

THE SIEGE AND FALL OF TROY

Skip I. The Foundation of Troy

Troy, they say, was founded by Prince Scamander who, because of famine, sailed eastward from the island of Crete with a large number of followers, resolved to plant a colony in some fertile spot. An oracle had ordered him to settle wherever earth-born enemies should disarm his men under cover of darkness. He landed on the coast of Phrygia, within sight of a tall mountain overgrown by pines, which he named Ida in honour of Cretan Mount Ida, and camped beside a river to which he gave his own name, Scamander. On waking next morning, the Cretans saw that a swarm of hungry mice had nibbled their bow-strings, the leather straps of their shields, and all edible parts of their armour. Since these must clearly be the earth-born enemies of the Oracle, Scamander called a halt, made friends with the Phrygian natives, and began farming the soil. Not long afterwards a colony of Locrian Greeks landed close by and put themselves under his leadership. Though the Phrygians let him build a city near the River Scamander, he could not at first decide on the best position. Then someone proposed sending a dappled cow into the plain, and watching where she lay down to chew her cud. The cow chose a small hill, and around it Scamander's men marked out the boundaries of Troy. They built houses inside, but did not raise the walls for some years, being too busy improving their farms.

At last, a Trojan king named Laomedon won all the help he needed from two important gods—Poseidon and Apollo. They had rebelled against Almighty Zeus, the leading god of Olympus, who sentenced them to be Laomedon's slaves for a whole year. At the King's orders, Poseidon built most of the walls, while Apollo played a harp and looked after the royal flocks and herds. Aeacus, a Locrian colonist, built the wall facing seaward. It was, of course, not nearly so strong as those built by the gods.

Laomedon promised to pay Apollo, Poseidon and Aeacus good wages for their work but, being the meanest of men, sent them off empty-handed. Aeacus sailed back to Greece in disgust; Apollo infected the Trojan flocks with

foot-rot; and Poseidon took his revenge by sending a scaly sea-monster ashore to swallow alive every Trojan it came across. When the Trojans blamed Laomedon for their misfortunes, he consulted Apollo's oracle. The priestess told him that the monster would not go away until it had eaten his daughter Hesione. He therefore bound her naked to a rock. In the nick of time, however, the hero Heracles passed, on one of his Labours, and took pity on Hesione. He promised to destroy the monster if Laomedon let him marry her and also gave him two wonderful snow-white horses, a present from Almighty Zeus. Laomedon eagerly agreed. Heracles thereupon broke the monster's skull with one blow of his olive-wood club, and rescued Hesione.

Laomedon, mean as ever, cheated Heracles: refusing him not only Hesione, but the horses, too. Heracles went away cursing, and returned a few weeks later in command of a small fleet which Aeacus's son Telamon lent him. They took Troy by surprise, shot down Laomedon, killed all his sons—except the youngest, whose name was Priam—and carried off Hesione.

Priam became King of Troy. Having made the city stronger than ever before, after a long and wise reign, he called a council to decide how his sister Hesione could best be brought home. When he suggested sending a fleet to rescue her, the Council advised that he should first politely demand her surrender. Priam's envoys accordingly visited Salamis, where she was said to be living. They were there reminded that Laomedon had originally promised Hesione to Heracles, but cheated him; that Heracles had come back, sacked Troy, carried her off, and given her in marriage to his friend Telamon; that Telamon's father Aeacus had also been cheated by Laomedon; finally that Hesione had borne Telamon a son named Teucer the Archer (now grown up) and did not wish to leave Salamis, even for a short visit.

Start here II. Paris and Queen Helen

King Priam sulked on hearing the envoys' account of their visit to Salamis, and when his own son Paris ran away with Queen Helen of Sparta and brought her to Troy, refused to send her back either. It was this decision that provoked the long, calamitous Trojan War, which benefited nobody, not even the conquerors.

Here is the story of Paris and Helen. Paris was Priam's son by Queen Hecuba who, just before his birth, dreamed that instead of a child she bore a blazing faggot, from which wriggled countless fiery serpents. Priam asked Apollo's prophet Calchas what the dream meant. Calchas answered: 'This child will be Troy's ruin. Cut his throat as soon as he is born!' Priam could not bring himself to kill any baby, especially his own son, but the warning frightened him; so he gave the child to his chief cattleman, saying: 'Leave him behind a bush somewhere in the woods on Mount Ida, and don't go there again for nine days.'

The cattleman obeyed. But on the ninth day, passing through the bushy valley in which Paris had been left, he found a she-bear suckling him. Amazed at this sight, the cattleman brought Paris up with his own children.

Paris grew to be tall, handsome, strong and clever. He was always invited by the other cattlemen to judge bullfights. Almighty Zeus, watching from his palace on far-off Olympus, noticed how honestly he gave his verdict on such occasions; and one day chose him to preside over a beauty contest at which he did not care to appear himself. This is what had happened. The Goddess of Quarrels, Eris, by name, was not invited to a famous wedding (that of the Sea-goddess Thetis and King Peleus of Phthia), attended by all the other gods and goddesses. Eris spitefully threw a golden apple among the guests, after scratching on the peel: 'For the Most Beautiful!' They would have handed the apple to Thetis, as the bride; but were afraid of offending the three far more important goddesses present: Hera, Almighty Zeus's wife; Athene, his unmarried daughter, who was Goddess not only of Wisdom but of Battle; and his daughter-in-law Aphrodite, Goddess of Love. Each of them thought herself the most beautiful, and they began quarreling about the apple, as Eris had intended. Zeus's one hope of domestic peace lay in ordering a beauty contest and choosing an honest judge.

So Hermes, Herald of the Gods, flew down with the golden apple and a message for Paris from Zeus. 'Three goddesses,' he announced, 'will visit you here on Mount Ida, and Almighty Zeus's orders are that you shall award this apple to the most beautiful. They will all, of course, abide by your decision.' Paris disliked the task, but could not avoid it.

The goddesses arrived together, each in turn unveiling her beauty; and each in turn offering a bribe. Hera undertook to make Paris Emperor of Asia. Athene undertook to make him the wisest man alive and victorious in all his battles. But Aphrodite sidled up, saying: 'Darling Paris, I declare that you're the handsomest fellow I've seen for years! Why waste your time here among bulls and cows and stupid cattlemen? Why not move to some rich city and lead a more interesting life? You deserve to marry a woman almost as beautiful as myself—let me suggest Queen Helen of Sparta. One look at you, and I'll make her fall so deep in love that she won't mind leaving her husband, her palace, her family—everything, for your sake!' Excited by Aphrodite's account of Helen's beauty, Paris handed her the apple; whereupon Hera and Athene went off angrily, arm in arm, to plot the destruction of the whole Trojan race.

Next day, Paris paid his first visit to Troy, and found an athletic festival in progress. His foster-father, the cattleman, who had come too, advised him against entering the boxing contest which was staged in front of Priam's throne; but Paris stepped forward and won the crown of victory by sheer courage rather than skill. He put his name down for the foot-race, too, and ran first. When Priam's sons challenged him to a longer race, he beat them again. They grew so annoyed, to think that a mere peasant had carried off three crowns of victory in a row, that they drew their swords. Paris ran for protection to the altar of Zeus, while his foster-father fell on his knees before Priam, crying: 'Your Majesty, pardon me! This is your lost son.'

The King summoned Hecuba, and Paris's foster-father, showed her a rattle left in his hands when he was a baby. She knew it at once; so they took Paris with them to the palace, and there celebrated a huge banquet in honour of his return. Nevertheless, Calchas and the other priests of Apollo warned Priam that unless Paris were immediately put to death, Troy would go up in smoke. He answered: 'Better that Troy should burn, than that my wonderful son should die!'

Priam made ready a fleet to sail for Salamis and rescue Queen Hesioné by force of arms. Paris offered to take command, adding: 'And if we can't bring my aunt home, perhaps I may capture some Greek princess whom we can hold as a hostage.' He was of course already planning to carry off Helen, and had no intention of fetching back his old aunt, in whom no Trojan but

Priam took the least interest, and who felt perfectly happy at Salamis.

While Priam was deciding whether he should give Paris the command, Menelaus, King of Sparta, happened to visit Troy on some business matter. He made friends with Paris and invited him to Sparta; which enabled Paris to carry out his plan easily, using no more than a single fast ship. He and Menelaus sailed as soon as the wind blew favourably and, on arrival at Sparta, feasted together nine days running. Under Aphrodite's spell, Helen loved Paris at first sight, but was greatly embarrassed by his bold behaviour. He even dared to write 'I love Helen!' in wine spilt on the top of the banqueting table. Yet Menelaus, grieved by news of his father's death in Crete, noticed nothing; and when the nine days ended, he set sail for the funeral, leaving Helen to rule in his absence. This was no more than Helen's due, since he had become King of Sparta by marrying her.

That same night Helen and Paris eloped in his fast ship, putting aboard most of the palace treasures that she had inherited from her foster-father. And Paris stole a great mass of gold out of Apollo's temple, in revenge for the prophecy made by his priests that he should be killed at birth. Hera spitefully raised a heavy storm, which blew their ship to Cyprus; and Paris decided to stay there some months before he went home—Menelaus might be anchored off Troy, waiting to catch him. In Cyprus, where he had friends, he collected a fleet to raid Sidon, a rich city on the coast of Palestine. The raid was a great success: Paris killed the Sidonian king, and captured vast quantities of treasure.

When at last he returned to Troy, his ship loaded with silver, gold and precious stones, the Trojans welcomed him rapturously. Everyone thought Helen so beautiful, beyond all comparison, that King Priam himself swore never to give her up, even in exchange for his sister Hesioné. Paris quieted his enemies, the Trojan priests of Apollo, by handing them the gold robbed from the God's treasury at Sparta; and almost the only two people who took a gloomy view of what would now happen were Paris's sister Cassandra, and her twin-brother Helenus, both of whom possessed the gift of prophecy. This they had won accidentally, while still children, by falling asleep in Apollo's temple. The sacred serpents had come up and licked their ears, which enabled them to hear the

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God's secret voice. Yet it did them no good: because Apollo arranged that no one would believe their prophecies. Time after time Cassandra and Helenus had warned Priam never to let Paris visit Greece. Now they warned him to send Helen and her treasure back at once if he wanted to avoid a long and terrible war. Priam paid not the least attention.

III

The Expedition Sails

When Helen had grown to womanhood at Sparta, in the palace of her foster-father Tyndareus—she was the daughter of Almighty Zeus by Leda, Queen of Sparta, and sister of the Heavenly Twins Castor and Polydeuces—most of the kings and princes of Greece wanted to marry her. Among them were Diomedes of Argos, Idomeneus of Crete, Cinyras of Cyprus, Patroclus of Phthia, Palamedes of Euboea, Ajax of Salamis, his half-brother Teucer the Archer (Hesioné's Greek son), and Odysseus of Ithaca. They all brought rich presents, or all except Odysseus. Having no hope of success, he came empty-handed. The husband chosen would obviously be Menelaus, brother of the High King Agamemnon of Mycenae, who had married Helen's sister Clytaemnestra.

Though Tyndareus sent none of these suitors away, he dared not accept their presents for fear he might be accused of favouritism. But since each had set his heart on winning Helen, the loveliest in Greece, Tyndareus grew frightened at the prospect of an open battle in his palace. Odysseus came to him, saying: 'If I tell you how to avoid a fight, King Tyndareus, may I marry your niece Penelope?' 'It's a bargain!' Tyndareus cried. 'Very well,' said Odysseus. 'This is what you must do: make them swear to defend whoever becomes Helen's husband against everyone else who grudges him his good luck.'

Bribes

The suitors's agreement

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'What sensible advice!' said Tyndareus, smiling gratefully. He at once sacrificed a horse to Poseidon, cut the carcass into twelve pieces, and made each suitor stand on one of them, repeating after him the oath suggested by Odysseus. Then he buried the pieces beneath a mound called 'The Horse's Tomb'; and explained that the men who broke his oath would fall under the God's lasting displeasure. Afterwards he announced that Menelaus was to be Helen's husband, and named him heir to the Spartan throne.

If Hera and Athene had not been so vexed with Paris for awarding the apple to Aphrodite, the Trojan War might never have begun. But as soon as Hera heard that he was carrying off Helen (who, by the way, left behind her nine-year-old daughter Hermione), she sent Iris, Goddess of the Rainbow, to tell Menelaus the news. Menelaus hurried home from Crete, complaining to his brother Agamemnon: 'That rascal Paris came to Sparta as a guest, and has wickedly eloped with my wife Helen. He envied my good luck. I count on you to remind all her other suitors of the oath that they swore before Poseidon. They must join us at once in an expedition against Troy.'

Agamemnon, knowing that Troy was an almost impregnable city and that King Priam had powerful allies in Asia Minor and Thrace, hesitated for a while. Then he said: 'Yes, I fear we may have to do as you ask, brother. But first let us send envoys to Troy, demanding the return of Helen and the stolen treasure. If Priam is sensible, he will surely not risk a war against Greece.'

When Agamemnon's envoys came to Troy, Priam told them that he knew nothing of the matter—which was true, because Paris had not yet got back from Sidon. He added: 'Nevertheless, my lords, if Queen Helen has really left Sparta with my son and the Palace treasures, she must have done so of her own free will. Paris took only a single ship, and his few sailors can hardly have plundered King Menelaus's palace, and Apollo's temple, without her help.'

This reasonable answer annoyed Agamemnon, who sent messengers throughout Greece, to remind Helen's suitors of their oath and collect volunteers. 'The Gods are on our side,' he explained, 'because of Paris's treacherous behaviour. We shall have no trouble in storming Troy, which is immensely rich. Its fall will give us passage into the Black Sea. The Trojans, on guard at the straits, now make us pay double for all imported Eastern goods, such as timber, iron, hides, perfumes, spices and precious stones. How pleasant to save so much money!'

Agamemnon and Palamedes visited Odysseus, King of Ithaca, but found him most unwilling to join the expedition. In fact, when told of their arrival, he put on a prophet's round felt cap, then ploughed a field with an ox and an ass yoked together, flinging salt over his shoulder as he went. He did this because an oracle had warned him that, having once left Ithaca to fight at Troy, he would not return until twenty years later—alone and in rags. To 'plough with an ox and an ass' was a proverb meaning to work summer and winter, and each furrow sown with salt stood for a wasted year. But as soon as the plough reached the tenth furrow Palamedes snatched Odysseus's son Telemachus from Penelope's arms, and set him down in front of the team, forcing his father to pull up. Palamedes thereby prophesied that Telemachus, or 'the final battle', would take place in the tenth year. Unable to deny this, Odysseus promised to contribute a small fleet.

Agamemnon's envoys also went to Cyprus where King Cinyras promised fifty ships, but cheated by sending only one real ship and forty-nine toy ones, with dolls for crews, which the captain launched as he drew near the coast of Greece. Agamemnon called on Apollo to punish the fraud; and Apollo made Cinyras die of a sudden illness.

Calchas, the Trojan priest of Apollo, consulting the Delphic oracle at Priam's suggestion, was ordered by the priestess to join the Greeks and not let them abandon their siege of Troy whatever might happen. He now prophesied that Troy could not be taken without the help of a young hero named Achilles, son of King Peleus and the Sea-goddess Thetis, at whose wedding the fateful apple had been thrown. Thetis soon tired of her mortal husband, because he grew older, feebler and more boring every day; while she, as a goddess, always stayed young and lively. But she decided to make their

son Achilles invulnerable by dipping him in the holy river Styx, held tight by one heel; and afterwards brought him to Cheiron the Centaur—these Centaurs were half men, half horses—where he got the best possible education: in riding, hunting, fighting, music, medicine and history. Achilles killed his first wild boar as soon as he could walk, and a little later ran fast enough to overtake and capture stags. Being the son of a goddess, he was fully grown at an age when other children still clung to their mothers' skirts.

The Fate-goddesses had told Thetis that if her son went to Troy, he would never return alive: his destiny was either a long, quiet life, or a short, exciting, glorious one. So, guessing that Odysseus would try to recruit Achilles for the war, she took him away from Cheiron and sent him to the island of Scyros. There he lived among the king's daughters disguised as a girl.

Odysseus heard a rumour of Achilles's whereabouts, and sailed to Scyros with a chestful of valuable jewels and clothes as gifts for the princesses. When they all gathered around and made their choice, Odysseus ordered his trumpeter to blow an alarm at the palace gate. One of the girls immediately stripped off her linen tunic and seized the shield and sword which lay in the chest beside other gifts. This girl was of course Achilles, whom Odysseus now easily persuaded to join the expedition. King Peleus gave Achilles command of a small fleet, though insisting that he was too young to go to war without his tutor—a wise old man named Phoenix, King of the Dolopians. Achilles's inseparable companion, his cousin Patroclus, came too; but, having been one of Helen's suitors, he would have gone in any case. Peleus counted on Patroclus to guard Achilles in battle; and on Phoenix to give him good advice.

The Greek fleet gathered at Aulis, a protected beach opposite the island of Euboea. Over a thousand ships, holding about thirty men each, were drawn up on the white sand—some brought from as far away as North-Western Greece and the islands of Cos, Rhodes and Crete.

Agamemnon, the Commander-in-Chief, sacrificed a hundred bulls to Almighty Zeus and to Apollo, but no sooner had he done so than a blue serpent with blood-red markings darted from behind the altar and made for a plane-tree growing near by. A sparrow had built her nest on the highest branch, and in it were eight little sparrows. The serpent ate them all, one by one; then

Upholstered from
Mediation

Rules of
Hospitality

ate the mother too. Calchas read this as a sign that though nine years must pass before Troy would fall, fall it would at last.

The immense fleet steered for Troy, using oars and sails, but Aphrodite sent a storm from the north-east to blow it off course. On reaching Asia Minor, the Greeks plundered the countryside, which they supposed to be part of Phrygia. They were, really, in Mysia, a long way to the south. A hard battle against the Mysians cost them two or three hundred men before their mistake was discovered. When they put to sea again, Aphrodite scattered the fleet with a fearful storm, and the ships that stayed afloat struggled back to Aulis as best they could. One third of the expedition had been lost.

Agamemnon grew restless. The winds were still unfavourable, and provisions running short. He consulted Calchas. Now, unless Calchas happened to be prophetically inspired by Apollo, he was in the habit of making wild guesses. On this occasion he said: 'My lord King, Artemis is angry because, when you were hunting a few days ago and shot a stag through the neck, at a great distance, you foolishly boasted: "Artemis herself could not have done better!"' 'What must I do to appease the Goddess?' Agamemnon asked. 'Sacrifice the most beautiful of your daughters to her,' Calchas answered. 'You mean Iphigeneia?' cried Agamemnon. 'But my wife Clytaemnestra would never allow it!' 'Then why tell her?' asked Calchas. 'I refuse to sacrifice my daughter!' were Agamemnon's parting words.

When the Greek leaders learned that the expedition was held up because their Commander-in-Chief would not listen to Apollo's own prophet, some of them wanted to depose him in favour of Prince Palamedes of Euboea; and Odysseus warned Agamemnon what was happening. So, after all, a royal herald went to fetch Iphigeneia from Mycenae, on the lying excuse, invented by Odysseus, that Agamemnon wanted to reward Achilles for his brave deeds in Mysia by making her his wife. Although Agamemnon sent a secret message to Clytaemnestra: 'Disregard the herald!', it never reached her. Menelaus had intercepted the message, and Iphigeneia presently arrived at Aulis.

Achilles, hearing that Iphigeneia had been lured to death by a mischievous use of his name, protested angrily, and tried to save her life. However, she nobly consented to die for the sake of Greece, and offered her

young neck to the sacrificial axe. But before the blade could fall, a peal of thunder rang out, lightning flashed, and Iphigeneia vanished. Artemis had snatched her away through the air, to a distant peninsula now called the Crimea, where she became priestess to the savage Taurians.

The north-easterly gale dropped, and the huge fleet once more steered for Troy.

IV.

The First Eight Years of War

The Greeks landed on Tenedos, an island visible from Troy, and sacked the city. It was here that an accident happened to King Philoctetes of Methone, who had inherited Heracles's famous bow and arrows. As he was offering a huge sacrifice to Apollo, in gratitude for the victory that his troops had just won, a poisonous serpent bit him on the heel. No salves or fomentations could reduce the swelling. The wound smelt so horrible and Philoctetes howled so miserably that, after a few days, Agamemnon could stand it no longer. He took Philoctetes away, in a small boat, to a rocky island near Lemnos, and there put him ashore. Philoctetes's wound continued to cause him intense pain, but he kept alive by eating the roots and seeds of asphodel and by shooting wild birds.

Before leaving Tenedos, Agamemnon sent Menelaus, Odysseus and Palamedes on a mission to King Priam, threatening to level Troy with the ground, unless he gave up Helen and all the stolen treasure, besides paying a vast sum in gold to cover the expenses already incurred. Priam and most other Trojans had no intention of surrendering Helen, or of paying for the wrecked ships. Only one member of the Royal Council, Antenor, who had been Priam's envoy to Greece when he demanded the return of Hesione, and whose wife Theano acted as Athene's priestess at Troy, dared say that Helen should, in justice, be restored to her husband. The Council shouted him down; but at least he prevented them from murdering Agamemnon's envoys. The fact was that the love-magic with which Aphrodite invested Helen had so strong an effect on almost every man in the city, including old King Priam himself, that they would cheerfully have faced torture for one smile from her lovely lips.

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When the Greeks sailed against Troy at dawn, two days later, the Trojans flocked to the beach, where they shot arrows and flung showers of stones to prevent the ships from landing. Calchas had prophesied that the first man ashore would die after a short but glorious fight; and even Achilles hesitated to risk his life. Only Protesilaus, the Thessalian dared defy fate. He leaped from his ship and killed a number of Trojans, before Priam's son Hector speared him. Protesilaus had recently married, and his wife hearing in a dream that he was dead, prayed Persephone, Goddess of Death, to let him visit her for no longer than three hours. Persephone granted the prayer, and released Protesilaus on parole. After three hours' loving talk with him, his wife killed herself, and they went down, hand in hand, to the gloomy Underworld.

Achilles waited until the last. He then took such a prodigious jump that a spring of water burst out where his feet struck Trojan soil. Cycnus, son of Poseidon, whose body was proof against stones and weapons, led the Trojans at this point, and had been killing Greeks by the score. Achilles, equally invulnerable, tried to spear Cycnus or cut off his head; but in vain. Finally he battered at Cycnus's face with the sword-hilt, made him trip backwards over a rock, then knelt on his chest and strangled him with his helmet strap.

The Trojans fled when they saw Cycnus lying there lifeless; and the Greeks, having scuttled the main Trojan fleet, which lay moored at the river mouth, hauled their own slips high up on the beach, and built a stockade of pine logs around them. Next day they paraded in long lines and marched to the attack; but found the city gates so well guarded, and the walls so enormous and well manned, that they suffered heavy losses and were forced to retire. After three more unsuccessful attempts, Agamemnon called a Royal Council, at which it was decided to starve Troy out. This plan, too, proved difficult. He had not brought enough men to protect his fleet and at the same time keep a ring of armed camps around the city capable of resisting a mass enemy attack. Every night

the Trojans brought in food and supplies by the gates on the landward side, and the Greeks stayed helplessly where they had disembarked.

At another Council meeting, Odysseus spoke up plainly. 'Calchas was right,' he said. 'The war will last for years, but we're bound to be victorious in the end. This is like a battle between a lion and a sea-monster: although we Greeks have won command of the sea, the Trojans still have command of the land. I suggest that we sit in our stockade, sending out ships to raid all the islands and cities allied to King Priam. We shall thus both keep ourselves in food and weaken the enemy. Since Priam can't protect his allies without a fleet, they'll desert him one by one. And I suggest that Prince Achilles shall lead these expeditions.'

The Council agreed. Eight years were therefore spent by the Greeks in a siege that was not really a siege and grew more tedious year after year. They longed to see their sweethearts or wives and children again; and the shoddy huts which they had built in rows behind the stockade could never become proper homes. Quarrels sprang up for small, foolish reasons, and often led to murder. Yet if a soldier dared say that peace must be made on any terms, he was called a coward and ordered to risk his life in the next raid.

Great Ajax of Salamis, Telamon's son, twice landed in Thrace and fetched back a heap of treasure. But most of the raids were led by Achilles, who sacked some thirty cities up and down the coast of Asia Minor, among them Lesbos, Phocaea, Colophon, Smyrna, Clazomenae, Cyme, Aegialus, Tenos, Adramyttium, Colone, Antandrus, and Hypoplacian Thebes, where he killed Hector's father-in-law and seven of his brothers-in-law. The captives from Thebes included a beautiful girl named Chryseis, daughter of Chryses, a priest of Apollo, who happened to have gone there on a visit. This Chryseis later caused the angry dispute between Agamemnon and Achilles which nearly brought the Greeks to disaster.

Achilles also attacked Dardanus, a city not far from Troy. It was ruled by Aeneas, a cousin of King Priam,

in the name of his aged father Anchises. Since, for some reason or other, Priam treated Aeneas coldly, although his cousin and the son of Aphrodite herself, the Dardanians had remained neutral. Achilles, not respecting Aeneas's neutrality, chased him down the wooded slopes of Ida, drove off his cattle, killed his herdsmen, and sacked Lyrnessus, the city in which he took refuge. Aeneas was rescued by Almighty Zeus; but Achilles's behaviour so angered him that he went over to the Trojans, and fought bravely for them—helped by his mother Aphrodite.

A quarrel with far-reaching results now broke out between Palamedes of Euboea and Odysseus. Palamedes had invented lighthouses, scales, weights and measures, the alphabet, discus-throwing, and the art of posting sentinels. Odysseus grew jealous of his genius. When one day Agamemnon sent Odysseus on a raid against Thrace, in search of corn, he returned empty-handed, and Palamedes laughed at him for his lack of success. 'It was not my fault,' said Odysseus. 'There happened to be no corn in any of the cities I attacked. You would have done no better.' 'Are you sure?' asked Palamedes. He set sail at once and, a few days later, brought in a whole ship-load of grain.

'How did you succeed?' Odysseus asked.

'By using my common sense,' was the only answer Palamedes gave him.

Odysseus decided to get his own back and, after brooding awhile, hit on a wicked plan. He came into Agamemnon's hut early one morning. 'The gods,' he said, 'have warned me in a dream that a traitor is hidden among us. They say that the camp must be moved for twenty-four hours.'

Agamemnon gave the necessary orders, and that evening Odysseus secretly buried a sack of gold at the spot where Palamedes's hut had stood. Then he forced a Phrygian prisoner to write a letter in his own language, as if from King Priam to Palamedes. It read: 'The gold which I send you herewith is the price agreed between us for your drugging of the Greek sentries. My son, Prince Hector, will be ready to break into the naval camp at dawn, in three days' time.' Odysseus told the prisoner to hand Palamedes this letter, but had him killed as he went off. When the camp was moved back again, someone noticed the prisoner's body, and took the letter to Agamemnon's Council. An interpreter read it to them, and

Palamedes was at once accused of treason. When he denied accepting any gold from Priam, Odysseus suggested a thorough search of his hut. The gold was found under the tent-pole and Agamemnon, who hated Palamedes because he had been the army's choice for Commander-in-Chief at Aulis, sentenced him to death by stoning.

On his way to the place of execution, Palamedes cried aloud: 'Truth, I lament your fate! You have died before me.' He had earned general gratitude by inventing dice, made from knuckle-bones of sheep, which helped to amuse the bored and homesick soldiers. But Odysseus convinced them that he was a traitor.

The news reached Palamedes's father Naupilus, King of Euboea, who came to Troy in a rage, protesting that his son had been the victim of a vile plot. Agamemnon roughly sent him away. 'Palamedes,' he said, 'was fairly tried and justly condemned.' Naupilus swore vengeance, withdrew his ships and men from the camp, and when he got home again, went around Greece visiting the wives of all Palamedes's enemies in turn, and making each of them believe the same story: 'Your husband has captured a lovely slave-girl. He intends to divorce you and marry her instead.' A few of these unhappy queens committed suicide; but the rest revenged themselves by taking lovers—such as Clytaemnestra, Agamemnon's wife; and the wife of Diomedes, King of Argos; and the wife of Idomeneus the Cretan; and (some say) Penelope, Odysseus's wife—plotting to kill their husbands when they returned.

Achilles's anger against Agamemnon grew hotter. Besides being convinced of Palamedes's innocence, he hated the High King's unfair way of distributing captured treasure. Instead of letting the leader of a raid keep two-thirds of the treasure for himself and his men, and giving the rest to a common fund, Agamemnon had it all distributed among the Councillors according to their rank. This meant that if a hundredweight of gold were brought in, Agamemnon would claim ten pounds; Idomeneus eight; Menelaus, Nestor, Diomedes and Odysseus five each; and so on; whereas Achilles himself, or Great Ajax, being a mere prince, not a king, could claim only a single pound—unless the Council were pleased to vote him a small extra prize of honour. Achilles felt cheated because none of these kings except

Odysseus ever went on raids, thinking it beneath their dignity. Yet the Council refused to alter its rule.

Just outside Troy stood a temple of Apollo, which Greeks and Trojans had agreed to treat as neutral ground. One morning, when Achilles went there unarmed to offer a sacrifice, he unexpectedly ran into Queen Hecuba, accompanied by her beautiful daughter Polyxena, who was dressed in scarlet linen and wore a heavy gold necklace. Achilles at once fell violently in love. He said nothing at the time, but returned to camp in a torment, and presently sent his charioteer back to the temple, knowing that Hector would be sacrificing that same afternoon. The charioteer was to ask Hector privately: 'On what terms may Prince Achilles hope to marry your sister Polyxena?' Hector, though enraged because Achilles had killed his father-in-law and his seven brothers-in-law, put the good of Troy before any private grudge. He gave the charioteer a sealed letter addressed to Achilles, which read: 'I hear, Prince, that King Agamemnon and his Council have insulted you on many occasions. Not being his subject, but a volunteer, and also too young to have been one of Queen Helen's suitors, you may perhaps feel inclined to act in your own interests—by admitting me and my men into the Greek camp one night. When we have killed King Agamemnon and his brother Menelaus, my sister Polyxena will be yours to marry.'

Achilles seriously considered this offer, but feared that if he let the Trojans into the camp, some of his friends (such as his cousins Great and Little Ajax) might be killed by mistake. So he decided to wait until Troy fell, and then win Polyxena without having to make Hector any payment.

V.

Achilles Quarrels with Agamemnon

By the beginning of the ninth year, Troy herself had suffered little, but many of her allies had deserted, and others could be kept loyal only with huge bribes of gold. Priam's treasury was almost exhausted. Nevertheless, no city or tribe in Asia Minor wanted the Greeks to defeat the Trojans and enrich themselves by controlling the Black Sea trade; so when news spread that a Greek attack on Troy was planned for the early summer, large forces came to help King Priam from far-off Lycia, Paphlagonia, and elsewhere.

Almighty Zeus found himself in an awkward position. Priam had always given him splendid sacrifices, and the Trojans were behaving bravely and honourably, which was more than might be said of the Greeks. Zeus could not deny having arranged the beauty contest, and knew well that the irresistible Love-goddess Aphrodite had arranged the scandalous love-affair between Paris and Helen which was the cause of war. Yet he dared not antagonize his wife Hera and his daughter Athene, both of whom demanded vengeance on Troy. So he stayed neutral, though making things as unpleasant as possible for the Greeks.

It will be remembered that Achilles took prisoner the lovely Chryseis, daughter of Apollo's priest Chryses. In the distribution of spoils she went to Agamemnon as his slave, and grew quite fond of him; but one day Chryses suddenly walked into the Greek camp, carrying a gold wand bound with a woollen head-band sacred to Apollo, and demanded Chryseis's return, offering a large ransom for her. Although the Royal Council urged Agamemnon to agree, he flew into a great rage, telling Chryses roughly to begone and never again show his face there, unless he wanted a severe beating. 'Chryseis is mine,' he shouted, 'and I don't intend to give her up!'

Chryses withdrew and, standing by the seashore, prayed to Apollo for vengeance. Apollo ran down angrily from Olympus, a silver bow in his hand, and arrows rattling in his quiver. He sat on a near-by hill and began to shoot at the Greeks. Every arrow was tipped with plague, and since they kept their camp in a filthy state, seldom troubling to cart away the refuse, or wash themselves, or change their clothes, plague spread quickly from man to man. Before ten days had passed, hundreds were dead, and their comrades found it more and more difficult to burn the corpses—the supply of wood was giving out. This calamity alarmed Hera, who visited Achilles in a dream. 'Prince,' she said, 'call a Royal Council at once, and see what you can do to save the expedition.'

Achilles did as she ordered him, and when the Council met, suggested that Agamemnon should ask some reliable prophet why Apollo had sent the plague. Calchas was called upon. He rose and said: 'If I tell you the truth, my lords, and if it displeases the High King, who will protect me against his anger?'

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'I will, for one,' said Achilles. 'Rely on me!'

Calchas then told the Council bluntly that, unless Chryseis were restored to her father without a ransom, the plague would continue till no Greek survived.

Agamemnon called Calchas a liar. 'It's a spiteful trick,' he burst out, 'to rob me of Chryseis—whom, by the way, I far prefer to my wife Clytaemnestra, and who has been given me by the Royal Council as a prize of honour. Nevertheless, I will surrender her, if you insist on believing this improbable story—but on condition that I'm compensated for my loss with an equally beautiful and talented slave-girl.'

Achilles lost his temper, too, calling Agamemnon a greedy rascal. 'You know well enough,' he said, 'that there's no common stock of booty to draw from. Everything has been distributed as soon as it came in—most unfairly, too! And which of us will be asked to give you his own beautiful slave—that's what I want to know?'

'Hold your tongue!' cried Agamemnon. 'I daresay you hope to keep your own prize of honour while I, though High King and Commander-in-Chief of the Greeks, go empty-handed? This Council must do as I ask or I shall take the law into my hands and choose the prize of honour that pleases me—from whoever happens to possess the slave I need: whether Great Ajax, or Odysseus, or even yourself. But meanwhile, I suppose, Chryseis must be sent back to her father.'

Achilles grew angrier than ever. 'I, for one, am not under your orders!' he shouted. 'I came here as a volunteer. Moreover, my men and I have so far done most of the fighting and been given the meanest possible share of the spoils. You threaten to seize the prize which the Council voted me after my sack of Hypoplacian Thebes? Then I have no intention of humbling myself any longer by further thankless efforts to fill your private treasury! I'm sailing home.'

'So be it,' said Agamemnon. 'Obviously, you're a coward as well as a traitor. Sail home, if you must, but I swear by Almighty Zeus that I'll first visit your hut and take away your slave Briseis, using force if necessary! That'll teach you never to argue with your elders and betters.'

Achilles half-drew his sword from its sheath, and would have killed Agamemnon on the spot, had Athene not seen that this might provoke a civil war in the Greek camp and save Troy from destruction. She appeared suddenly at Achilles's side, unseen to all except him, and restrained his hand. 'Call Agamemnon what names you please,' she said, 'but use no violence! I solemnly swear that, before many days have gone by, Agamemnon will beg your pardon and offer you treasures enormously more valuable than your Theban slave.'

Achilles pushed the sword back into its sheath, muttering: 'It's always wise to obey the immortal gods.' Then he turned to Agamemnon, throwing at him every ugly name in the Greek language, and saying how surprised he was that no other member of the Council dared stand up to him. The time must come, he said, when the Greeks, on the point of being massacred by Hector's Trojans, would beg him to save their lives; but he would grimly fold his arms and watch while Agamemnon writhed in despair and cursed his own greed and stubbornness.

Old Nestor tried unsuccessfully to patch the quarrel. The Council dispersed and Agamemnon, having sent Chryseis home by sea, under Odysseus's charge, called his two royal heralds and said: 'Fetch me the slave Briseis from Achilles's hut.'

They went off in fear of their lives, but Achilles, who trusted Athene's oath, did not resist them. He only repeated his warning of what would happen when Hector attacked the Greek camp. After striding along the seashore, plunged in gloom, he stopped and prayed for help to his mother, the Sea-goddess Thetis. She swam up from her underwater cave, sat on the sand, and listened sympathetically as he told her his troubles; then promised to visit Almighty Zeus and make him punish Agamemnon.

That afternoon Hera saw Thetis in earnest conversation with Zeus, and at suppertime asked him what their talk had been about. He refused to answer, and when Hera snapped: 'I suppose she was asking a favour for her son Achilles—to let Hector give the Greeks a severe beating?' threatened to thrash her black and blue. Hera dared say no more, and her son Hephaestus the Smith, Aphrodite's lame husband, hurriedly brought her a cup of sweet wine. 'Please don't nag,' he muttered. 'Father Zeus is quite capable of hurling his thunderbolt at us, and then where should we be? Drink this, dear mother!'

Zeus decided to keep the promise he had made Thetis, by sending down a False Dream, disguised as old King Nestor. That night, the False Dream told Agamemnon: 'A message from Almighty Zeus. He's been persuaded by Queen Hera to let you capture Troy. Parade your troops at dawn, and advance!'

Agamemnon immediately roused his Council and reported the message. Old Nestor, proud to have figured in a divine dream, thought it must be authentic, and advised instant obedience. But Agamemnon called a General Assembly of all his troops, and very foolishly decided to test their courage by reminding them how few they were compared with the Trojans, how long the war had lasted, and how little hope they had of victory. 'Why fight against fate?' he asked them. 'Perhaps after all we should sail home, before worse befalls us?'

Instead of everyone protesting loudly, as he hoped, and crying: 'No, no, we've sworn to take Troy!' there came shouts of: 'Well said, well said, your Majesty! Let's set sail at once!'

Hera heard the jubilant shouts, the trampling of feet, and the noise of ships being loaded. She hurriedly sent Athene down to correct the High King's mistake. Athene saw Odysseus standing glumly beside his vessel, and told him to use Agamemnon's sceptre for taming the men into obedience. He did so, and kept them from launching their ships, by a threat that anyone who took Agamemnon's joke seriously and tried to sail off, would be executed as a deserter. He then called another General Assembly, which he reminded of Calchas's prophecy about the serpent and the sparrows, at the same time mentioning Agamemnon's divine dream. 'Let's eat a good breakfast, comrades,' he said, 'and then we'll attack Troy, which is bound to fall. Almighty Zeus has promised us that!'

A common soldier named Thersites, the ugliest man in the army—bandy-legged, hunch-backed, and almost bald, stood yelling abuse at the Greek leaders: 'Why should we stay here and suffer for a pack of greedy, cowardly kings? Look at the mean way Agamemnon has treated Achilles: all he wants is loot and glory, at other people's expense! Why don't we go home, as he suggested, and let him carry on this war alone?'

Odysseus walked up to Thersites and cried: 'Silence, you miserable windbag! I won't allow you to insult our great Commander-in-Chief.' Then he beat Thersites with the heavy golden sceptre until tears rolled down his cheeks.

Thersites had such a nasty tongue and so many enemies that all present cheered Odysseus uproariously and, after a good meal of beef roasted on spits, and copious draughts of rich Lemnian wine, the entire army, except Achilles's Myrmidons, formed up for battle. The Trojans, watching from the high walls, hastily put on their armour, harnessed their chariots, opened the City gates, and swarmed out to meet the attack. Great clouds of dust arose on both sides of the plain, darkening the sun.

VI.

The Greeks Win the Advantage

The battle had not yet begun when Paris, dressed in a panther-skin cloak, darted between the two armies, carrying a sword, two spears, and a bow. He loudly challenged any Greek who dared to meet him in single combat. Bellowing for rage, Menelaus jumped from his chariot and ran at his mortal enemy. Since Menelaus wore full armour—helmet, breastplate, leg-guards, and all—Paris thought better of it and slipped back again into the Trojan ranks. His brother Hector cried in disgust: 'You cowardly, handsome, curly-headed, deceitful good-for-nothing! I wish you had never been born! The enemy are laughing at our disgrace. Upon my word, we must have been mad not to stone you long ago!'

Paris answered: 'You speak sensibly, brother; but why blame my good looks, which the gods gave me at birth? It seems that you insist on my duelling with King Menelaus—very well, I'm ready! It's only fair for the

two of us to fight it out. If he kills me, I don't grudge him Helen and her fortune. If I kill him, let her stay here. We can then return Apollo's treasure to his temple at Sparta, and all will be settled. But first I must arm myself, like Menelaus.'

Hector, relieved by Paris's answer, strode along the Trojan line holding his spear at chest-level and pressing the soldiers back. 'Stop, and sit down!' he shouted. Though Greek arrows and slingstones flew at Hector in showers, all missed their aim; and when Agamemnon saw what was happening, he ordered: 'Leave Prince Hector alone, comrades! Probably he has something important to say.'

Hector turned around: 'Trojans and Greeks,' he announced, 'my brother, whose elopement with Queen Helen caused this miserable war, begs you to ground arms, and sit down. He and King Menelaus will presently fight to the death for this beautiful lady and her fortune. Meanwhile, we should agree on a truce.'

Menelaus accepted Paris's challenge; Agamemnon accepted the truce; and, after some delay due to the need for a sacrifice of lambs, both sides grounded arms, and the leaders dismounted from their chariots. Everyone welcomed the prospect of honourable peace.

Priam, his elder Councillors and Queen Helen, watching from the walls of Troy, saw Hector put two marked pebbles in his helmet and shake it to decide whether Paris or Menelaus should throw the first spear. Paris's pebble leaped out. When he had borrowed a splendid corslet from one of his brothers, a shield and helmet from a second, and a pair of leg-guards from a third, the champions advanced to meet each other, brandishing their weapons.

Paris's spear-throw struck Menelaus's shield fair and square; yet the point failed to pierce the thick layers of bull's hide under their bronze casing. Menelaus, in return, offered a prayer to Almighty Zeus and hurled his spear with terrific strength. It tore through Paris's shield, but he bent sideways and only his corslet was scratched. Menelaus then ran forward, sword in hand, and struck Paris's helmet so hard that the sword-blade snapped into four pieces. As Paris staggered, Menelaus caught hold of his horse-hair helmet crest and swung him bodily around. Half-strangled by the chin-strap, Paris found himself being dragged towards the Greek lines.

The duel would have ended in a glorious triumph for Menelaus, had not Aphrodite darted down to Paris's rescue. Reaching out an invisible hand, she broke the chin-strap and left Menelaus holding an empty helmet. He tossed this to his comrades, picked up Paris's spear, and turned to kill him. But Paris was no longer there! Aphrodite had made her favourite invisible and carried him to safety behind the lines.

When Paris could not be seen anywhere, Agamemnon shouted: 'Pray give me your attention, Trojans! I declare my brother Menelaus the winner! Now you must surrender Queen Helen and her fortune; and also pay me a huge indemnity to cover the costs of our expedition.'

His men yelled applause, and although the Trojans muttered curses against Paris, they could not dispute Menelaus's victory. Later, Helen, who had shut her eyes when Paris seemed on the point of being killed, heard from an old servant that he was back in their bedroom. She went to scold him for his cowardice, but he merely smiled and said: 'Athene helped Menelaus; Aphrodite helped me. What's more, she saved my life, as I knew she would. Well, Menelaus won that round; perhaps I'll win the next.'

Meanwhile, an argument took place in Heaven between Almighty Zeus and the other gods and goddesses. Zeus wanted to spare Troy, yet both Hera and Athene raised such protests that he let them have their way. Hera had even said: 'Destroy Argos, Mycenae, Sparta, or any other favourite city of mine; but I insist on the fall of Troy!' Athene saw that she could best keep the war alive (now that the Trojans were bound in honour to hand over Helen and her treasure) by making some Trojan ally break the truce. She therefore disguised herself as one of Priam's sons and told King Pandarus the Lycian: 'Take my advice, Pandarus, and shoot Menelaus while he is standing in the open. If you kill him, you'll earn undying glory, and Paris will give you a handsome reward as well.'

Pandarus unwisely followed Athene's advice. He reached for his bow, made from a pair of four-foot oryx-horns clamped together at their bases; strung it, fitted an arrow to the string, and let fly. Athene naturally had no intention of allowing her friend Menelaus to be killed. She stood in front of him and guided the arrow where it

would do the least damage. The point just nicked his side and drew a little blood. But the truce had been broken.

Some minutes later the two armies met head on, with a clatter of shields and a clash of weapons. Hundreds of dead soon strewed the plain. The fight surged this way and that, until at last Hector's Trojans fell back, and the Greeks began greedily stripping enemy corpses of their arms and armour.

Diomedes, King of Argos, fought best that day, though Agamemnon, Menelaus, Great Ajax, and other Greek leaders also accounted for a large number of the enemy. Athene herself helped Diomedes, as he stormed across the battlefield in his chariot, spearing men by the score, and seldom troubling to strip their corpses. Pandarus halted him awhile with an arrow that pierced his shoulderplate; but when it had been pulled out by his charioteer, Athene gave him renewed strength to kill many more of the enemy.

Aeneas then invited Pandarus to mount his chariot, drawn by two mares of divine breed, faster than the wind. 'I'll drive, you fight,' he suggested. 'Together we should easily destroy this Argive champion.'

Pandarus mounted. 'I thought,' he said, 'that my arrow had gone home; but Diomedes seems to be protected by some god or goddess. This time I'll use my spear and make sure of him.'

Diomedes saw them approaching at a gallop. He told his charioteer: 'Don't be afraid! We're protected by Athene. As soon as I've killed those two kings, abandon our chariot, seize Prince Aeneas's, and drive it to the camp. His mares are of a divine breed, worth twenty of mine.'

Pandarus flung the first spear. It tore through Diomedes's shield, dinting his breastplate, but went no farther. Diomedes's spear, guided by Athene, struck Pandarus between the eyes and killed him outright. Aeneas dismounted to stand guard over the fallen body. Diomedes dismounted too; he picked up and flung an enormous rock which broke Aeneas's thigh-bone. When