

**THE METAMORPHOSES;
OR, GOLDEN
ASS. VOLUME I**

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The metamorphoses; or, Golden ass. Volume I by H. E. Butler

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H. E. BUTLER

**THE METAMORPHOSES;
OR, GOLDEN
ASS. VOLUME I**

THE METAMORPHOSES OR
GOLDEN ASS OF APULEIUS
OF MADAURA

TRANSLATED

By H. E. BUTLER

FELLOW OF NEW COLLEGE

VOL. I

OXFORD
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS

1910

PREFACE

As a basis for this translation I have used the excellent text by Helm published by Messrs. Teubner in their series of *Classical Texts*, and I am indebted to them for their permission to make such use of it. On rare occasions when I have diverged from the text, I have indicated in a footnote the reading preferred. Not a few expurgations have been necessary, and in one case, where the offending passage is one on which the plot actually turns, it has been necessary to rewrite the story to the extent of a few lines of print. I can only trust that such a liberty may not be regarded as unwarrantable, and on the other hand that nothing has been retained in the translation which can reasonably cause offence. The authorities to whom I am chiefly indebted are duly mentioned in the Introduction. I wish, however, specially to record my debt to Hildebrand's commentary, and also to a very limited extent to the vivacious French translation by Victor Bétolaud, which has been of occasional service in indicating the best method of breaking up the almost interminable sentences in which Apuleius not infrequently indulges. I have confined myself in the Introduction to the very

briefest statement of the difficult problems as to the origins of the main plot and the various episodes of the romance. If this statement should seem unduly scanty, my excuse must be that I hope to deal with those problems more fully at some future date. I have added a few brief notes. They might have been almost indefinitely multiplied. I have confined myself to those which seemed most necessary. For a brief outline of the life of Apuleius I must refer the reader to the Introduction to my translation of the *Apologia* and *Florida* (Clarendon Press, 1909).

H. E. BUTLER.

NEW COLLEGE,
1909.

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INTRODUCTION

THE *Metamorphoses*, better known as the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius, is, with the exception of the fragment of the *Satyricon* of Petronius, the sole surviving example of the Latin novel. Nor is that all. Save for a Greek version of the same tale, the *Lucius or the Ass*, attributed to Lucian, it is unique in type as well as in language. Not a few erotic romances by Greek authors have been preserved to us, of which the most famous is the *Daphnis and Chloë* of Longus. But these works are on the whole of a very different character. The erotic portions of Apuleius do, it is true, present many resemblances to the treatment of love-scenes in the Greek novelists; rhetoric and picturesque description pervade the works of both. But there the resemblance ceases. Love is not the central motive of the *Golden Ass*, being entirely episodic, while, though the Greek novelists are by no means to be disregarded as stylists, in none of them does style pure and simple contribute so largely to the effectiveness of the work. Apuleius wrote in a style which, by whatever canons it be judged, was intrinsically bad. Few writers in any language have pushed preciousness to such extravagance, or shown such studious care in the avoidance of natural and direct expression. It has been said of Tacitus that in his works the language itself is touched with decay. What then shall we say

of the style of Apuleius, writing not more than a generation later? The ruin seems complete. Alike in diction and syntax we seem to move in a new world. The worst faults of Asiatic oratory run riot, while archaism and neologism go hand in hand to produce bizarre effects of an almost oriental gorgeousness. Narrative and dialogue alike are written in the same stilted style, and tautology is carried to such an extent that were it not for the richness of the colouring it would be positively wearisome. And yet the general effect is surprisingly successful. The story is one which almost requires a bizarre presentation. We never move in a real world. At no point in the tale are we more than a handbreadth away from the miraculous. The action is laid primarily in Thessaly, the fabulous home of witchcraft, and if we are permitted for a while to forget the existence of the black art, it is to hear wild tales of brigandage and murder,¹ to wander in the regions of fairyland with Cupid and Psyche, or to be half-admitted to the mysteries of Isis and Osiris. As a result, there are really but few occasions where the style is felt as inappropriate. The fantastic elaboration of description may perhaps ring false when applied to the depiction of the works of art in the house of the hero's kinswoman Byrrhena, but it is assuredly in place when directed to portray the miraculous palace of Cupid or the vision of the great goddess Isis rising from the sea. Even where the

¹ The story gives a picture of a very cruel and hideous life. But the general atmosphere is so fantastic and unreal, that the picture thrills without revolting the reader.