

GROUP V.

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*ANCIENT AND MODERN TREATMENT OF THE
MYTH OF CUPID.*
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WHILE Cupid, under the name Eros, was one of the gods famous in Grecian story, the myth of Cupid and Psyche is comparatively new, as it was invented by Apuleius, a Roman author of the second century.

The modern artist reverses the first scene of the story by representing Cupid gazing on the sleeping Psyche.

“The young unawakened maid lies by the rose-trellis, under the eyes of the conquering but now conquered god.”

PARAPHRASES ON APULEIUS.

MRS. BROWNING.

PSYCHE GAZING ON CUPID.

Then Psyche, weak in body and soul, put on
The cruelty of Fate in place of strength :
She raised the lamp to see what should be done,
And seized the steel, and was a man at length
In courage, though a woman ! Yes, but when
The light fell on the bed whereby she stood
To view the “beast” that lay there, — certes, then,
She saw the gentlest, sweetest beast in the wood —
Even Cupid’s self, the beauteous god : more beauteous
For that sweet sleep across his eyelids dim !

Drawn on to crop the river's flowery hair.)
 And as the hoary god beheld her there,
 The poor, worn, fainting Psyche! — knowing all
 The grief she suffered, he did gently call
 Her name, and softly comfort her despair: —
 "O wise, fair lady, I am rough and rude,
 And yet experienced through my weary age!
 And if I read aright, as soothsayer should,
 Thy faltering steps of heavy pilgrimage,
 Thy paleness, deep as the snow, we cannot see
 The roses through, — thy sighs of quick returning,
 Thine eyes that seem, themselves, two souls in mourning, —
 Thou lovest, girl, too well, and bitterly!
 But hear me: rush no more to a headlong fall:
 Seek no more deaths! leave wail, lay sorrow down,
 And pray the sovran god; and use withal
 Such prayer as best may suit a tender youth,
 Well-pleased to bend to flatteries from mouth,
 And feel them stir the myrtle of his crown."
 — So spake the shepherd-god; and answer none
 Gave Psyche in return: but silently
 She did him homage with a bended knee,
 And took the onward path. —

PSYCHE PROPITIATING CERES.

Then mother Ceres from afar beheld her,
 While Psyche touched, with reverent fingers meek,
 The temple's scythes; and with a cry compelled her:
 "O wretched Psyche, Venus roams to seek
 Thy wandering footsteps round the weary earth,
 Anxious and maddened, and adjures thee forth
 To accept the imputed pang, and let her wreak
 Full vengeance with full force of deity!

Yet *thou*, forsooth, art in my temple here,
 Touching my scythes, assuming my degree,
 And daring to have thoughts that are not fear!"
 — But Psyche clung to her feet, and as they moved
 Rained tears along their track, tear dropped on tear.
 And drew the dust on in her trailing locks,
 And still, with passionate prayer, the charge disproved;
 "Now, by thy right hand's gathering from the shocks
 Of golden corn, — and by thy gladsome rites
 Of harvest, — and thy consecrated sights
 Shut safe and mute in chests, — and by the course
 Of thy slave-dragons, — and the driving force
 Of ploughs along Sicilian glebes profound, —
 By all those Nuptial torches that departed
 With thy lost daughter, — and by those that shone
 Back with her, when she came again glad-hearted, —
 And by all other mysteries which are done
 In silence at Eleusis, — I beseech thee,
 O Ceres, take some pity and abstain
 From giving to my soul extremer pain,
 Who am the wretched Psyche! Let me teach thee
 A little mercy, and have thy leave to spend
 A few days only in thy garnered corn,
 Until that wrathful goddess, at the end
 Shall feel her hate grow mild, the longer borne, —
 Or till, alas! — this faintness at my breast
 Pass from me, and my spirit apprehend
 From life-long woe a breath-time hour of rest!"
 But Ceres answered, "I am moved indeed,
 By prayers so moist with tears, and would defend
 The poor beseecher from more utter need:
 But where old oaths, anterior ties, commend,
 I cannot fail to a sister, lie to a friend,
 As Venus is to *me*. Depart with speed!"

PSYCHE AND THE EAGLE.

But sovran Jove's rapacious bird, the regal
 High percher on the lightning, the great eagle
 Drove down with rushing wings; and — thinking how,
 By Cupid's help, he bore from Ida's brow
 A cup-boy for his master, — he inclined
 To yield, in just return, an influence kind;
 The god being honored in his lady's woe.
 And thus the bird wheeled downward from the track
 Gods follow gods in, to the level low
 Of that poor face of Psyche left in wrack.
 — "Now fie, thou simple girl!" the bird began;
 "For if thou think to steal and carry back
 A drop of holiest stream that ever ran,
 No simpler thought, methinks, were found in man.
 What! know'st thou not these Stygian waters be
 Most holy, even to Jove? that as, on earth,
 Men swear by gods, and by the thunderer's worth,
 Even so the heavenly gods do utter forth
 Their oaths by Styx's flowing majesty?
 And yet one little urnful, I agree
 To grant thy need!" Whereat all hastily,
 He takes it, fills it from the willing wave,
 And bears it in his beak, incarnadined
 By the last Titan-prey he screamed to have;
 And, striking calmly out against the wind,
 Vast wings on each side, — there, where Psyche stands,
 He drops the urn down in her lifted hands.

PSYCHE AND CERBERUS.

A mighty Dog with three colossal necks,
 And heads in grand proportion; vast as fear,

With jaws that bark the thunder out that breaks
 In most innocuous dread for ghosts anear,
 Who are safe in death from sorrow: he reclines
 Across the threshold of Queen Proserpine's
 Dark-sweeping halls, and, there, for Pluto's spouse,
 Doth guard the entrance of the empty house.
 When Psyche threw the cake to him, once amain
 He howled up wildly from his hunger-pain,
 And was still, after.

PSYCHE AND PROSERPINE.

Then Psyche entered in to Proserpine
 In the dark house, and straightway did decline
 With meek denial the luxurious seat,
 The liberal board for welcome strangers spread,
 But sate down lowly at the dark queen's feet,
 And told her tale and brake her oaten bread.
 And when she had given the pyx in humble duty,
 And told how Venus did entreat the queen
 To fill it up with only one day's beauty
 She used in Hades, star-bright and serene,
 To beautify the Cyprian, who had been
 All spoilt with grief in nursing her sick boy, —
 Then Proserpine, in malice and in joy,
 Smiled in the shade, and took the pyx, and put
 A secret in it; and so, filled and shut,
 Gave it again to Psyche. Could she tell
 It held no beauty, but a dream of hell?

PSYCHE AND VENUS.

And Psyche brought to Venus what was sent
 By Pluto's spouse; the paler, that she went
 So low to seek it, down the dark descent.

MERCURY CARRIES PSYCHE TO OLYMPUS.

Then Jove commanded the god Mercury
To float up Psyche from the earth. And she
Sprang at the first word, as the fountain springs,
And shot up bright and rustling through his wings.

THE MARRIAGE OF PSYCHE AND CUPID.

And Jove's right-hand approached the ambrosial bowl
To Psyche's lips, that scarce dared yet to smile,—
"Drink, O my daughter, and acquaint thy soul
With deathless uses, and be glad the while!
No more shall Cupid leave thy lovely side;
Thy marriage-joy begins for never-ending."
While yet he spake,—the nuptial feast supplied,—
The bridegroom on the festive couch was bending
O'er Psyche in his bosom. The rural cup-boy came
And poured Jove's nectar out with shining eyes,
While Bacchus for the others did as much,
And Vulcan spread the meal; and all the Hours
Made all things purple with a sprinkle of flowers,
Or roses chiefly, not to say the touch
Of their sweet fingers; and the Graces glided
Their balm around, and the Muses through the air
Struck out clear voices, which were still divided
By that divinest song Apollo there
Intoned to his lute; while Aphrodite fair
Did float her beauty along the tune, and play
The notes right with her feet. And thus, the day
Through every perfect mood of joy was carried,
The Muses sang their chorus; Satyrus
Did blow his pipes; Pan touched his reed;—and thus
At last were Cupid and his Psyche married.

The myth of Cupid meets us at every turn in our reading, and is so familiar to young and old, both in pictures and poetry, that explanations are unnecessary. The poems that we have selected to illustrate the myth are of varied authorship and nationality. Those having the full flavor of antiquity are translations from the Greek poet, Anacreon, who wrote in the latter half of the fifth century B.C.

CUPID STUNG. [ANACREON.]

THOMAS BATESON'S MADRIGALS (1618).

Cupid in a bed of roses
Sleeping, chanced to be stung
Of a bee that lay among
The flowers where he himself reposes;
And thus to his mother weeping
Told that he this wound did take
Of a little winged snake,
As he lay securely sleeping.
Cytherea smiling said,
That "if so great a sorrow spring
From a silly bee's weak sting
As should make thee thus dismayed,
What anguish feel they, think'st thou, and what pain,
Whom thine empoison'd arrows cause complain?"

CUPID STUNG.

TRANSLATED BY EDWIN ARNOLD.

Love once among the roses
Perceived a bee reposing,
And wondered what the beast was,
And touched it, so it stung him.

Sorely his finger smarted,
 And bitterly he greeted,
 And wrung his hands together ;
 And half he ran, half fluttered
 To Cytherea's bosom,
 Unto his fair sweet mother.
 Loud sobbed he, " Ai ! ai ! mother
 Olola ! I am murdered !
 Olola ! it has killed me !
 A small brown snake with winglets,
 Which men the honey-bee call,
 Bit me ! " But Cytherea
 Said, laughing, " Ah, my baby,
 If bees' stings hurt so sorely,
 Bethink thee what the smart is
 Of those, Love, whom thou piercest."

CUPID AND THE BEE.

THOMAS MOORE.

Cupid once upon a bed
 Of roses laid his weary head ;
 Luckless urchin not to see
 Within the leaves a slumbering bee !
 The bee awaked — with anger wild
 The bee awaked and stung the child.
 Loud and piteous are his cries ;
 To Venus quick he runs, he flies ;
 " Oh, mother ! — I am wounded through —
 I die with pain — what shall I do ?
 Stung by some little angry thing,
 Some serpent on a tiny wing, —
 A bee it was — for once I know,
 I heard a peasant call it so."

Thus he spoke, and she the while
 Heard him with a soothing smile ;
 Then said : " My infant, if so much
 Thou feel the little wild-bee's touch,
 How must the heart, ah, Cupid, be,
 The hapless heart, that's stung by thee ?"

DISCOURSE WITH CUPID.

BEN JONSON.

Noblest Charis, you that are
 Both my fortune and my star !
 Hear what late discourse of you
 Love and I have had ; and true.
 'Mongst my muses finding me,
 Where he chanced your name to see
 Set, and to this softer strain :
 " Sure," said he, " if I have brain,
 This here sung can be no other
 By description, but my mother !
 So hath Homer praised her hair ;
 So Anacreon drawn the air
 Of her face, and made to rise,
 Just about her sparkling eyes,
 Both her brows, bent like my bow.
 By her looks I do her know. And see !
 Such my mother's blushes be,
 As the bath your verse discloses
 In her cheeks of milk and roses ;
 Such as oft I wanton in.
 And above her even chin,
 Have you placed the bank of kisses
 Ripened with a breath more sweet,
 Than when flowers and west winds meet.

Nay, her white and polished neck,
 With the lace that doth it deck,
 Is my mother's! hearts of slain
 Lovers, made into a chain!
 . . . Her very name,
 With my mother's is the same."
 "I confess all," I replied,
 "And the glass hangs by her side,
 And the girdle 'bout her waist,
 All is Venus; . . .
 But, alas! thou seest the least
 Of her good who is the best
 Of her sex; but couldst thou, Love,
 Call to mind the forms that strove
 For the apple, and those three
 Make in one, the same were she.
 For this beauty still doth hide
 Something more than thou hast spied.
 Outward grace weak Love beguiles:
 She is Venus when she smiles,
 But she's Juno when she walks,
 And Minerva when she talks."

CUPID AND CAMPASPE.

JOHN LILY.

Cupid and my Campaspe played
 At cards for kisses — Cupid paid;
 He stakes his quiver, bow and arrows,
 His mother's doves and team of sparrows —
 Loses them too; then down he throws
 The coral of his lip, the rose
 Growing on 's cheek (but none knows how);
 With these the crystal of his brow,

And then the dimple of his chin;
 All these did my Campaspe win.
 At last he set her both his eyes;
 She won, and Cupid blind did rise.
 O Love! has she done this to thee?
 What shall, alas! become of me?

THE CHEAT OF CUPID. [ANACREON.]

TRANSLATED BY ROBERT HERRICK.

One silent night of late,
 When every creature rested,
 Came one unto my gate,
 And knocking, me molested.
 "Who's there," said I, "beats there,
 And troubles thus the sleepy?"
 "Cast off," said he, "all fear,
 And let not locks thus keep thee."
 "For I a boy am, who
 By moonless nights have swerved;
 And all with showers wet through
 And e'en with cold half-starved."
 I pitiful, arose,
 And soon a taper lighted;
 And did myself disclose
 Unto the lad benighted.
 I saw he had a bow,
 And wings, too, which did shiver;
 And, looking down below,
 I spied he had a quiver.
 I to my chimney's shrine
 Brought him, as Love professes,