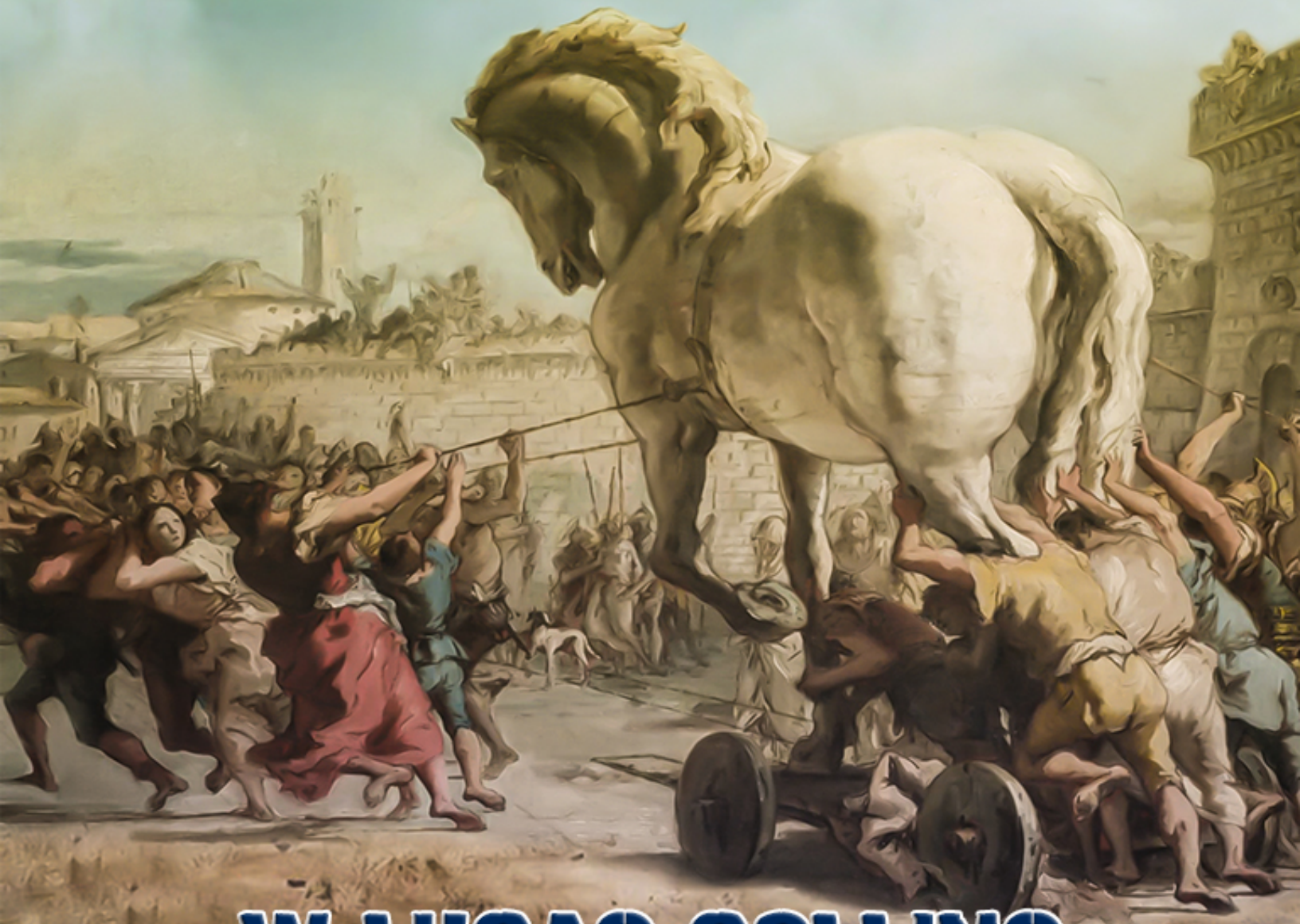
CLASSICS TO GO

HOMER THE ILIAD THE ODYSSEY



W. LUCAS COLLINS

Homer

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THE ILIAD

INTRODUCTION.

It is quite unnecessary here to discuss the question, on which the learned are very far from being agreed, whether Homer—the “Prince of Poets”—had any real existence; whether he was really the author of the two great poems which bear his name, or whether they are the collected works of various hands, dovetailed into each other by some clever editor of ancient times. Homer will still retain his personality for the uncritical reader, however a sceptical criticism may question it. The blind old bard, wandering from land to land, singing his lays of the old heroic times to a throng of admiring listeners, must always continue to be the familiar notion of the author of the Iliad and the Odyssey. Such was the universal creed of the world of readers until a comparatively recent date; and the speculations of modern scholars, in this as in other cases, have been much more successful in shaking the popular belief than in replacing it by any constructive theory of their own which is nearly so credible. “Homer” is quite as likely to have been really Homer, as a mere name under whose shadow the poems of various unknown writers have been grouped.

There is extant a Life of the poet, said to have been composed by the Greek historian Herodotus, quoted as such by early writers, and possibly, after all, quite as trustworthy as the destructive conjectures of those critics who would allow him no life at all. There we are told that his birth, like that of so many heroes of antiquity, was illegitimate; that he was the son of Critheis, who had been betrayed by her guardian; that he was born near Smyrna, on the banks of the river Meles, and was thence called “Melesigenes.” His

mother is said afterwards to have married a schoolmaster named Phemius, by whom the boy was adopted, and in due course succeeded to his new father’s occupation. But the future bard soon grew weary of such confinement. He set out to see the world; visiting in turn Egypt, Italy, Spain, the islands of the Mediterranean, and gathering material for at least one of his great works, the adventures of the hero Odysseus (Ulysses), known to us as the Odyssey. In the course of his travels he became blind, and thence was called “Homeros”—“the blind man”—such at least is one of the interpretations of his name.[1] In that state returning to his native town of Smyrna, he, like his great English successor, Milton, composed his two great poems. One of the few passages in which any personal allusion to himself has been traced, or fancied, in Homer’s verse, is a scene in the Odyssey, where the blind harper Demodocus is introduced as singing his lays in the halls of King Alcinous:—

> “Whom the Muse loved, and gave him good and ill—
> Ill, that of light she did his eyes deprive;
> Good, that sweet minstrelsies divine at will
> She lent him, and a voice men’s ears to thrill.” (W.)

So, in the same poem, the only other bard who appears is also blind—Phemius, who is compelled to exercise his art for the diversion of the dissolute suitors of Penelope. The fact of blindness is in itself by no means incompatible with the notion of Homer’s having constructed and recited even two such long poems as the Iliad and the Odyssey. The blind have very frequently remarkable memories, together with a ready ear and passionate love for music.

For the rest of his life, Homer is said to have roamed from city to city as a wandering minstrel, singing his lays through the towns of Asia Minor, in the islands of the Archipelago, and even in the streets of Athens itself, and drawing crowds of eager listeners wherever he went by the wondrous charm of his song. This wandering life has been assumed to imply

that he was an outcast and poor. The uncertainty of his birthplace, and the disputes to which it gave rise in after times, were the subject of an epigram whose pungency passed for truth—

> “Seven rival towns contend for Homer dead,
> Through which the living Homer begged his bread.”

But the begging is not in the original lines at all, and a wandering minstrel was no dishonoured guest, wherever he appeared, in days much later than Homer’s. Somewhere on the coast of the Levant he died and was buried, leaving behind him that name which retains its spell hardly weakened by the lapse of some twenty-seven centuries, and the two great poems which have been confessedly the main source of the epic poetry, the heroic drama, and the early romance of Europe.

Other works are ascribed to Homer’s name besides the Iliad and the Odyssey, but the authorship appears more doubtful. If we trust the opinion of Aristotle, Homer was the father of comic narrative poetry as well as of epic. The poem called ‘Margites,’ attributed to him, contained the travels and adventures of a wealthy and pedantic coxcomb: but slight fragments only of this have been preserved—enough to show that the humour was somewhat more gross than one would expect from the poet of the Odyssey, though redeemed, no doubt, by satire of a higher kind, as in the surviving line which, in describing the hero’s accomplishments, seems to anticipate the multifarious and somewhat superficial knowledge of the present day—

> “Full many things he knew—and ill he knew them all.”

Admitting the personality of the poet himself, and his claim to the authorship of both Iliad and Odyssey, it is not necessary to suppose that either poem was framed originally as a whole, or recited as a whole upon every

occasion. No doubt the song grew as he sung. He would probably add from time to time to the original lay. The reciter, whose audience must depend entirely upon him for their text, has an almost unlimited licence of interpolation and expansion. It may be fairly granted also that future minstrels, who sung the great poet's lays after his death, would interweave with them here and there something of their own, more or less successful in its imitation of the original. Such explanation of the repetitions and incongruities which are to be found in the Iliad seems at least as reasonable as the supposition that its twenty-four books are the work of various hands, "stitched together"—such is one explanation of the term "rhapsody"—in after times, and having a common origin only in this, that all sung of the "wondrous Tale of Troy."

That tale was for generations the mainspring of Greek legend and song, and the inspiration of Greek painters and sculptors. At this day, the attempt to separate the fabulous from the real, to reduce the rich colouring of romance into the severe outlines of history, is a task which even in the ablest hands seems hopeless. The legends themselves are various, and contradictory in their details. The leading characters in the story—Priam, Helen, Agamemnon, Achilles, Ulysses, Paris, Hector and Andromache—appear in as many different aspects and relations as the fancy of each poet chose. In this respect they are like the heroes of our own "Round Table" romances; like Arthur and Guinevere, Lancelot, Tristram, and Percival—common impersonations on whom all kinds of adventures are fastened, though the main characteristics of the portrait are preserved throughout. What amount of bare historical truth may or may not underlie the poetical colouring—whether there was or was not a real Greek expedition and a real siege of Troy, less "heroic" and more probable in its extent and details than the Iliad represents it—is no question to be here

discussed. So far as literary interest is concerned, “the real Trojan war,” as Mr Grote well says, “is that which is recounted by Homer.” It will be sufficient here to take the poet as our main authority, and to fill up his picture from other legendary sources; for though Homer’s version of the Great Trojan War is the earliest account which has come down to us, he drew his material from still earlier lays and legends, with which he assumes all his readers (or hearers) to be tolerably familiar; and which, again, the later poets and tragedians reproduced with many additions and variations of their own.

The preservation of poems of such great length (the Iliad alone contains between fifteen and sixteen thousand lines) in days when writing, even if invented, was in its infancy, has been the subject of much speculation. That they were publicly recited at great national festivals in all parts of Greece, is undoubted. Professional minstrels, or “rhapsodists,” as they were called, chanted certain selected portions which suited their own taste or that of their audience—often such as contained the exploits of some national hero. They followed possibly in this the example of the great bard himself; just as certain of our own popular writers have lately taken to read, to an admiring public, some favourite scenes and chapters from their own works. Lycurgus is said to have brought the collected poems from Asia to Sparta; Solon, at Athens, to have first obliged the minstrels to recite the several portions in due order, so as to preserve the continuity of the narrative. Pisistratus, the great Athenian ruler, has the reputation of having first reduced the whole into a collected shape, and of having thus far settled the “text” of Homer, employing in this work the most eminent men of letters of his day. There is a legend of a Homeric ‘Septuagint:’ of seventy learned scribes employed in the great work, as in the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures. From the time when the Iliad and

Odyssey were reduced to writing, their popularity rather increased than waned. They were the storehouse of Greek history, genealogy, and antiquity—the models and standards of literary taste. To be unacquainted with these masterpieces, was to be wholly without culture and education: and, thanks to their continual and public recital, this want was perhaps less prevalent amongst the Greeks than amongst ourselves. The young Alcibiades, when receiving the usual education of a Greek gentleman, is said to have struck his tutor one day in a burst of righteous indignation, for having made the confession—certainly inexcusable in his vocation—that he did not possess a copy of the great poet. Alexander the Great carried always with him the copy which had been corrected by his master Aristotle, preserved in a jewelled casket taken amongst the spoils of Darius. No pains were spared in the caligraphy, or costliness in the mountings, of favourite manuscripts of the Homeric poems. They continued to be regarded with almost a superstitious reverence even during the middle ages of Christendom. Men's future destinies were discovered, by a sort of rude divination, in verses selected at hap-hazard. Fantastic writers saw in the two poems nothing more or less than allegorical versions of Hebrew history; and grave physicians recommended as an infallible recipe for a *quartan* ague, the placing every night a copy of the *fourth* book of the Iliad under the patient's head. Modern critical speculations have gone quite as far in another direction. In the eyes of some ingenious theorists, this siege of Troy is but "a repetition of the daily siege of the East by the solar powers that every evening are robbed of their brightest treasures in the West;"[2] and the Homeric heroes and their exploits all represent allegorically, in one form or another, the great conflict between Light and Darkness. But such questions are beyond the scope of these pages; we are content here to take the tale of Troy as the poet tells it.

The supposed date of the story may be taken as some fifteen centuries before the Christian era. The great City of Troy, or Ilium, lay on the coast of Asia Minor—its reputed site still bearing the name of the Troad, a broad well-watered champaign, with a height still recognised as the citadel towering above it. “No royal seat of the ancient world,” says a modern visitor to the spot, “could boast a grander situation than the Trojan citadel.”[3] As to its actual locality and existence, there is little ground for scepticism. The tradition of the name and place was unbroken in the early historical ages of Greece. Xerxes, king of Persia, in his expedition, is said to have visited the citadel, and to have offered there a thousand oxen to the tutelary goddess; possibly, it has been suggested, claiming to be the avenger of the Asiatic kings on their European enemies.[4] Mindarus, the Lacedæmonian admiral, seventy years later, sacrificed there also: and Alexander, when he crossed the Hellespont, not only did the same, but took from the temple some of the sacred arms which were hung there (said to be those of the heroes of the great siege), offering up his own in exchange. The founder of the city was Ilus, son of Tros, and from these mythical heroes it took its two names. But its walls were built by the grandson, Laomedon. He employed some remarkable workmen. In one of the most striking and suggestive fables of the Greek mythology, certain of the gods are represented as being condemned by Zeus (or Jupiter) to a period of servitude upon earth. Poseidon (Neptune) and Apollo were under this condemnation, and undertook, for certain rewards, to help Laomedon in his fortifications. But when the work was finished, the ungrateful king repudiated his bargain. As a punishment, a sea-monster is sent to ravage his dominions, who can only be appeased by the sacrifice of a maiden of noble blood. The lot falls upon the king’s own daughter, Hesione. It is the original version of St George and the Dragon. Laomedon

offers his daughter, and certain horses of immortal breed (which he seems to count even a more valuable prize), to the champion who will deliver her and slay the monster. Hercules comes to the rescue; but a second time Laomedon breaks his word. He substitutes mortal horses, and refuses his daughter. Hercules attacks the city, kills Laomedon, and carries off the princess Hesione, whom he gives to his comrade Telamon. From this union are born two heroes, Ajax and his brother Teucer, whom we shall meet in the second and great Siege of Troy, which forms the subject of Homer's Iliad.

This double perjury of Laomedon's is one supposed cause of the wrath of Heaven resting on the town and its people. Yet Apollo, forgetful, it would seem, of his former unworthy treatment, and only remembering with affection the walls which he had helped to build, is represented as taking part with the Trojans in the great struggle, in which the deities of Olympus are bitterly divided amongst themselves.

But Homer's Tale of Troy says nothing of Laomedon and his broken faith. His poem is built upon a later legend. This legend embraces in the whole a period of thirty years, divided exactly, in a manner very convenient for both poet and reader, into complete decades; ten years of preparation for the siege, ten occupied in the siege itself (with which alone the Iliad has to do), and ten consumed in the weary wanderings and final return home of the surviving Greek heroes who had taken part in the expedition.

The first decade begins with the carrying off from the court of Menelaus, king of Sparta, of his wife Helen, by a young Asiatic prince whom he has entertained in his travels. Helen is the reputed daughter of Jupiter by Leda, and upon her Venus has bestowed the fatal endowment of matchless and irresistible beauty. The young prince whom she unhappily captivates is Paris or Alexander, son of Priam, king of Troy. Terrible oracles had accompanied the birth of

him who was to prove the curse of his father's people. His mother Hecuba dreamed that she gave birth to a flaming brand. The child when born was exposed on Mount Ida, so as to insure his death in infancy without incurring the guilt of blood. But, as in similar legends, the precaution did but help to fulfil the prophecy. In the solitudes of the mountain he grew up, a boy of wondrous beauty, the nursling and the favourite of Venus. There he was called upon to decide to whom the "Prize of Beauty"—the golden apple thrown by Discord into the feast of the Immortals, with that insidious legend inscribed on it—should be awarded. Three competing goddesses—Juno, Venus, and Minerva, who at least, as the goddess of wisdom, ought to have known better—appeared before the young shepherd in all the simplicity of immortal costume, in order that he might decide which of them was "the fairest." Each tried to bribe him to adjudge the prize to herself. The Queen of Heaven offered him power in the future; Minerva, wisdom; Venus, the loveliest woman upon earth. Paris chose the last. It was Helen; for Venus took it very little into her account that she had a husband already. It involved also, according to the most picturesque of the legends, a somewhat similar breach of troth on Paris's part. In the valleys of Ida he had already won the love of the nymph Œnone, but he deserts her without scruple under the new temptation.[5] He has learnt the secret of his royal birth, and is acknowledged by his father Priam. In spite of the warnings of his sister Cassandra, who has a gift of prophecy, and foresees evil from the expedition; in spite, too, of the forsaken Œnone's wild denunciations, he fits out ships and sets sail for Greece. Admitted as a guest to the hospitable court of Menelaus at Sparta, he charms both him and Helen by his many accomplishments. The king, gallant and unsuspicious, and of somewhat easy temperament, as appears from several passages of Homer, leaves him still an inmate of his palace, while he himself makes a voyage to

Crete. In the husband's absence, Paris succeeds—not without some degree of violence, according to some of the legends—in carrying off the wife, loading his ships at the same time (to give emphatic baseness to the exploit) with a rich freight of gold and treasures, the spoils of his absent host. So Venus's promise is made good, and Priam weakly receives into his palace the fatal beauty who is to prove the ruin of the Trojan fortunes.

The outrage rouses all Greece to arms. Menelaus appeals to his brother Agamemnon, king of Argos and Mycenæ, who held some sort of suzerainty over the whole of Greece. The brother-kings were the sons of Atreus, of the great house of Pelops, who gave his name to the peninsula known as the Peloponnesus, and now the Morea. It was a house eminent for wealth and splendour and influence. According to an old proverb, valour and wisdom were given by the gods to other names in larger measure, but wealth and power belonged of divine right to the Atridæ. This power must not be hastily pronounced fabulous. There yet remain traces of the mural and sepulchral architecture of Agamemnon's capital, Mycenæ, which are strongly significant of a pre-historical civilisation—an "iron age" of massive strength and no mean resources.[6] Agamemnon, in Homer's poem, carries a sceptre which had literally, not metaphorically, come down to him as an heirloom from the king of the gods. Vulcan himself had wrought it for Jupiter; Jupiter had given it to Hermes, Hermes to Pelops, and so it had been handed on. It was in some sort the prototype of those more than mortal weapons wielded by the heroes of medieval romance, which were one secret of their invincible prowess, and which had come from the hand of no human armourer; like the sword Durentaille, which belonged to Charlemagne, and was by him given to his nephew Roland; like Arthur's Excalibur; or the marvellous blade Recuite, which passed from the hands of Alexander the Great to Ptolemy, from Ptolemy to Judas

Maccabæus, and so, through many intermediate owners, to the Emperor Vespasian. To the monarchs of the house of Pelops, then, belonged in uncommon degree “the divinity that doth hedge a king;” and Agamemnon is recognised, throughout the whole of the Homeric story, as pre-eminently “King of Men.” But a terrible curse rested on the house—a curse connected with a revolting legend, which, as not recognised by Homer, needs no further notice here, but which was to find ample fulfilment in the sequel of Agamemnon’s history.

The royal sons of Atreus take hasty counsel with such of the neighbouring kings and chiefs as they can collect, how they may avenge the wrong. One legend tells us that Tyndarus, the reputed father of Helen, before he gave her in marriage to Menelaus, had pledged all her suitors, among whom were the noblest names of Greece, to avenge any such attempt against the honour of the husband he should choose for her, whichever of them he might be: and that they now redeemed that pledge when called upon by the king of Sparta. Nestor, king of Pylos, and a chief named Palamedes, went through the coasts of Greece, denouncing the perfidy of the foreign adventurer, and rousing the national feeling of the Greeks, or, as Homer prefers to call them, the Achæans. The chiefs did not all obey the summons willingly. Odysseus—better known to us under the Latin form of his name as Ulysses—king of the rocky island of Ithaca, feigned madness to escape from his engagement. But the shrewd Palamedes detected the imposture. He went to the field where the king, after the simple fashion of the times, was ploughing, carrying with him from the house his infant child Telemachus, and laid him down in the furrow which Ulysses was moodily driving, apparently insensible to all other sights and sounds. The father turned the plough aside, and his assumed madness was at once detected. In some cases, where there were several sons of military age

in the same family, lots were cast for the unwelcome honour of serving against Troy. Some even sent bribes to Agamemnon to induce him to set them free from their engagement. Echepolus of Sicyon, loath to leave his vast possessions, sent to the great king his celebrated mare Œthe, the fleetest of her kind, as his personal ransom. The bribe was accepted, and Œthe went to Troy instead of her luxurious master. The story has been adduced in proof of Agamemnon's greediness in thus preferring private gain to the public interests: but no less a critic than Aristotle has sagaciously observed, that a good horse was a far more valuable conscript than an unwilling soldier. Some heroes, on the other hand, went resolutely to the war, though the fates foretold that they should never return from it alive. Euchenor of Corinth, though rich like Echepolus, could not be persuaded to remain at home, even when his aged father, who was a seer himself, forewarned him of his doom; he boldly dared his fate, and fell at the close of the siege by the hand of Paris.

Under somewhat similar auguries the great hero of Homer's tale left his home for Troy. Achilles, said the legends, was the son of the ocean-goddess Thetis by a mortal lover, Peleus son of Æacus. The gods had honoured the marriage with their personal presence—

> "For in that elder time, when truth and worth
> Were still revered and cherished here on earth,
> The tenants of the skies would oft descend
> To heroes' spotless homes, as friend to friend;
> There meet them face to face, and freely share
> In all that stirred the hearts of mortals there."[7]

The Roman poet Catullus tells us in the same beautiful ode, how mortals and immortals alike brought their wedding gifts: Chiron the centaur ("that divine beast," as Pindar calls him) comes from the mountains laden with coronals of flowers for the banquet, and Peneus, the Thessalian river-

god, brings whole trees of beech and bay and cypress to shade the guests. Even the three weird sisters, the inexorable Fates, tune their voices for this once into a nuptial hymn, and while their spindles “run and weave the threads of doom,” they chant the future glories of the child that shall be born from this auspicious union. Neptune presents the fortunate bridegroom with two horses of divine breed—Xanthus and Balius—and Chiron gives him a wondrous ashen spear. Both these gifts passed afterwards as heirlooms to Achilles, the offspring of this marriage, and were carried by him to Troy.

Achilles is the very model of a hero, such as heroes would be accounted in times when the softer and nobler qualities of true heroism were unknown. Strong and beautiful in person, as a goddess-born should be; haughty, and prompt to resent insult, but gallant and generous; passionate alike in his love and in his hate; a stanch friend, and a bitter enemy. He is the prototype of Sir Lancelot in many points —“the goodliest person that ever came among press of knights—the truest friend to his lover that ever bestrod horse—the sternest man to his mortal foe that ever put spear in rest.” The epithet which Homer himself gives him is precisely that which was given to the English king who was held to be the flower of chivalry—“Lionheart.” Though in personal strength and speed of foot he excels all the other heroes of the expedition, yet he is not a mere fighter, like his comrade Ajax, but has all the finer tastes and accomplishments of an age which, however fierce and barbarous in many respects, shows yet a high degree of civilisation. Music and song beguile for him the intervals of battle, and, whether indignant, sarcastic, or pathetic, he is always an admirable speaker. There is something of a melancholy interest about him, too, not inappropriate to a hero of romance, which the poet never allows us to forget. He has come to Troy with his doom upon him, and he knows

it. His goddess-mother has told him that there is a twofold destiny possible for him: either to live in wealth and peace, and such happiness as they can bring, a long life of inglorious ease in his native land of Phthia, or to embrace in foreign warfare a brief career of victory, a warrior's death, and undying glory. He makes his choice as a hero should—

"One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth an age without a name."

One fable runs that his mother, Thetis, dipped him when an infant in the river Styx, which made him invulnerable in every point except the heel, by which she held him:[8] but there is no mention of this in the Iliad, and he goes into battle, for all that appears, as liable to wounds and death as any other mortal warrior, and with a presentiment that the last awaits him before the capture of Troy is complete.

At length the ten years' preparations were all completed. The harbour of Aulis on the coast of Bœotia was the place fixed for the rendezvous. From every quarter where the great race of the Achæans had settled,—from the wooded valleys of Thessaly, from all the coasts of the Peloponnesus, and the neighbouring islands, from Ithaca and Cephallenia on the west to Crete and Rhodes on the east—the chiefs and their following were gathered. A hundred ships—long half-decked row-galleys, whose average complement was about eighty men—were manned from Agamemnon's own kingdom of Mycenæ, and he supplied also sixty more to carry the contingent of the Arcadians, who, as an inland people, had no fleet of their own. His brother Menelaus brought sixty; Nestor of Pylos, ninety; Idomeneus of Crete, and Diomed of Argos, eighty each. Ulysses and Ajax did but contribute each twelve galleys; but the leaders were a host in themselves. In all there were twelve hundred vessels, carrying above 100,000 men. With the exception of the chiefs and two or three officials attached to each galley,

such as the helmsman and the steward, all on board were rowers when at sea, and fighting-men on land. The expedition has been well termed a secular crusade. It was undertaken, as modern politicians would say, “for an idea;” not for conquest, but for a point of honour. It might be questioned, indeed, how far the object was worth the cost. There was at least one of the neighbouring kings who at the time took a very unromantic and utilitarian view of the matter. Poltis, king of Thrace, was applied to amongst the rest for his assistance. He inquired into the cause of the expedition; and when he heard it, he suggested an arrangement which might accommodate all differences without the necessity of an appeal to arms. “It is hard,” he said, “for Menelaus to lose a wife: yet very probably Paris wanted one. Now I have two wives, whom I can well spare; I will send one to Menelaus, and the other to Paris; and so all parties will be satisfied.” But we might have lost the Iliad if his counsel had been taken.

The great host set sail; but the first time, says the legend, they missed their way. They mistook a part of the coast called Teuthrania for the plains of Troy; and then, re-embarking, were driven by a storm back to the shores of Greece. A second time they made their rendezvous at Aulis; but Agamemnon had incurred the anger of Diana, and the fleet lay wind-bound for many weeks. It was then that deed of purest tragedy was done, which, though it forms no part of Homer’s story, has been so often the subject of song, of painting, and of sculpture, and has received so many illustrations in modern literature, that it must find place here. The king is informed by the oracle that the wrath of Heaven can only be appeased by the sacrifice of his virgin daughter Iphianassa, or as she is more commonly called, Iphigenia. Reluctantly, and only after a bitter struggle with his feelings, urged by the importunate clamour of the whole army, and in obedience to his conception of his duties as

their chief, the father consented. The story is immortalised by the anecdote told of Timanthes, the painter of Sicyon, when competing with a rival in a picture of the sacrifice. The point of admitted difficulty with both the competitors was to portray the agony in the father's features at the moment when the sacrificing priest was about to strike the fatal blow. The great artist represented the king as wrapping his face in the folds of his mantle, and was at once pronounced the winner of the prize. Mr Tennyson—never more successful than when he draws his inspiration from the old classical sources—has made tasteful use of both legend and anecdote in his 'Dream of Fair Women.' It is Iphigenia who speaks:—

"I was cut off from hope in that sad place,
Which yet to name my spirit loathes and fears:
My father held his hand upon his face;
I, blinded with my tears,

"Still strove to speak: my voice was thick with sighs,
As in a dream. Dimly I could descry
The stern black-bearded kings with wolfish eyes,
Waiting to see me die.

"The tall masts quivered as they lay afloat,
The temples and the people and the shore;
One drew a sharp knife through my tender throat,
Slowly,—and nothing more."

There was, however, a less harrowing version of the legend. As in the parallel case of Jephtha's daughter, there were found interpreters who could not bear that the sacrifice should be carried out. They said that in mercy Diana substituted a fawn, and carried off the maiden to serve her as a priestess in perpetual maidenhood at her shrine in the Tauric Chersonese. It is this version of the tale which the Greek tragedian Euripides has followed in his "Iphigenia in Aulis." Racine, in his tragedy, avails himself of a third version of the catastrophe. The victim whom Calchas' oracle demands must be a princess of the blood of

Helen. This Agamemnon’s daughter was—her mother Clytemnestra being Helen’s sister. But at the last moment another Iphigenia is found, offspring of a previous secret marriage of Helen with Theseus. The French tragedian, following Euripides in representing the princess as promised in marriage to Achilles, has given the necessary amount of romance to the *denouement* by introducing the hero as an impetuous lover of the modern type, surrounding the altar with his faithful Myrmidons, and vowing that Calchas himself shall be the first victim—until the old soothsayer hits upon the expedient of a satisfactory substitute.

The wrath of Diana is appeased, the favouring gales are granted, and once more the Greek armament sets sail. They break their voyage at the island of Tenedos; and from thence Menelaus, accompanied by Ulysses, who is the diplomatist of the army, proceeds to Troy to make a final demand for reparation. Even now, if the Trojans will give back Helen and the treasures, the Greeks will be satisfied. But the terms were rejected, though the reception of the embassy at Troy seems to mark a high state of civilisation. So the expedition proceeds: but before they make good their landing on the Trojan coast, the Fates demand another victim. The oracle had said that the first who set foot on Trojan soil must fall. There was a hesitation even among the bravest of the Greeks, and the Trojans and their allies were lining the shore. Protesilaus of Phylacè, with a gallant disregard of omens, leapt to land, and fell, first of his countrymen, by a Dardanian spear—launched, as one legend has it, by the noble hand of Hector. Homer has a pathetic touch in his mention of him:—

> “Unfinished his proud palaces remain,
> And his sad consort beats her breast in vain.”

On this slight foundation the Roman poet, Ovid, has constructed one of the sweetest of his imaginary ‘Epistles’—

that of the wife Laodamia to the husband of whom she complains as sending no message home, undreaming that he had long since found a grave on the soil of Troy. A later legend tells us that she wearied the gods with prayers and tears, by night and day, to obtain permission to see her husband once again on earth. The boon was granted: for the space of three hours the dead hero was allowed to revisit his home, and Laodamia died in his embrace. There is a poetic sequel to the tradition, preserved by Pliny,[9] and thus beautifully rendered in the concluding lines of Wordsworth's 'Laodamia:'—

> "Upon the side
> Of Hellespont (such faith was entertained)
> A knot of spiry trees for ages grew
> From out the tomb of him for whom she died;
> And ever, when such stature they had gained
> That Ilium's walls were subject to their view,
> The trees' tall summits withered at the sight—
> A constant interchange of growth and blight!"

The Trojans, too, had their allies, who came to their aid, when the invasion was imminent, from the neighbouring tribes of Mysia, Caria, Phrygia, and even the coast towns of Thrace. The most renowned of these auxiliary chiefs were Sarpedon, who led the Lycian troops, and Æneas, commander of the Dardanians. Both claimed an immortal descent: Æneas was the son of Venus by a human lover, Anchises, and sprung from a branch of the royal house of Troy: Sarpedon's father was no less than Jupiter himself. Next after Hector, the most warlike, but not the eldest of the sons of Priam, these are the most illustrious names on the side of the Trojans in Homer's story. But the force of the invaders was too strong to allow their adversaries to keep the open field. Soon they were driven inside the walls of the city, while the Greeks ravaged all the neighbouring coast almost unopposed, and maintained themselves at the enemy's cost. Then began the weary siege which wasted

the hopes and resources of both armies for ten long years. To the long night-watches round the camp-fires of the Greeks we are indebted—so the legends say—for at least one invention which has enlivened many a waste hour since, and also, it perhaps may be said, has wasted some hours for its more enthusiastic admirers. Palamedes, to cheer the nagging spirits of his countrymen, invented for them, among other pastimes, the nobler game of chess; and kings and castles, knights and pawns, still move in illustration of the greater game which was then being played on the plains of Troy. The inventor met with but an ungrateful return, according to one gloomy legend—which, however, is not Homer's. Ulysses had never forgiven him the detection of the pretence of madness by which he had sought himself to escape the service; nor could he bear so close a rival in what he considered his own exclusive field of subtlety and stratagem. He took the occasion of a fishing expedition to plunge the unfortunate chief overboard.

So much of preface seems almost necessary to enable any reader to whom the Greek mythology is not already familiar ground, to take up Homer's tale with some such previous acquaintance with the subject as the bard himself would have given him credit for. The want of it has sometimes made the study of the Iliad less interesting and less intelligent than it should have been, even to those who have approached it with some knowledge of the original language.

The galleys of the Greeks, when they reached the Trojan coast, were all drawn up on shore, as was their invariable custom at the end of a voyage, and kept in an upright position by wooden shores. The crews, with the exception of some two or three "ship-keepers" for each galley, disembarked, and formed some kind of encampment near their respective vessels. Achilles' station was on one wing,

and that of Ajax on the other; these points of danger being assigned to the leaders of highest repute for valour. The chiefs fought in war-chariots of very light construction, on two wheels and open at the back. These were drawn by two —or sometimes three—horses, and carried two persons, both standing; the fighter, armed with sword and shield, and one or two long spears which were usually hurled at the enemy—and his charioteer, usually a friend of nearly equal rank. The fighters in most cases dismounted from their chariots when they came to close quarters, their charioteers attending on their movements. The combatants of lower degree fought on foot. There is no mention of cavalry.

CHAPTER I.

THE QUARREL OF AGAMEMNON AND ACHILLES.

ADOPTING for himself a method which has since become a rule of art, more or less acknowledged in the literature of fiction, the poet dashes off at once into the full action of his story. He does not ask his readers or hearers to accompany the great armament over sea from the shores of Greece, or give them the history of the long and weary siege. He plunges at one leap into the tenth year of the war. He assumes from the outset, on the part of those to whom he speaks, a general knowledge of the main plot of his poem, and of the characters represented: just as the modern author of a novel or a poem on the Civil Wars of England would assume some general acquaintance with the history of Charles I., the character of Cromwell, and the breach between King and Commons. Nine whole years are supposed to have already passed in desultory warfare; but for the details of these campaigns the modern reader has to go to other sources, with which also the original hearers are supposed to have been acquainted. The Trojans and their allies are cooped up within the walls of their city, while the Greek hero Achilles has spread the terror of his name far and wide.

The poet’s exordium is of the very briefest. His invocation to the goddess of song is in just three words:—

“Sing, heavenly muse, the wrath of Peleus’ son.”

We have here the key-note of the poem brought before us in the very first line—nay, in the very first word, according to the original, for “wrath” stands first in the Greek, which it cannot very conveniently do in the English. The two great heroes of the Greek chivalry, Agamemnon and Achilles, always jealous of each other, come to an open quarrel in full council of the princes of the League. Their quarrel is—like the original cause of the war, like so many quarrels before

and since—about a woman, a beautiful captive. A fatal pestilence is raging in the camp. The Sun-god, Apollo, is angry. To him and to his twin-sister Diana, the Moon, all mysterious diseases were attributed—not without some sufficient reasons, in a hot climate. Pestilence and disease were the arrows of Apollo and Diana. Therefore the Greeks have no doubt as to the author of the present calamity. It is "the god of the silver bow" who is sending his swift shafts of death amongst them. The poet's vision even sees the dread Archer in bodily shape. It is a fine picture; the English reader will lose little of its beauty in Lord Derby's version:—

"Along Olympus' heights he passed, his heart
Burning with wrath; behind his shoulders hung
His bow and ample quiver; at his back
Rattled the fateful arrows as he moved.
Like the night-cloud he passed, and from afar
He bent against the ships, and sped the bolt;
And fierce and deadly twanged the silver bow.
First on the mules and dogs, on man the last,
Was poured the arrowy storm; and through the camp
Constant and numerous blazed the funeral-fires."

In their misery the Greeks appeal to their soothsayer Calchas, to divine for them the cause of the god's displeasure. The Mantis or soothsayer, whose skill was in most cases supposed to be hereditary, accompanied a Greek force on all its expeditions; and no prudent general would risk a battle, or engage in any important enterprise, without first ascertaining from this authority the will of the gods, as shadowed out in certain appearances of the sacrifice, or some peculiarity in the flight of birds, or some phenomena of the heavens. In this particular expedition it would appear that Calchas had turned the last branch of his art to good purpose; it must have been his knowledge of the stars which had enabled him, as Homer tells us, to pilot the great fleet from their own shores to Troy. He confesses that he can read the secret of Apollo's present wrath; but he