and pride. “What dower did you bring your husband?” an Athenian woman asked of one of them. “Chastity,” was the superb reply.[9]

Lesbos differed from Lacedæmon. The Spartans declared that they knew how to fight, not how to talk. They put all their art into not having any. The Lesbians put theirs into the production of verse. At Mitylene, poetic development was preferred to physical culture. The girls there thought more of immortality than of motherhood. But the unusual liberty which they enjoyed was due to influences either Bœotian or Egyptian, perhaps to both. Egypt was neighborly. With Lesbos, Egypt was in constant communication. The liberty of women there, as generally throughout the morning lands, religion had procured. Where Ishtar passed, she fevered, but also she freed. Beneath her mantle women acquired a liberty that was very real. On the very sites in which Islâm was to shut them up, Semiramis, Strantonice, Dido, Cleopatra, and Zenobia appeared. Isis, who was Ishtar’s Egyptian avatar, was particularly liberal. Among the cities especially dedicated to her was Naucratis.

Charaxus, a brother of Sappho, went there, met Rhodopis, a local beauty, and fell in love with her. Charaxus was a merchant. He brought wine to Egypt, sold it, returned to Greece for more. During one of his absences, Rhodopis, while lolling on a terrace, dropped her sandal which, legend says, a vulture seized, carried away, and let fall into the lap of King Amasis. The story of Cinderella originated there. With this difference: though the king, after prodigal and impatient researches, discovered the little foot to which the tiny sandal belonged, Rhodopis, because of Charaxus, disassociated herself from his advances. Subsequently a young Naucratian offered a fortune to have relations with her. Because of Charaxus, Rhodopis again refused. The young man dreamed that she consented, dreamed that she was his, and boasted of the dream. Indignantly Rhodopis cited him before the magistrates, contending that he should pay her as proposed. The matter was delicate. But the magistrates decided it with great wisdom. They authorized Rhodopis to dream that she was paid.

Rumors of these and of similar incidents were probably reported in Lesbos and may have influenced the condition of women there. But memories of Bœotia from which their forefathers came was perhaps also a factor. Bœotia was a haunt of the muses. In the temple to them, which Lesbos became, the freedom of Erato was almost of necessity accorded to her priestesses.

Lesbos was then a stretch of green gardens and white peristyles set beneath a purple dome. Today there is no blue bluer than its waters. There is nothing so violet as the velvet of its sky. With such accessories the presence of Erato was perhaps inevitable. In any case it was profuse. Nowhere, at no time, has emotional æstheticism, the love of the lovely, the fervor of individual utterance, been as general and spontaneous as it was in this early Academe.

In the later Academe at Athens laughter was prohibited. That of Mitylene was less severe. To loiter there some familiarity with the magnificence of Homer may have been exacted, but otherwise a receptive mind, appreciative eyes, and kissable lips were the best passports to Sappho, the girl Plato of its groves, who, like Plato, taught beauty, sang it as well and with it the *glukupikros*– the bitterness of things too sweet.

Others sang with her. Among those, whose names at least, the fates and the Fathers have spared us, were Erinna and Andromeda. Sappho cited them as her rivals. One may wonder could they have been really that. Plato called Sappho the tenth muse. Solon, after hearing one of her poems, prayed that he might not die until he had learned it. Longinus spoke of her with awe. Strabo said that at no period had any one been known who in any way, however slight, could be compared to her.

Though twenty-five centuries have gone since then, Sappho is still unexceeded. Twice only has she been approached; in the first instance by Horace, in the second by Swinburne, and though it be admitted, as is customary among scholars, that Horace is the most correct of the Latin poets, as Swinburne is the most faultless of our day, Sappho sits and sings above them atop, like her own perfect simile of a bride:

[9] Xenophon: de Republica Lacedæmoniorum.

Like the sweet apple which reddens atop on the topmost bough,
Atop on the topmost twig which the pluckers forgot somehow.
Forget it not, nay, but got it not, for none could get it till now.[10]

It is regrettable that one cannot now get Sappho. But of at least nine books there remain but two odes and a handful of fragments. The rest has been lost on the way, turned into palimpsests, or burned in Byzance. The surviving fragments are limited some to a line, some to a measure, some to a single word. They are the citations of lexicographers and grammarians, made either as illustrations of the Æolic tongue or as examples of metre.

The odes are addressed, the one to Aphrodite, the other to Anactoria. The first is derived from Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who quoted it as a perfect illustration of perfect verse. The second was given by Longinus as an example of the sublime in poetry – of the display, as he put it, not of one emotion, but of a congress of them. Under the collective title of *Anactoria*, these odes together with many of the fragments, Swinburne has interwoven into an exquisite whole.

To appreciate it, Sappho herself should be understood. Her features, which the Lesbians put on their coins, are those of a handsome boy. On seeing them one does not say, Can this be Sappho? But rather, This is Sappho herself. They fit her, fit her verse, fit her fame. That fame, prodigious in her own day, is serviceable in ours. It has retained the name of Phaon, her lover; the names of girls for whom she also cared. Of these, Suidas particularly mentioned Atthis and Gorgo. Regarding Anactoria there is the testimony of the ode. There is more. "I loved thee once, Atthis, long ago," she exclaimed in one fragment. In another she declared herself "Of Gorgo full weary." But the extreme poles of her affection are supposably represented by Phaon and Anactoria. The ode to the latter is, apart from its perfection, merely a jealous plaint, yet otherwise useful in showing the trend of her fancy, in addition to the fact that her love was not always returned. Of that, though, there is further evidence in the fragments. Some one she reproached with being "Fonder of girls than Gello." Elsewhere she said "Scornfuller than thou have I nowhere found." But even in the absence of such evidence, the episode connected with Phaon, although of a different order, would suffice.

Contemporaneous knowledge of it is derived from Strabo, Servius, Palæphatus, and from an alleged letter in one of Ovid's literary forgeries. According to these writers, Phaon was a good-looking young brute engaged in the not inelegant occupation of ferryman. In what manner he first approached Sappho, whether indeed Sappho did not first approach him, is uncertain. Pliny, who perhaps was credulous, believed that Phaon had happened on the male root of a seaweed which was supposed to act as a love charm and that by means of it he succeeded in winning Sappho's rather volatile heart. However that may be, presently Phaon wearied. It was probably in these circumstances that the Ode to Aphrodite was written, which, in Swinburne's paraphrase – slightly paraphrased anew – is as follows:

I beheld in sleep the light that is
In her high place in Paphos, heard the kiss
Of body and soul that mix with eager tears
And laughter stinging through the eyes and ears;
Saw Love, as burning flame from crown to feet,
Imperishable upon her storied seat;
Clear eyelids lifted toward the north and south,
A mind of many colors and a mouth
Of many tunes and kisses; and she bowed
With all her subtle face laughing aloud,

[10] Rossetti, D. G.

Bowed down upon me saying, “Who doth the wrong,
Sappho?” But thou – thy body is the song,
Thy mouth the music; thou art more than I,
Though my voice die not till the whole world die,
Though men that hear it madden; though love weep,
Though nature change, though shame be charmed to sleep.
Ah, wilt thou slay me lest I kiss thee dead?
Yet the queen laughed and from her sweet heart said:
“Even he that flees shall follow for thy sake,
And he shall give thee gifts that would not take,
Shall kiss that would not kiss thee” (Yea, kiss me)
“When thou wouldst not” – When I would not kiss thee!

If Phaon heard he did not heed. He took ship and sailed away, to Sicily it is said, where, it is also said, Sappho followed, desisting only when he flung at her some gibe about Anactoria and Atthis. In a letter which Ovid pretended she then addressed to him, she referred to the gibe, but whether by way of denial or admission, is now, owing to different readings of the text, uncertain. In some copies she said, quas (the Lesbian girls) *non* sine crimine (reproach) amavi. In others, quas *hic* (in Lesbos) sine crimine amavi. Disregarding the fact that the letter itself is imaginary, the second reading is to be preferred, not because it is true, but precisely because it is not. Sappho, though a woman, was a poet. Several of her verses contain allusions to attributes poetically praised by poets who never possessed them, and Ovid who had not written a treatise on the Art of Love for the purpose of displaying his ignorance, was too adroit to let his imaginary Sappho admit what the real Sappho would have denied.[11]

Meanwhile Phaon refused to return. At Lesbos there was a white rock that stretched out to the sea. On it was a temple to Apollo. A fall from the rock was, at the time, locally regarded as a cure for love. Arthemesia, queen of Caria, whom another Phaon had rebuffed and who, to teach him better manners, put his eyes out, threw herself from it. Sappho did also. It cured her of the malady, of all others as well.

Such is the story, such, rather, is its outline, one interesting from the fact that it constitutes the initial love-tragedy of the Occident, as, also, because of a climax befitting the singer of the bitterness of things too sweet.

[11] Epistolæ Heroïdum, XV.

# V
# THE AGE OF ASPASIA

"Eros is son of earth and heaven, but persuasion is Aphrodite's daughter." So Sappho sang. The note, new and true as well, became, as fresh truth ever does become, revolutionary. Athens heard it. Even Sparta listened. Corinth and Miletus repeated it in clinging keys.

With the new truth came a new era. Through meditations patient and prolonged Calypso had succeeded in adding coquetry to love. With a distich Sappho emancipated it. To the despotism that insisted she suggested the duty of asking; to the submission that had obeyed she indicated the grace that grants; yet, posing as barrier between each, the right and liberty of choice, which already Rhodopis had exacted.

Then the new era came. The gynæceum was not emptied. Wives were still shut apart. But elsewhere, with that marvel which Atticism was, came the sense of personal dignity, the conception of individuality, the theory of freedom, and, ultimately, in streets where women of position could not venture unaccompanied and unveiled, they were free to come and go at will, to mingle with men, to assist at comedies and games, to become what women are to-day, with this difference, they were more handsome and less pretty. To a people naturally æsthetic the revolution naturally appealed. Led by the irresistible authority of beauty, for support it had the sovereign prestige of the muse.

In stooping to conquer, Erato smiled, supplying, as she did so, another conception, one as novel as the first, the idea that, after all, though love is a serious thing, the mingling of a little gayety in it is not forbidden. It was to Anacreon that Erato offered that chord, threw it rather, laughing, in his face. The poet, laughing too, took and plucked it lightly, producing quick airs, conceits of pleasure and of wine. When Sappho sang, it was with all her fervent soul. When she loved it was with all her fervid heart. She sang as the nightingales of Lesbos sang, because singing was her life, and she sang of love because she could sing of nothing else. Anacreon did not pretend to sing. He hummed as the bees of Hymettus hummed, over this flower and over that, indifferent to each, caring not for them, for their sweets merely, eager to get all he could as quickly as he might, smacking his faunesque lips over the grape, staggering with a hiccough along the lanes of love, trailing among them strophes to Bacchus rather than to Eros, yet managing to combine the two and leaving finally to the world that chord with its notes of pleasure.

These, mounting behind Sappho's songs, spread through Hellas, creating as they spread a caste that borrowed from the girl her freedom, from the bard his wit, and, from the fusion, produced the hetaira.

Hetaira is a term which Sappho applied to her pupils. It means comrade. But either because it was too elusive for history's detention or too fragile for its care, it became corrupted, shoved roughly by stupid hands among the pornai. The latter were the hierodules of Aphrodite Pandemos. The hetairæ were objects of art, patiently fashioned in fastidious convents, a class of highly educated young women to whom marriage did not necessarily appeal but to whom liberty was essential, girls "pleasanter," Amphis said, "than the wife, for she with the law on her side, can sit in your house and despise you."

Such an attitude is not enticing. The hetairæ were an alterative from it, and, at the same time, a protest against existing feminine conditions. These conditions the legislature could not change but the protest the legislature could and did encourage. While the wife sat contemptuous in the severe gynæceum, the hetairæ mingled with men, charming them always, marrying them occasionally, yet only when their own equality and independence was recognized and conserved.

It was into a union of this kind that Pericles entered with Aspasia. He never regretted it, though history has affected to regard it as illicit, and Aspasia as Omphale. The affectation is an injustice. "In all things," Pericles said, "a man's life should be as clean as his hands." What Aspasia said is not recorded. But it is not improbable that she inspired the remark.

Aspasia was born and educated at Miletus. It was chiefly there and at Corinth that the hetairæ were trained. In these cities, seminaries had been established where girls rose from studies as serious as those which the practice of other liberal professions comport. Their instruction comprised everything that concerned the perfectioning of the body and everything that related to the embellishment of the mind. In addition to calisthenics, there were courses in music, poetry, diction, philosophy, politics, and art. The graduates were admirable. Their beauty was admirable also. But they were admired less for that than because the study of every grace had contributed to their understanding of the unique art, which is that of charming. Charm they exhaled. Gifted and accomplished, they were the only women with whom an enlightened Greek could converse. Their attitude was irreproachable, their distinction extreme, and they differed from other women only in that their manners were more correct. Plato had one of them for muse. Sophocles another. To Glycera, of whom Menander wrote, poetry was an insufficient homage, a statue was erected to her.[12]

These instances, anomalous now, were logical then. To the Greek the gifts of the gods were more beneficent here than hereafter. Of divine gifts none was more appreciated and none more allied to the givers than beauty. The value attached to it, prodigious in peace, was potent in war, potent in law. At Platæa, Callicrates was numbered among the heroes because of his looks. For the same reason Philippus, killed in battle, was nobly buried and worshipped by those who had been his foes. For the same reason Phryne, charged with high crimes, was acquitted.

At the Eleusinian mysteries, beneath the portico of the temple, before assembled Athens, Phryne appeared in the guise of Aphrodite rising from the sea. Charged with parodying the rites, she was summoned before the Areiopagus. Conviction meant death. But her beauty, which her advocate suddenly and cleverly disclosed, was her sole defence. It sufficed for the acquittal of this woman whose statue, the work of Praxiteles, was placed in the temple at Delphi.

The tomb of a sister had for epitaph: “Greece, formerly invincible, was conquered and enslaved by the beauty of Lais, daughter of Love, graduate of Corinth, who here rests in the noble fields of Thessaly.” For Thais a monument was erected. At Tarsus Glycera had honors semi-divine. In Greece, let a woman be what she might, if beautiful she was deified, if charming she was adored. In either case she represented vivified æstheticism to a people at once intellectual and athletic, temperate and rich, a people who, contemptous of any time-consuming business, supported by a nation of slaves, possessing in consequence that wide leisure without which the richest are poor, attained in their brilliant city almost the ideal. They knew nothing of telegraphs and telephones, but they knew as little of hypocrisy and cant. Art and æsthetics sufficed.

In Corinthian and Milesian convents æsthetics were taught to girls who, lifting their fair hands to Aphrodite, prayed that they might do nothing that should not charm, say nothing that should not please. These studies and rituals were supplemented in the Academe. There they learned that the rightful path in love consisted in passing from beautiful manners to beautiful thoughts, from beautiful thoughts to beautiful aspirations, from beautiful aspirations to beautiful meditations, and that, in so passing, they attained wisdom absolute which is beauty supreme.

It would be excessive to fancy that all graduates followed these precepts and entered with them into the austere regions where Beauty, one and indivisible, resides. It would be not only excessive but unreasonable. Manners were proper for all, but for some revenues were better. Those of Phryne were so ample that she offered to rebuild the walls of Thebes. Those of Lais were such that she erected temples. But Phryne and Lais came later, in post-Aspasian days, when Corinth, in addition to schools, had marts in which beauty was an article of commerce and where pleasure received the same official encouragement that stoicism had at Sparta. In the train of Lais, Ishtar followed. It was Alexander that invoked her.

[12] Athenæus, XIII. Musonius: de Luxu. Becker: Charikles.

In the age of Pericles and Aspasia, Athens was too æsthetic to heed the one, too young to know the other. Pallas alone, she who from her crystal parapets saw and foresaw what the years would bring, could have told. Otherwise there was then not a shadow on Athens, light only, light that has never been excelled, light which from high porches, from tinted peristyles, from gleaming temples, from shining statues, from white immortals, from hill to sea, from Olympus itself, radiated, revealing in its intense vibrations the glare of genius at its apogee.

Whatever is beautiful had its apotheosis then. Whatever was superb found there its home. Athens had risen to her full height. Salamis had been fought. A handful of athletes had routed Asia. Reverse the picture and the glare could not have been. Its aurora would have swooned back into darkness. But such was the luminousness it acquired that one ray, piercing the mediæval night, created the Renaissance, art's rebirth, the recall of antique beauty.

Salamis lifted Greece to the skies. In the return was a new epoch, the most brilliant the world has known, a brief century packed with the art of ages, filled to the tips with grace, lit with a light that still dazzles. It was too fair. Willed by destiny, it menaced the supremacy of the divine. "But by whom," Io asked, "is Destiny ruled?" "By the Furies," was the prompt reply.

They were there. From the depths of the archaic skies they were peering, prepared to pounce. After one war, another. After the rout of incoherent Persia, a duel between Athens and Sparta, a duel of jealousy, feminine in rancor, virile in strength, from which Sparta backed, yet only to return and fight again, only to fall at last as Athens did, as Thebes did too, beneath the might of Macedon, expiring all of them in those convulsions that summoned Rome.

Meanwhile there was but light. Death had not come. In between was the unexampled reign of beauty during which, after Æschylus and Pindar, came the splendors of Sophocles, the magnificence of Euripides, Socratic wisdom, and the rich, rare laugh of Aristophanes. That being insufficient, there was Pheidias, there was Plato, art at its highest, beauty at its best, and, that the opulent chain they formed might not sever too suddenly, there followed Praxiteles, Apelles, Aristotle, Epicurus, and Demosthenes. Even with them that chain could not end. Intertwisting with the coil of death, it Hellenized Asia, Atticized Alexandria, girdled Rome, resting in the latter's Lower Empire until recovered by the delighted Renaissance.

The names of the Periclean age are high. There is a higher one yet, that of Pericles. Statesman, orator, philosopher, soldier, artist, poet, and lover, Pericles was so great that, another Zeus, he was called the Olympian. If to him Egeria came, would it not, a poet somewhere asked, be uncivil to depict her as less than he? It would be not only uncivil but untrue.

Said Themistocles, "You see that boy of mine? Though but five, he governs the universe. Yes, for he rules his mother, his mother rules me, I rule Athens and Athens the world." After Themistocles it was Pericles' turn to govern and be ruled. His sovereign was Aspasia.

Aspasia had come from Miletus with another hetaira to Athens which her companion vacated to be bride of a Thessalian king, but where she became the wife of one beside whom mere kings were nothing. It was her beauty that first attracted Pericles. Beauty does attract, but only graciousness can detain. In the home of Pericles there was none, a woman merely of the Xantippe type from whom he separated by common consent and put Aspasia, not in her inferior place, but on a pedestal before which he knelt. Aspasia became not merely his wife but his inspiration, his comrade, his aid. She worked for him and with him. She encouraged him in his work, accompanied him in his battles, consoled him in his fatigues, entertained his friends, talked philosophy with Socrates, frivolity with Alcibiades, art with Pheidias, but love to him, displaying what Athens had socially never seen, the spectacle of delicacy, culture, wit, beauty, and ease united in a woman, and that woman a woman of the world.

The sight, highly novel, established a precedent and with it fresh conceptions of what woman might be. In the *Iliad*, she was money. Money has a language of its own. In the enchanted islands of the *Odyssey* she was charm. Charm has a more distinct appeal. In Lesbos she was emancipated and

that made her headier still. But in the opulent Athenian nights Aspasia revealed her not physically attractive merely, not personally alluring only, not simply free, but spirituelle, addressing the mind as well as the eye, inspiring the one, refining the other, captivating the soul as well as the senses, the ideal woman, comrade, helpmate, and sweetheart in one.

Like the day it was too fair. Presently the duel occurred. Lacedæmon, trailing the pest in her tunic, ravaged the Eleusinian glades. Pericles died. Aspasia disappeared. The duel, waning a moment, was resumed. It debilitated Sparta, exhausted Athens, and awoke Thebes, who fell on both but only to be eaten by Philip.

It would have been interesting to have seen that man and his Epeirote queen who hung serpents about her, played with them among poisonous weeds and who, because of another woman, killed her king, burned her rival alive, and gave to the world Alexander.

It would have been more interesting still to have seen the latter when, undermined by every vice of the vicious East, with nothing left to conquer, with no sin left to commit, with no crime left undone, he descended into the great sewer that Babylon was and there, in a golden house, on a golden throne, in the attributes of divinity was worshipped as a god. Behind him was a background of mitred priests and painted children, about him were the fabulous beasts that roamed into heraldry, with them was a harem of three hundred and sixty-five odalisques apportioned to the days of the year, while above swung the twelve signs of the zodiac. In that picture Rome was to find the prototype of her Cæsars, as in it already Hellas has seen the supplanting of Aphrodite by Ishtar.

Greece, still young, lingered briefly, then without decrepitude, without decadence, ceased, nationally, to be. Aphrodite, young too, died with her. As Venus Pandemos Rome evoked her. The evocation was successful. Venus Pandemos appeared. But even from Olympus, which together with Hellenic civilization, Rome absorbed, Aphrodite had already departed. Those who truly sought her found her indeed, but like the art she inspired only in marble and story.

# VI
# THE BANQUET

It used to be a proverb that Apollo created Æsculapius to heal the body and Plato to heal the soul. Plato may have failed to do that. But he heightened its stature. It has been loftier since he taught. In his teaching was the consummation of intellect. His mind was sky-like, his speech perfection. Antiquity that thought Zeus must have revealed himself to Pheidias, thought, too, that should the high god deign to speak to mortals, it would be in the nightingale tongue of refinement which Plato employed. The beauty of it is not always apprehensible. His views, also, are not always understood. Yet an attempt must be made to supply some semblance of the latter because of the influence they have had.

"I know but one little thing," said Socrates. "It is love." Socrates was ironical. That which it pleased him to call little, Plato regarded as a special form of the universal law of attraction. His theories on the subject are contained in the *Phædrus* and the *Symposion*, two poetically luxurious works produced by him in the violet-crowned city during the brilliant Athenian day, before Socrates had gone and Sparta had come.

The *Symposion* is a banquet. A few friends, Phædrus and Pausanias, men of letters; Eryximachus, a physician; Aristophanes, the poet; Socrates, the seer, have been supping at the house of Agathon. By way of food for thought love is suggested. Discussion regarding it follows, in which Socrates joins – a simple expedient that enabled Plato to put in his master's mouth the æsthetic nectar of personal views of which the real Socrates never dreamed.

Among the first disputants is Phædrus. In his quality of man of letters he began with extravagant praise of Eros, whom he called the mightiest of all gods, the chief minister of happiness.

To this, Pausanias, also a literary man and therefore indisposed to agree with another, objected. "Phædrus would be right," he said, "if there were but one Eros. But there are two. Love is inseparable from Aphrodite. If there were only one Aphrodite there would be only one love. But there are two Aphrodites. Hence there must be two loves. One Aphrodite is Urania or celestial, the other Pandemos or common. The divinities should all be lauded. Still there is a distinction between these two. They vary as actions do. Consider what we are now doing, drinking and talking. These things in themselves are neither good nor evil. They become one or the other in accordance with the way in which we do them. In the same manner, not every love, but only that which is inherently altruistic, can be called divine. The love inspired by Aphrodite Pandemos is essentially common. It is such as appeals to vulgar natures. It is of the senses, not of the soul. Intemperate persons experience this love, which seeks only its own gross end. Whereas the love that comes of Aphrodite Urania has for object the happiness and improvement of another."

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.