

# The Trojan War

*MORE THAN a thousand years before Christ, near the eastern end of the Mediterranean was a great city very rich and powerful, second to none on earth. The name of it was Troy and even today no city is more famous. The cause of this long-lasting fame was a war told of in one of the world's greatest poems, the Iliad, and the cause of the war went back to a dispute between three jealous goddesses.*



## PROLOGUE: THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS

The evil goddess of Discord, Eris, was naturally not popular in Olympus, and when the gods gave a banquet they were apt to leave her out. Resenting this deeply, she determined to make trouble — and she succeeded very well indeed. At an important marriage, that of King Peleus and the sea nymph Thetis, to which she alone of all the divinities was not invited, she threw into the banqueting hall a golden apple marked *For the Fairest*. Of course all the goddesses wanted it, but in the end the choice was narrowed down to three: Aphrodite, Hera and Pallas Athena. They asked Zeus to judge between them, but very wisely he refused to have anything to do with the matter. He told them to go to Mount Ida, near Troy, where the young prince Paris, also called Alexander, was keeping his father's sheep. He was an excellent judge of beauty, Zeus told them. Paris, though a royal prince, was doing shepherd's work because his father Priam, the King of Troy, had been warned that this prince would some day be the ruin of his country, and so had sent him away. At the moment Paris was living with a lovely nymph named Oenone.

His amazement can be imagined when there appeared before him the wondrous forms of the three great goddesses. He was not asked, however, to gaze at the radiant divinities and choose which of them seemed to him the fairest, but only to consider the bribes each offered and choose which seemed to him best worth taking.



Nevertheless, the choice was not easy. What men care for most was set before him. Hera promised to make him Lord of Europe and Asia; Athena, that he would lead the Trojans to victory against the Greeks and lay Greece in ruins; Aphrodite, that the fairest woman in all

the world be his. Paris, a weakling and something of a coward, too, as later events showed, chose the last. He gave Aphrodite the golden apple. That was the Judgment of Paris, famed everywhere as the real reason why the Trojan War was fought

## THE TROJAN WAR

The fairest woman in the world was Helen, the daughter of Zeus and Leda and the sister of Castor and Pollux. Such was the report of her beauty that not a young prince in Greece but wanted to marry her. When her suitors assembled in her home to make a formal proposal for her hand they were so many and from such powerful families that her reputed father, King Tyndareus, her mother's husband, was afraid to select one among them, fearing that the others would unite against him. He therefore exacted first a solemn oath from all that they would champion the cause of Helen's husband, whoever he might be, if any wrong was done to him through Ids marriage. It was, after all, to each man's advantage to take the oath,

since each was hoping he would be the person chosen, so they all bound themselves to punish to the uttermost anyone who carried or tried to carry Helen away. Then Tyndareus chose Menelaus, the brother of Agamemnon, and made him King of Sparta as well.

So matters stood when Paris gave the golden apple to Aphrodite. The Goddess of Love and Beauty knew very well where the most beautiful woman on earth was to be found. She led the young shepherd, with never a thought of Oenone left forlorn, straight to Sparta, where Menelaus and Helen received him graciously as their guest. The ties between guest and host were strong. Each was bound to help and never harm the other. But Paris broke that sacred bond.

Menelaus trusting completely to it left Paris in his home and went off to Crete.

Menelaus got back to find Helen gone, and he called upon all Greece to help him. The chieftains responded, as they were bound to do. They came eager for the great enterprise, to cross the sea and lay mighty Troy in ashes. Two, however, of the first rank, were missing: Odysseus, King of the Island of Ithaca, and Achilles, the son of Peleus and the sea nymph Thetis. Odysseus, who was one of the shrewdest and most sensible men in Greece, did not want to leave his house and family to embark on a romantic adventure overseas for the sake of a faithless woman. He pretended, therefore, that he had gone mad, and when a messenger from the Greek Army arrived, the King was plowing a field and sowing it with salt instead of seed. But the messenger was shrewd too. He seized Odysseus' little son and put him directly in the way of the plow. Instantly the father turned the plow aside, thus proving that he had all his wits about him. However reluctant, he had to join the Army.

\*\*\*\*\*

The thousand ships carried a great host of fighting men and the Greek Army was very strong, but the Trojan city was strong, too. Priam, the King, and his Queen, Hecuba, had many brave sons to lead the attack and to defend the walls, one above all, Hector, than whom no man anywhere was nobler or more brave, and only one a greater warrior, the champion of the Greeks, Achilles. Each knew that he would die before Troy was taken. Achilles had been told by his mother: "Very brief is your lot. Would that you could be free now from tears and troubles, for you shall not long endure, my child, short-lived beyond all men and to be pitied." No divinity had told Hector, but he was equally sure. "I know well in my heart and in my soul," he said to his wife Andromache, "the day shall come when holy Troy will be laid low and Priam and Priam's people." Both heroes fought under the shadow of certain death.

For nine years victory wavered, now to this side, now to that. Neither was ever able to gain any decided advantage. Then a quarrel flared up between two Greeks, Achilles and Agamemnon, and for a time it turned the tide in favor of the Trojans.

\*\*\*\*\*

That night Achilles' mother, silver-footed Thetis the sea nymph, came to him. She was as angry as he. She told him to have nothing more to do with the Greeks, and with that she went up to heaven and asked Zeus to give success to the Trojans. Zeus was very reluctant. The war by now had reached Olympus — the gods were ranged against each other. Aphrodite, of course, was on the side of Paris. Equally, of course, Hera and Athena were against him. Ares, God of War, always took sides with Aphrodite;

while Poseidon, Lord of the Sea, favored the Greeks, a sea people, always great sailors. Apollo cared for Hector and for his sake helped the Trojans, and Artemis, as his sister, did so too. Zeus liked the Trojans best, on the whole, but he wanted to be neutral because Hera was so disagreeable whenever he opposed her openly. However, he could not resist Thetis. He had a hard time with Hera, who guessed, as she usually did, what he was about. He was driven finally into telling her that he would lay hands upon her if she did not stop talking. Hera kept silence then, but her thoughts were busy as to how she might help the Greeks and circumvent Zeus.

The plan Zeus made was simple. He knew that the Greeks without Achilles were inferior to the Trojans, and he sent a lying dream to Agamemnon promising him victory if he attacked. While Achilles stayed in his tent a fierce battle followed, the hardest yet fought. Up on the wall of Troy the old King Priam and the other old men, wise in the ways of war, sat watching the contest. To them came Helen, the cause of all that agony and death, yet as they looked at her, they could not feel any blame. "Men must fight for such as she," they said to each other. "For her face was like to that of an immortal spirit." She stayed by them, telling them the names of this and that Greek hero, until to their astonishment the battle ceased. The armies drew back on either side and in the space between, Paris and Menelaus faced each other. It was evident that the sensible decision had been reached to let the two most concerned fight it out alone.

Paris struck first, but Menelaus caught the swift spear on his shield, then hurled his own. It rent Paris' tunic, but did not wound him. Menelaus drew his sword, his only weapon now, but as he did so it fell from his hand broken. Undaunted though unarmed he leaped upon Paris and seizing him by his helmet's crest swung him off his feet. He would have dragged him to the Greeks victoriously if it had not been for Aphrodite. She tore away the strap that kept the helmet on so that it came away in Menelaus' hand. Paris himself, who had not fought at all except to throw his spear, she caught up in a cloud and took back to Troy.

Furiously Menelaus went through the Trojan ranks seeking Paris, and not a man there but would have helped him for they all hated Paris, but he was gone, no one knew how or where. So Agamemnon spoke to both armies, declaring that Menelaus was victor and bidding the Trojans give Helen back. This was just, and the Trojans would have agreed if Athena, at Hera's prompting, had not interfered. Hera was determined that the war should not end until Troy was ruined. Athena, sweeping down to the battlefield, persuaded the foolish heart of Pandarus, a Trojan, to break the truce and shoot an arrow at Menelaus. He did so and wounded him, only slightly, but the Greeks in rage at the treachery turned upon the Trojans and the battle was on

again. Terror and Destruction and Strife, who fury never slackens, all friends of the murderous War-god, were there to urge men on to slaughter each other. Then the voice of groaning was heard and the voice of triumph from slayer and from slain and the earth streamed with blood.

\*\*\*\*\*

On came Achilles, glorious as the sun when he rises. Beside him was Athena, but Hector was alone. Apollo had left him to his fate. As the pair drew near he turned and fled. Three times around the wall of Troy pursued and pursuer ran with flying feet. It was Athena who made Hector halt. ... He cried out to him, "If I kill you I will give back your body to your friends and do you do the same to me." But Achilles answered, "Madman. There are no covenants between sheep and wolves, nor between you and me." So saying, he hurled his spear. It missed its aim, but Athena brought it back. Then Hector struck with a true aim; the spear hit the center of Achilles' shield. But to what good? That armor was magical and could not be pierced. He turned quickly to Deiphobus to get his spear, but he was not there. Then Hector knew the truth. Athena had tricked him and there was no way of escape. "The gods have summoned me to death," he thought. "At least I will not die without a struggle, but in some great deed of aims which men yet to be born will tell each other." He drew his sword, his only weapon now, and rushed upon his enemy. But Achilles had a spear, the one Athena had recovered for him. Before Hector could approach, he who knew well that armor taken by Hector from the dead Patroclus aimed at an opening in it near the throat, and drove the spear-point in. Hector fell, dying at last. With his last breath he prayed, "Give back my body to my father and my mother." "No prayers from you to me, you dog," Achilles answered. "I would that I could make myself devour raw your flesh for the evil you have brought upon me." Then Hector's soul flew forth from his body and was gone to Hades, bewailing his fate, leaving vigor and youth behind.

Achilles stripped the bloody armor from the corpse while the Greeks ran up to wonder how tall he was as he lay there and how noble to look upon. But Achilles' mind was on other matters. He pierced the feet of the dead man and fastened them with thongs to the back of his chariot, letting the head trail. Then he lashed his horses and round and round the walls of Troy he dragged all that was left of glorious Hector.

At last when his fierce soul was satisfied with

vengeance lie stood beside the body of Patroclus and

said, "Hear me even in the house of Hades. I have dragged Hector behind my chariot and I will give him to the dogs to devour beside your funeral pyre."

Up in Olympus there was dissension. This abuse of the dead displeased all the immortals except Hera and Athena and Poseidon. Especially it displeased Zeus. He sent Iris to Priam, to order him to go without fear to Achilles to redeem Hector's body, bearing a rich ransom. She was to tell him that violent as Achilles was, he was not really evil, but one who would treat properly a suppliant.

Then the aged King heaped a car with splendid treasures, the best in Troy, and went over the plain to the Greek camp. ... the old man passed the guards and came into the presence of the man who had killed and maltreated his son. He clasped his knees and kissed his hands and as he did so Achilles felt awe and so did all the others there, looking strangely upon one another. "Remember, Achilles," Priam said, "your own father, of like years with me and like me wretched for want of a son. Yet I am by far more to be pitied who have braved what no man on earth ever did before, to stretch out my hand to the slayer of my son."

Grief stirred within Achilles' heart as he listened. Gently he raised the old man. "Sit by me here," he said, "and let our sorrow lie quiet in our hearts. Evil is all men's lot, but yet we must keep courage." Then he bade his servants wash and anoint Hector's body and cover it with a soft robe, so that Priam should not see it, frightfully mangled as it was, and be unable to keep back his wrath. He feared for his own self-control if Priam vexed him. "How many days do you desire to make his funeral?" he asked. "For so long I will keep the Greeks back from battle." Then Priam brought Hector home, mourned in Troy as never another. Even Helen wept. "The other Trojans upbraid me," she said, "but always I had comfort from you through the gentleness of your spirit and your gentle words. You only were my friend."

Nine days they lamented him; then they laid him on a lofty pyre and set fire to it. When all was burned they quenched the flame with wine and gathered the bones into a golden urn, shrouding them in soft purple. They set the urn in a hollow grave and piled great stones over it.

This was the funeral of Hector, tamer of horses. And wit it the *Iliad* ends.



## The Fall of Troy

*The greater part of this story comes from Virgil. The capture of Troy is the subject of the second book of the Aeneid, and it is one of the best, if not the best, story Virgil ever told —concise, pointed, vivid. The beginning and the end of my account are not in Virgil. The end, the tale of what happened to the Trojan women when Troy fell, comes from a play by Sophocles' fellow playwright, Euripide. To Virgil as to all Roman poets, war was the noblest and most glorious of human activities. Four hundred years before Virgil a Greek poet looked at it differently. What was the end of that far-famed war? Euripides seems to ask. Just this, a ruined town, a dead baby, a few wretched women,*

With Hector dead, Achilles knew, as his mother had told him, that his own death was near. One more great feat of arms he did before his fighting ended forever. Prince Memnon of Ethiopia, the son of the Goddess of the Dawn, came to the assistance of Troy with a large army and for a time, even though Hector was gone, the Greeks were hard-pressed and lost many a gallant warrior, including swift-footed Antilochus, old Nestor's son. Finally, Achilles killed Memnon in a glorious combat, the Greek hero's last battle. Then he himself fell beside the Scaean gates. He had driven the Trojans before him up to the wall of Troy. There Paris shot an arrow at him and Apollo guided it so that it struck his foot in the one spot where he could be wounded, his heel. His mother Thetis when he was born had intended to make him invulnerable by dipping him into the River Styx, but she was careless and did not see to it that the water covered the part of the foot by which she was holding him. He died, and Ajax carried his body out of the battle while Odysseus held the Trojans back. It is said that after he had been burned on the funeral pyre his bones were placed in the same urn that held those of his friend Patroclus.

\*\*\*\*\*

They saw clearly by now that unless they could get their Army into the city and take the Trojans by surprise, they would never conquer. Almost ten years had passed since they had first laid siege to the town, and it seemed as strong as ever. The walls stood uninjured. They had never suffered a real attack. The fighting had taken place, for the most part, at a distance from them. The Greeks must find a secret way of entering the city, or accept defeat. The result of this new determination and new vision was the stratagem of the wooden horse. It was, as anyone would guess, the creation of Odysseus' wily mind.

He had a skillful worker in wood make a huge wooden horse which was hollow and so big that it could hold a number of men. Then he persuaded — and had a great deal of difficulty in doing so — certain of the chieftains to hide inside it, along with himself, of course. They were all terror-stricken except Achilles' son

Neoptolemus, and indeed what they faced was no slight danger. The idea was that all the other Greeks should strike camp, and apparently put out to sea, but they would really hide beyond the nearest island where they could not be seen by the Trojans. Whatever happened they would be safe; they could sail home if anything went wrong. But in that case the men inside the wooden horse would surely die.

Odysseus, as can be readily believed, had not overlooked this fact. His plan was to leave a single Greek behind in the deserted camp, primed with a tale calculated to make the Trojans draw the horse into the city — and without investigating it. Then, when night was darkest, the Greeks inside were to leave their wooden prison and open the city gates to the Army, which by that time would have sailed back, and be waiting before the wall.

A night came when the plan was carried out. Then the last day of Troy dawned. On the wall the Trojan watchers saw with astonishment two sights, each as startling as the other. In front of the Scaean gates stood an enormous figure of a horse, such a thing as no one had ever seen, an apparition so strange that it was vaguely terrifying, even though there was no sound or movement coming from it. No sound or movement anywhere, indeed. The noisy Greek camp was hushed; nothing was stirring there. And the ships were gone. Only one conclusion seemed possible: The Greeks had given up. They had sailed for Greece; they had accepted defeat. All Troy exulted. Her long warfare was over; her sufferings lay behind her.

The people flocked to the abandoned Greek camp to see the sights: here Achilles had sulked so long; there Agamemnon's tent had stood; this was the quarters of the trickster, Odysseus. What rapture to see the places empty, nothing in them now to fear. At last they drifted back to where that monstrosity, the wooden horse, stood, and they gathered around it, puzzled what to do with it. Then the Greek who had been left behind in the camp discovered himself to them. His name was Sinon, and he was a most plausible speaker. He was seized and dragged to Priam, weeping and

protesting that he no longer wished to be a Greek.

\*\*\*\*\*

It was a good tale and the Trojans never questioned it. They pitied Sinon and assured him that he should henceforth live as one of themselves. So it befell that by false cunning and pretended tears those were conquered whom great Diomedes had never overcome, nor savage Achilles, nor ten years of warfare, nor a thousand ships. For Sinon did not forget the second part of his story. The wooden horse had been made, he said, as a votive offering to Athena, and the reason for its immense size was to discourage the Trojans from taking it into the city. What the Greeks hoped for was that the Trojans would destroy it and so draw down upon them Athena's anger. Placed in the city, it would turn her favor to them and away from the Greeks. The story was clever enough to have had by itself, in all probability, the desired effect; but Poseidon, the most bitter of all the gods against Troy, contrived an addition which made the issue certain. The priest Laocoön, when the horse was first discovered, had been urgent with the Trojans to destroy it. "I fear the Greeks even when they bear gifts," he said. Laocoön and his two sons heard his story with suspicion, the only doubters there. As Sinon finished, suddenly over the sea came two fearful serpents swimming to the land. Once there, they glided straight to Laocoön. They wrapped their huge coils around him and the two lads and they crushed the life out of them. Then they disappeared within Athena's temple.



There could be no further hesitation. To the horrified spectators Laocoön had been punished for opposing the entry of the horse which most certainly no one else would now do.

They dragged the horse through the gates and up to the temple of Athena. Then, rejoicing in their good fortune, believing the war ended and Athena's favor restored to them, they went to

their houses in peace as they had not for ten years.

In the middle of the night the door in the horse opened. One by one the chieftains let themselves down. They stole to the gates and threw them wide, and into the sleeping town marched the Greek Army. What they had first to do could be carried out silently. Fires were started in buildings throughout the city. By the time the Trojans were awake, before they realized what had happened, while they were struggling into their armor, Troy was burning. They rushed out to the street one by

one in confusion. Bands of soldiers were waiting there to strike each man down before he could join himself to others. It was not fighting, it was butchery. Very many died without ever a chance of dealing a blow in return. In the more distant parts of the town the Trojans were able to gather together here and there and then it was the Greeks who suffered. They were borne down by desperate men who wanted only to kill before they were killed. They knew that the one safety for the conquered was to hope for no safety. This spirit often turned the victors into the vanquished. The quickest-witted Trojans tore off their own armor and put on that of the dead Greeks, and many and many a Greek thinking he was joining friends discovered too late that they were enemies and paid for his error with his life.

On top of the houses they tore up the roofs and hurled the beams down upon the Greeks. An entire tower standing on the roof of Priam's palace was lifted from its foundations and toppled over. Exulting the defenders saw it fall and annihilate a great band who were forcing the palace doors. But the success brought only a short respite. Others rushed up carrying a huge beam. Over the debris of the tower and the crushed bodies they battered the doors with it. It crashed through and the Greeks were in the palace before the Trojans could leave the roof. In the inner courtyard around the altar were the women and children and one man, the old King. Achilles had spared Priam, but Achilles' son struck him down before the eyes of his wife and daughters.

By now the end was near. The contest from the first had been unequal. Too many Trojans had been slaughtered in the first surprise. The Greeks could not be beaten back anywhere. Slowly the defense ceased. Before morning all the leaders were dead, except one. Aphrodite's son Aeneas alone among the Trojan chiefs escaped. He fought the Greeks as long as he could find a living Trojan to stand with him, but as the slaughter spread and death came near he thought of his home, the helpless people he had left there. He could do nothing more for Troy, but perhaps something could be done for them. He hurried to them, his old father, his little son, his wife, and as he went his mother Aphrodite appeared to him, urging him on and keeping him safe from the flames and from the Greeks. Even with the goddess's help he could not save his wife. When they left the house she got separated from him and was killed. But the other two he brought away, through the enemy, past the city gates, out into the country, his father on his shoulders, his son clinging to his hand. No one but a divinity could have saved them, and Aphrodite was the only one of the gods that day who helped a Trojan.

She helped Helen too. She got her out of the city and took her to Menelaus. He received her gladly, and as he sailed for Greece she was with him.

When morning came what had been the proudest city in Asia was a fiery ruin. All that was left of Troy was a band of helpless captive women, whose husbands were dead, whose children had been taken from them. They were waiting for their masters to carry them overseas to slavery.

Chief among the captives was the old Queen, Hecuba, and her daughter-in-law, Hector's wife Andromache.

\*\*\*\*\*

One woman still had her child. Andromache held in her arms her son Astyanax, the little boy who had once shrunk back from his father's high-crested helmet. "He is so young," she thought. "They will let me take him with me." But from the Greek camp a herald came to her and spoke faltering words. He told her that she must not hate him for the news he brought to her against his will. Her son . . . She broke in

Not that he does not go with me?

He answered,

The boy must die — be thrown  
Down from the towering wall of Troy  
Now — now — let it be done. Endure  
Like a brave woman. Think. You are alone.  
One woman and a slave and no help anywhere.

She knew what he said was true. There was no help. She said good-by to her child.

The soldiers carried him away. With the death of Hector's son, Troy's last sacrifice was accomplished. The women waiting for the ships watched the end.

Troy has perished, the great city.  
Only the red flame now lives there.  
The dust is rising, spreading out like a great wing  
of smoke,  
And all is hidden.  
We now are gone, one here, one there.  
And Troy is gone forever.  
Farewell, dear city.  
Farewell, my country, where my children lived.  
There below the Greek ships wait.

## The Adventures of Odysseus

(taken from Euripides' *Trojan Women*)

When the victorious Greek Fleet put out to sea after the fall of Troy, many a captain, all unknowing, faced troubles as black as those he had brought down on the Trojans. Athena and Poseidon had been the Greeks' greatest allies among the gods, but when Troy fell all that had changed. They became their bitterest enemies. The Greeks went mad with victory the night they entered the city; they forgot what was due to the gods; and on their voyage home they were terribly punished.

Cassandra, one of Priam's daughters, was a prophetess. Apollo had loved her and given her the power to foretell the future. Later he turned against her because she refused his love, and although he could not take back his gift — divine favors once bestowed might not be revoked — he made it of no account: no one ever believed her. She told the Trojans each time what would happen; they would never listen to her. She declared that Greeks were hidden in the wooden horse; no one gave her words a thought. It was her fate always to know the disaster that was coming and be unable to avert it. When the Greeks sacked the city she was in Athena's temple clinging to her image, under the goddess's protection. The Greeks found her there and they dared to lay violent hands on her. Ajax — not the great Ajax, of course, who was dead, but a lesser chieftain of the same name — tore her from the altar

and dragged her out of the sanctuary. Not one Greek protested against the sacrilege. Athena's wrath was deep. She went to Poseidon and laid her wrongs before him. "Help me to vengeance," she said. "Give the Greeks a bitter homecoming. Stir up your waters with wild whirlwinds when they sail. Let dead men choke the bays and line the shores and reefs."

Poseidon agreed. Troy was a heap of ashes by now. He could afford to lay aside his anger against the Trojans. In the fearful tempest which struck the Greeks after they left for Greece, Agamemnon came near to losing all his ships; Menelaus was blown to Egypt; and the arch-sinner, sacrilegious Ajax, was drowned. At the height of the storm his boat was shattered and sank, but he succeeded in swimming to shore. He would have been saved if in his mad folly he had not cried out that he was one that the sea could not drown. Such arrogance always aroused the anger of the gods. Poseidon broke off the jagged bit of rock to which he was clinging. Ajax fell and the waves swept him away to his death.

Odysseus did not lose his life, but if he did not suffer as much as some of the Greeks, he suffered longer than them all. He wandered for ten years before he saw his home. When he reached it, the little son he had left there was grown to manhood. Twenty years had passed since Odysseus sailed for Troy