

APHRODITE.

BY THE EDITOR.

APHRODITE, the goddess of love, represents originally a distinctly cosmic principle. She is the tendency of procreation, the exuberance of growth, the fertile humidity of spring and the spread of organic life. It is but natural that this cosmic creatrix was in an early stage identified with love in every form, and especially with human love, with propagation and the pleasures of family life.

Aphrodite was worshiped in a prehistoric age and the origin of her cult is plainly traceable to the Orient, especially to Phenicia and further back to Pamphylia, Syria, Canaan and Babylon. The Phenician Astarte was imported to the islands of the Aegean Sea, to Cythera, Paphos and Amathus. Hence even in the Hellenistic age she was still honored with the names Cytherea, Paphia and Amathusia.

From the Aegean islands the cult of Aphrodite spread rapidly to Sparta, Athens and other Greek centers. The barbaric origin of the Aphrodite cult is in evidence in the myth of Aphrodite's birth as the foam-born, but it is difficult to say whom we shall deem responsible for the legend—perhaps the inhabitants of the islands. Certainly we cannot lay the burden of the invention of the story upon the Asiatics, at least not on the Syrians, for according to an account by Nigidius Figulus¹ the fish of the Euphrates found a large egg in the floods and pushed it ashore, where it was brooded upon by a dove until the Syrian goddess came forth from it.

The Oriental goddess was originally the queen of the starry heaven, either the moon or the morning star, and as such she is the same figure which in other places gave rise to the development of Artemis. We may emphasize here that like the Christian Mary the pagan female divinity was at the same time both the eternal virgin

¹ As reported in Roscher's *Lexikon*, s. v. "Aphrodite."

and the celestial mother. Mythology cannot stand the application of logical rationalism, and we must not try to make the traditional legends rigidly consistent.

While we recognize a strong Oriental influence in the Greek construction of the Aphrodite cult, we must acknowledge that we



THE BIRTH OF VENUS.
Relief found in the Villa Ludovisi.

have before us a new and independent origin of the divine ideal of femininity. In Mesopotamia Istar was a very popular deity, and innumerable idols have been found in the shape of a naked woman commonly called "Beltis" or "lady," but this conception of the goddess of femininity cannot be regarded as the prototype

of the Greek Aphrodite who at an early period assumed the type which is now well known as Venus. Without detracting from her universal significance as the cosmic principle of generation, the



DETAIL FROM THE LUDOVISI RELIEF.

artistic conception of the Greek mind at once idealized her as the incarnation of loveliness and grace, and from Phidias down to the end of paganism she has remained this ideal.

In Homer she is called the daughter of Zeus and Dione, and when later usage degraded her to a conception of promiscuous sexuality, philosophers distinguished between Venus Urania, celestial love and Venus Pandemus, or promiscuity.

In Cnidos Aphrodite was worshiped in three forms; as gift-giver (*δορῆτις*), as goddess of the high places (*ἀκράια*) and as the lucky sailor (*εὐπλοια*), and we learn that bloody sacrifices were not permitted (Tac., *Hist.*, II, 3) even on the main altar in Paphos.

Originally, Aphrodite was not only love, grace and beauty, but the mistress, (i. e., the possessor or owner and supreme commander, *domina*) as the lady, the queen (*regina*, *βασιλεῖα*); and so she is represented in Cythera as fully armed. The same is true in Sparta and in Corinth where her temple was erected on the highest place



WINTER.



SUMMER.

End pieces of the Ludovisi sculpture.

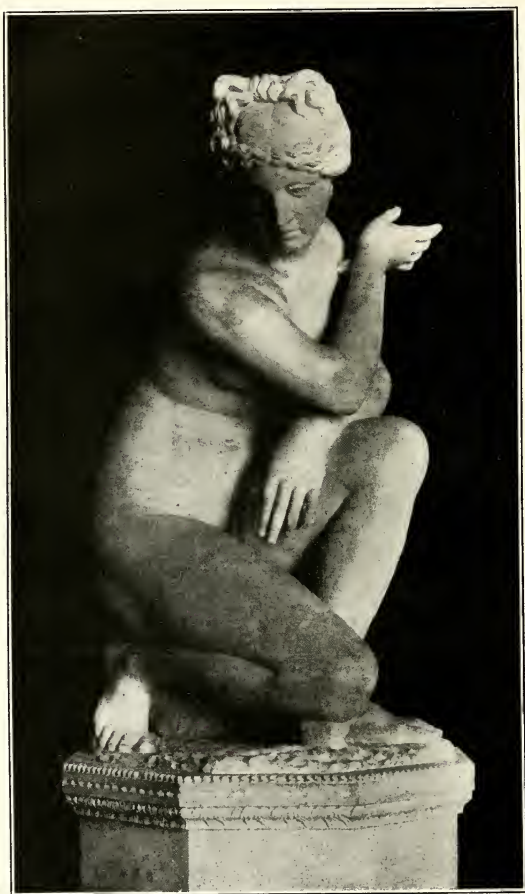
of the city, called Acro Corinthus. She was the life spender, but possessed also a deep significance in the world of death, a chthonian aspect which is indicated by the symbols of the apple and the poppy found in the hand of her statue in the temple at Sikyon (Paus. II, 10, 4). In this same city her priestesses were bound by a vow of chastity.

The chthonian aspect of the Aphrodite cult appears in the legend of the death of Adonis with all its details of funeral lamentations and ceremonies, and the great hope of his resurrection. Istar herself descends to the underworld, and we know that at least in Cyprus a tomb² of Aphrodite has been shown.

The sensual features of the Aphrodite cult were certainly not absent in ancient Hellas. We know that in Corinth there were large numbers of hierodules in the temple who helped to make the

² Preller, *Griechische Mythologie*, I, p. 364.

ceremonies gorgeous and impressive, but judging from the language used by Aeschylus and Pindar they were highly respected and



VENUS CROUCHING IN THE BATH.

In the Vatican Museum.

received public acknowledgement for their fervid and efficient prayers during the Persian wars.

We learn from coins that in olden times the goddess was represented by a pillar with a column on either side, and these stone pillars gradually changed into very awkward statues. Further it is noteworthy that all the ancient representations of the goddess show her not only fully dressed but even veiled, and it was not until the age of Phidias and Praxiteles that the figure of the goddess



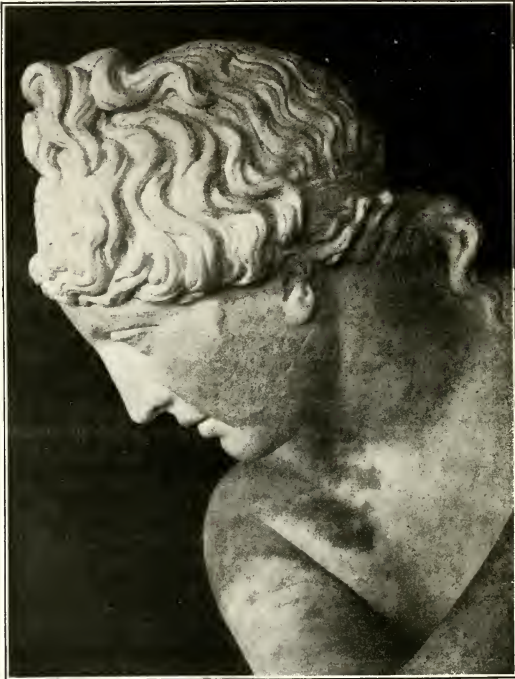
THE STATUE OF VENUS BY KALAMIS.

From Roscher's *Lexikon*, I, p. 412.

was represented at first as partly uncovered and finally entirely nude. As an instance of the older type we reproduce a statue of Venus by Kalamis thought to be the same as that called Sosandra, "the saviour of men," which stood on the Acropolis. Praxiteles seems to have been the first to dare picture Aphrodite stripped of her dress apparently at the moment when she rose from the sea, or when ready to descend into a bath.

In Rome Aphrodite was identified with Venus, the goddess of

vegetation and gardening, and in the imperial age her popularity increased because the legend of Aeneas made her the ancestor of the Julian family and the protectrix of Cæsar. The nature of Venus as the mother of the universe, the mistress of existence, and the representative of all that is charming and lovely endeared her



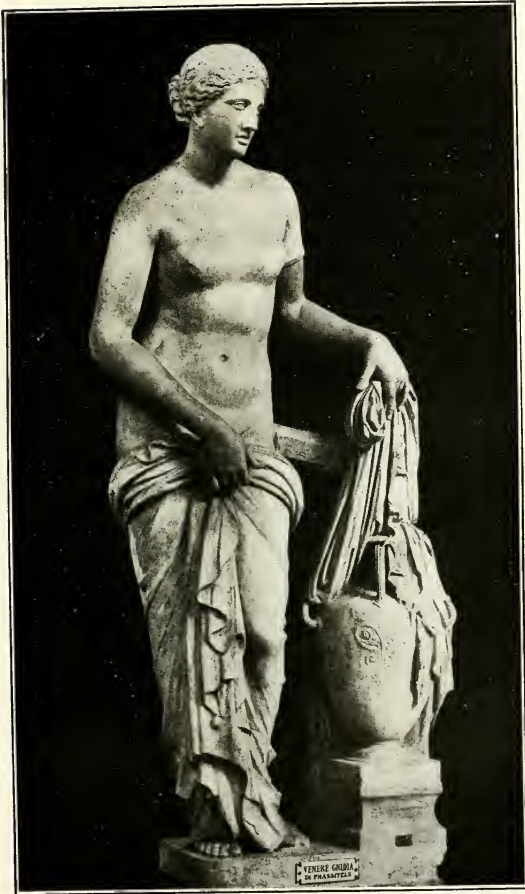
HEAD OF THE CROUCHING VENUS.

to philosophers and poets, and so even the freethinker among classical poets, Titus Lucretius, dedicated to her his philosophical book of poetry, *De rerum natura*, in these often quoted words:³

“Mother of Rome, delight of Gods and men,
 Dear Venus that beneath the gliding stars
 Makest to teem the many-voyaged main
 And fruitful lands—for all of living things

³ Translated by Dr. William Ellery Leonard.

Through thee are risen to visit the great sun—
Before thee, Goddess, and thy coming on,
Flee stormy wind and massy cloud away;

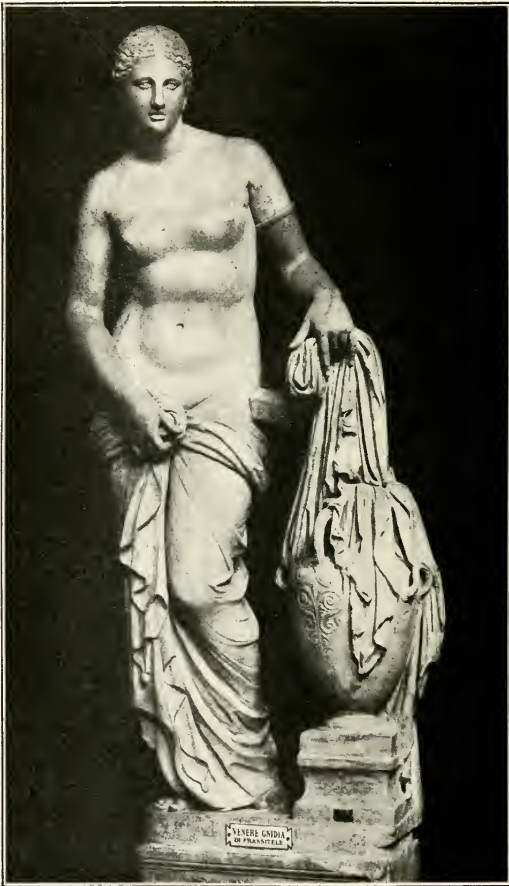


THE CNIDIAN VENUS OF PRAXITELES.

In the Vatican.

For thee the dedal Earth bears gentle flowers;
For thee wide waters of the unvexed deep
Smile, and the hollows of the serene sky

Glow with diffusèd radiance for thee!
 For soon as comes the springtime face of day,
 And procreant gales blow from the West unbarred,



ANOTHER VIEW OF THE CNIDIAN VENUS.

First fowls of air, smit to the heart by thee,
 Foretoken thy approach, O thou Divine,
 And leap the wild herds round the happy fields

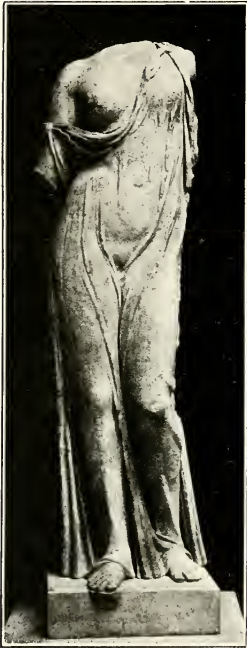
Or swim the bounding torrents. Then amain,
Seized with the spell, all creatures follow thee
Whithersoever thou walkest forth to lead;



HEAD OF THE CNIDIAN VENUS.

And thence through seas and mountains and swift streams,
Through leafy homes of birds and greening plains,
Kindling the lure of love in every breast,

Thou bringest the eternal generations forth,
 Kind after kind. And since 'tis thou alone
 Guidest the Cosmos, and without thee naught
 Is risen to reach the holy shores of light,
 Nor aught of joyful or of lovely born,
 Thee do I crave co-partner in that verse
 Which I presume on Nature to compose
 For Memmius mine, whom thou hast willed to be



ATTIC SCULPTURE OF THE FIFTH CENTURY.

In the National Museum at Rome.

Peerless in every grace at every hour—
 Wherefore, indeed, Divine one, give my words
 Immortal charm. Lull to a timely rest
 O'er sea and land the savage works of war,
 For thou alone hast power with public peace
 To aid mortality; since he who rules
 The savage works of battle, puissant Mars,

How often to thy bosom flings his strength,
 O'er-mastered by the eternal wound of love—
 And there, with eyes and full throat backward thrown,
 Gazing, my Goddess, open-mouthed at thee,
 Pastures on love his greedy sight, his breath
 Hanging upon thy lips! Him thus reclined
 Fill with thy holy body, round, above!



VENUS WITH THE UNGUENT JAR.

In the Vatican Museum at Rome.

Pour from those lips soft syllables to win
 Peace for the Romans, glorious Lady, peace!
 For in a season troublous to the state
 Neither may I attend this task of mine
 With thought untroubled, nor may mid such events
 The illustrious scion of the Memmian house
 Neglect the civic cause."