



Aphrodite (French Edition)

Pierre Louys

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The erudite Prodicos of Ceos, who flourished toward the end of the first century before our era, is the author of the celebrated apologue which St. Basil recommended to Christian meditation: "Herakles between virtue and voluptuousness." We know that Herakles decided for the first, and was thus enabled to accomplish a certain number of great crimes against the Hinds, the Amazons, the Golden Apples and the Giants. If Prodicos had limited himself to that, he would have written only a fable of readily comprehended symbolism, but he was a clever philosopher and his repertory of tales, "The Hours," which was divided into three parts, presented the moral truths under their three different aspects which correspond to the three ages of life. For little children he was pleased to propose as an example the austere choice of Herakles; to youths he doubtless related the voluptuous choice of Paris; and I imagine that, to ripe men, he said nearly this: "Odysseus was wandering in the chase one day, at the foot of the mountains of Delphi, when he met on his path two virgins who held each other by the hand. The one had hair of violets, transparent eyes, and grave lips; she said to him: 'I am Arete.' The other had softly tinted eyelids, delicate hands and tender breasts; she said to him: 'I am Tryphe.' And they said together: 'Choose between us.' But the subtle Odysseus responded wisely: 'How could I choose—you are inseparable. The eyes which have seen you pass—one without the other—have glimpsed but a sterile shadow. Just as sincere virtue does not deprive itself of the eternal joys which voluptuousness brings to it, so luxury would go ill without a certain grandeur of soul. I will follow you both. Show me the way.' As he finished, the two visions melted together and Odysseus knew that he had spoken with the great goddess Aphrodite."

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