

THE STORY OF THE TROJAN HORSE¹

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WE have been told a great deal in recent times about "the Trojan horse". We have heard of Trojan horse tactics, Trojan horse movements, Trojan horse activities and so on. The term is used so generally and so widely applied that its meaning is often doubtful and vague. Therefore it may be of value to us in our thinking about present-day problems to cast back to the lore of our school days, and refresh our minds about the original incident and the meaning of the Trojan horse.

That it was connected with the Trojans and the siege of Troy, is obvious. This, the most famous siege in the history of the world, is especially the property of the poet Homer. So much is this so that many people have doubted whether there ever was a siege of Troy, or at least such a one as we know, outside of the pages of Homer. It seems, then, that we ought to ask first what Homer knows about the Trojan horse.

In the *Iliad*, which is Homer's account of the Trojan war, we find no mention whatever of the horse. The name of Epeius, who was reputed to be its builder, does occur, but only as that of a boxer and discus-thrower, and there is no indication whether it is the same man who is meant or not. We recall, of course, that the *Iliad* makes no pretence of telling the whole story of the ten years' war. In fact its twenty-four books record merely the events of a few days, and depict the result of the wrath of Achilles as displayed in the dispute which he had with the Greek commander-in-chief, Agamemnon. This caused Achilles to retire in a sulky fit from the fighting, allowed the Trojans under Hector almost to drive the Greeks into the sea, and brought about the death of Patroclus, Achilles's friend. Then at last Achilles was aroused to revenge his death by killing Hector, and so was reconciled to Agamemnon and the Greeks.

These few days, while full of momentous events, were only a small portion of the whole siege, and perhaps it is too much to expect that there would be any mention in their description of what happened years afterwards. Poetic propriety would cause Homer to be silent about something that he knew, but that was not relevant to his immediate story.

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However, in the *Odyssey*, the story of Odysseus's long return home from the war, Homer gives a fairly full account of the episode of the Trojan horse. This is quite natural, as the building of the horse was one of the latest happenings in the war, and so was quite fresh in the minds of those who had fought there and were now finding their way homewards. It is in the eighth book of the *Odyssey*, lines 445-527, that the following passage occurs. Alcinous, king of the Phaeacians, is entertaining the unknown stranger who had been wrecked on his coast, and after the banquet he calls for the bard Demodocus to sing to the assembled company. I quote from T. E. Lawrence's translation of the *Odyssey*:

When they were filled with drink and food, then Odysseus addressed Demodocus. "Demodocus, I laud you above all mortal men: I know not if it was the Muse, daughter of Zeus, that taught you, or Apollo himself. Anyhow, you have sung the real history of the mishaps of the Achaeans, their deeds, their sufferings, their griefs, as if you had been there or had heard it from eye-witnesses. But now change your theme, and sing of how Epeius with the help of Athene carpentered together that great timbered horse, the crafty device, which wise Odysseus got taken into the citadel after packing it with the men who were to lay Troy waste. Tell me all this in order, and then I will maintain everywhere that the God's grace has conferred the bounty of inspiration on your singing."

So he said; and the minstrel, fired by the God, gave proof of his mastery. He took up his tale where the main body of the Argives embarked on their well-decked ships after setting fire to their hutments, and sailed away; leaving the remnant, the companions of famous Odysseus, enclosed in the heart of Troy-town, in the meeting-place, hidden within the horse which the Trojans themselves had dragged up to their citadel. There the horse stood while the people hung about it arguing this way and that, uncertainly. They were of three minds:—either to prize open its wooden womb with their pitiless blades; or to drag it to the cliff's edge and roll it down among the rocks; or to leave it there dedicated as a mighty peace offering to the Gods. In the end this last counsel had it, for it was fated that they should perish when their city gave lodgement to the monstrous beast in which crouched all the flower of the Argives with their seeds of death and doom for Troy. He sang how the sons of the Argives quitted their hollow den, and poured out from the horse, and made an end of Troy. He sang the share of each warrior in the wasting of the stately town, and how Odysseus, Ares-like, attacked the house of Deiphobus with great Menelaus. There, he said, Odysseus braved terrible odds but conquered in the end, by help of resolute Athene.

Thus ran the famous singer's song.

Then in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*, lines 522-537, we read the following in the passage where Odysseus goes down to the world of departed spirits and meets the shade of Achilles, to whom he tells the news of the upper world and particularly of Achilles's son, Neoptolemus. I quote again from T. E. Lawrence's translation. Odysseus is speaking:

Royal Memnon apart, I saw no better man among them. Further, when the time came for us Argive leaders to mount into the horse that Epeius built, they charged me with the responsibility of closing or opening the trap-door of our crowded lair. The other chiefs and champions were wiping away tears and trembling in every limb: but though I gazed at him with my whole eyes, never once did his comely skin turn white or a tear need dashing from his cheek. Repeatedly he begged me to let him sally forth from the horse: and he kept fondling his sword-hilt and heavy spear-blade, in deadly rage against the men of Troy. After we had sacked the hill-built city of Priam, he departed in his ship with his full share of loot, escaping without a wound, for the flying shafts of all missed him and the sword-play left him unhurt. The luck of war, that was: Ares often fights too haphazardly to give each one his due.

We see, then, that Homer in the *Odyssey* knows the full story of the fall of Troy by means of the stratagem of the wooden horse, although he mentions it only incidentally to his main theme. It is part of the difference in tone between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* that has been so often remarked, that the two works depict such different kinds of warfare. In the *Iliad* there is the simple, straight-forward fighting of the chieftains, who are keen to display their individual prowess. Discipline, foresight and strategy are mainly conspicuous by their absence. What we are told of the Trojan War in the *Odyssey*, as this episode of the wooden horse, seems to exhibit a unity of purpose and perfection of discipline as great as in any modern war. Perhaps the Greeks had learned by their long schooling in fighting.

It was left to the lesser epic poets of the post-Homeric times to describe the other events of the long Trojan war, following the brilliant but brief wrath of Achilles. Their works sometimes passed under the name of Homer, but posterity usually distinguished them. Among these works was the *Sack of Troy* by Arctinus, which told the full story of the wooden horse. This, although it had wide circulation and much popularity in the ancient world, has vanished, and we are dependent for a knowledge of its contents on a brief summary by a late commentator named Proclus. From this it is obvious that the

Roman poet Vergil¹ has largely reproduced the story of Aretinus in the second book of his *Aeneid*. No doubt he made some changes which were necessary in order to give more prominence to his hero Aeneas than he enjoyed in the original Greek tale; but a man who came as late as he did, and who ventured to treat the well-known epic subject-matter, would not dare to change it greatly. So it is in Vergil's *Aeneid* that we look for the classic account of the Trojan horse, and there most of the high-school pupils, at least of recent times, have read it with considerable interest if not with complete illumination. They will not object to putting to present use some of the so-called "useless" knowledge of the school days.

Those who are wise will read again the telling lines of the second book of the *Aeneid*. To those who are in a hurry, or to those who wish to have the old story in modern terms, I offer, with some diffidence, the following synopsis.

In the first book of the *Aeneid*, Vergil has told how Aeneas with his fleet has come as far west as Sicily, and while attempting to sail from there to Italy has been caught in a tempest and thrown up on the north coast of Africa. There the Trojans find that the Phoenician princess, Dido, is founding a new city in the west, Carthage, with a devoted band of retainers whom she has led from their homeland of Tyre and Sidon.

Dido has heard stories of the great Trojan war, and she is delighted to entertain some of the heroes who have taken part in it. Accordingly she welcomes Aeneas and his followers. She proceeds to give a state banquet in their honour, and after the formal entertainment asks Aeneas to tell her the story of the taking and destruction of Troy. Aeneas, although the recital is very painful to him for many obvious reasons, complies with her request.

The second book of the *Aeneid* contains the account which Aeneas gives to Dido of the last day and night of Troy. He explains how the Greeks devised their famous stratagem of "the Trojan horse". They invented a scheme which was so different from anything that they had used before that the Trojans, who thought they knew them absolutely, were completely taken in. The builder was Epeius, but, needless to say, the crafty Odysseus, or Ulysses, as the Romans called him, had conceived the plan. Into the huge wooden horse which they had constructed they put armed men. Then they sailed away out of sight behind the neighboring island of Tenedos, and lay hidden on its seaward side.

¹ Macrobius says that Vergil took *Aeneid* II from the work of an epic poet Polixander but no one else has been able to trace this Polixander.

When the Trojans saw the Greeks standing out to sea and their camping-site and battlefield deserted, they came swarming out of their city in the joyous abandon of relief, and ran about as happy as children, seeing the sights and visiting the scenes of the war. Then they gathered about the towering horse and discussed what should be done with it. The cautious ones were for destroying it forthwith, while the soft and sentimental ones thought that by taking it into their own city they might gain a majestic monument that would get for them the favour of the gods.

The crowd of Trojans were still grouped around the great wooden horse, hotly debating what should be done with it, when there arrived strong reinforcement for those who demanded that it be destroyed at once, or at least opened up and investigated. This was no less a person than Laocoon, who, as priest of Apollo, was one of the most influential men of the city. He had apparently heard the news of the horse while still in the citadel, and had at once begun to denounce it loudly even before he saw it. This naturally attracted a large crowd about him, who followed him as he came rushing down the streets and out the gates.

Even before he reached the ring about the horse, he shouted invectives at the Greeks and all their works and ways. He pointed out to his fellow-citizens that it was madness to trust anything in which the Greeks and especially Ulysses had had a hand. He argued that either there were armed men in the horse, or that it was some kind of watch-tower or vantage-point from which to spy on the city. At any rate there was something false about it, and it behooved them to be particularly suspicious of the Greeks when they seemed to be bringing presents. So saying, he snatched a spear, doubtless from some warrior standing near, and hurled it against the horse, where it landed with a loud thud and stuck quivering. He would have forced his people to proceed further if, as Aeneas says, the will of heaven had not caused a sudden diversion.

A great tumult of shouting was heard, and some shepherds appeared on the scene obviously in great excitement. They were seen to be dragging along a man of some sort. As they came up to the throng about the horse, they halted and gave their captive a chance to recover himself a little and to breathe. He was seen to be a young Greek. The shepherds explained that, as they were reconnoitring their sheep-pastures, he had come out of the swamp and accosted them of his own accord.

As he stood there, the Trojan youth rushed in to have a look at him, and began to fling taunts. Still he was strangely unaffected. He looked as though he were quite expecting to meet instant death, and yet he seemed ready and anxious to speak. As he faced the multitude of hostile glances, he took advantage of a lull in the hubbub, and began to address them in humble and conciliatory tones. Presumably he knew their language.

His first words were little more than a lament that he was now indeed an outcast in the world, since both the Greeks and the Trojans were demanding his blood. This served, as it was intended to do, to abate their hostility by arousing their curiosity. The Trojans scented something out of the ordinary behind his words, and they found themselves suddenly eager to learn who he was and what he was doing there, after all the rest of his countrymen had departed. With one accord they urged him to go on and to tell them his story.

The captive, when urged by the assembled throng to tell them about himself, appeared considerably reassured, and after a pause to regain his composure, turned and addressed King Priam, whom he apparently recognized as being in charge. The speech that he made was seemingly simple and straightforward and right from his heart, but it was one where art concealed art; for if it is examined closely, it will be seen to follow carefully all the best rules for making public speeches in law courts, a practice which the Greeks brought to a fine pitch of perfection.

He started, as one would expect, with a declaration that he would tell the whole truth, no matter what happened. He then admitted that he was a Greek and he told his name, Sinon. Apparently this meant nothing to the Trojans, and in spite of the ten years' war, he was unknown to them. He claimed, however, connection with a name that was well-known. He said that he had been the attendant and friend of Palamedes.

The story of the death of Palamedes had long ago spread far and wide, and become public property. It had revealed to the world some of that dissension in the ranks of the Greeks which made ineffective their attack and served to prolong the war. Palamedes had been a famous king of Euboea, who had joined the expedition against Troy; but Agememnon, Diomedes, and Ulysses, envious of his fame, had had a captive Phrygian write a letter to Palamedes in the name of Priam, and they bribed a servant of Palamedes to hide the letter under his master's bed. They then accused Palamedes of treachery. Upon searching his tent they found the letter which they had

themselves dictated; and thereupon they caused him to be stoned to death. When Palamedes was being led to his execution, he exclaimed, "Truth, I lament thee, for thou hast died even before me."

Sinon alleged that his father, who was a poor but honourable man, had sent him along in the usual Greek fashion to be the youthful companion of Palamedes. While the latter flourished, he had shared his position and renown. After Ulysses had concocted and carried through the plot that led to Palamedes's death, he naturally had had a hard time. In his indignation at the undeserved fate of his innocent friend, he could not keep silent, but threw out hints of the vengeance that he would exact after his victorious return to Greece. He found some sympathetic response, and this spurred Ulysses into action. In his cunning way he began to circulate stories against Sinon, and to look for suitable accomplices in contriving his ruin. Finally he found Calchas, the seer, to assist him.

At this point in his tale, Sinon broke down and appeared to be overcome by the futility of his efforts. What was the use, he said, of telling all this to the Trojans, who lumped all the Greeks together and made no distinction between the bad and the good? Let them finish killing him off. So Ulysses and Menelaus and Agamemnon would have gained their end.

If there was anything calculated to increase the curiosity of the Trojans, who were just beginning to put together the pieces of this puzzle, it was to have a break come at this interesting point. Accordingly they forgot all their suspicions and cautions, all their experience of the Greeks, and urged him to complete his story.

With every appearance still of apprehension, he went on to relate how gradually war-weariness overtook the Greeks until they became heartily sick of the land of Troy, but when they came to the point of departure they were more than once prevented by the violence of the weather and by unfavourable winds. So they built the huge horse to propitiate the favour of heaven.

Still the storms continued, and the Greeks were alarmed at being blocked in their efforts to return to Greece. So they did what Greeks usually did in a crisis. They sent to consult the Oracle of Apollo, god of prophecy. The answer came back from the god that, as there had been a human sacrifice at the commencement of the expedition against Troy to appease the contrary winds, so there would have to be another human sacrifice now to propitiate the winds for the return.

The Trojans doubtless knew all about the previous occasion when, at Aulis in Euboea, Agamemnon, leader of the Greeks had been compelled to sacrifice his daughter Iphigeneia, although she was a princess. So they were not at all surprised to hear of this second sacrifice. In fact it would seem quite natural to them. It would fit into the picture as a logical sequence.

Sinon went on to relate how, when the news of the oracle got around, there was universal fear. Each of the Greeks was afraid that he might be chosen as the victim. Calchas, the seer, the man who had picked Iphigeneia before, was enjoined to tell whom the gods desired. Calchas for ten days refused to speak, but at last he was driven by the loud demands of Ulysses to break his silence, and he selected Sinon as the victim.

This won universal approval. All the rest, who had been kept in uneasy anxiety for ten days, were thankful to have escaped themselves. A day was fixed for the event. Sinon was put in detention, and all the trappings were prepared, as for the sacrifice of an animal. Sinon, however, did not go through with the business in the same spirit as Iphigeneia had done. He objected to being the chief figure in a sacrifice. He managed to escape, and lay hid in a swamp until the Greek army had departed. Presumably they had found a substitute victim in his place, and the winds had been satisfied.

Now, Sinon said, he had no hope of ever seeing again his native land or his father or children; in fact the latter would probably have to suffer for his escape by being put to death. Accordingly Sinon threw himself on the mercy of the Trojans, and appealed in the name of truth and good faith to their sympathy.

The Trojans, in spite of the ten years' war, or perhaps on account of the very horrors that they had witnessed, were full of sentimental softness. There was a universal outrush of pity towards this poor unfortunate, who had made a subtle appeal to their generosity by the implied assumption that they were vastly superior in morals to the Greeks.

King Priam immediately ordered the captive's bonds to be removed, and bade him forget all about the Greeks and live with the Trojans as one of themselves. Then, because the subject was burning in every mind and he thought that he had a heaven-sent opportunity of satisfying his curiosity, he went on to ask Sinon what the wooden horse meant and what was its purpose. Was it a votive offering to the gods, or an engine of siege-warfare as some suggested?

King Priam's urgency left Sinon no time to consider his reply, but he was ready. His limbs must have been aching from the bonds which had just been removed, but without pausing to ease them, he lifted his hands to heaven in a grand gesture of solemn prayer. Passionately he called on the powers above to free him from any obligation or loyalty to the Greeks who had treated him so badly. Then turning to Priam, he bade him keep faith, if he found that he told the truth and did the Trojans a great service.

After this grave preliminary, which was sufficiently impressive, he explained that everything had hinged on the Palladium or statue of the goddess Pallas Athene, which stood in the temple on the citadel of Troy. Although the goddess was on the whole favourable to the Greeks, it became known that Troy could never be taken as long as the statue of Pallas stood unharmed in her temple. Accordingly the enterprising Ulysses, king of Ithaca, and Diomedes, king of Argos, undertook the task of stealing the statue. They entered Troy in disguise, slew the guards of the temple and ran off with the statue, which must have been a fairly small one, probably an ancient wooden one of miniature size.

So far the Trojans, of course, were well aware of the course of events, but now Sinon explained to them the rather astonishing sequel. The goddess, it seemed, instead of being grateful to her loyal worshippers for the zeal and daring they had displayed in order to win her favour, was distinctly annoyed at the rough way in which her statue had been handled. They had, it appears, got some blood on the sacred maidenly attire, which was not surprising, since they had just killed the guards. But the goddess had high standards in the matter of her proper treatment and respect, and as soon as the Palladium was duly placed in position in the Greek camp, she gave unmistakable signs of her displeasure. Fire flashed from the statue's eyes, salt sweat ran over its limbs, and it leaped three times into the air from its seat as it held aloft its shield and spear. It is not surprising that the Greeks decided to send the statue away to Greece as too disturbing for the peace of the camp.

The Trojans apparently had no difficulty in swallowing Sinon's story. They had had trouble with their own gods in the past, and this was the sort of thing that one must expect. They without doubt foresaw Sinon's next statement, that Calchas the seer had been called into consultation, when things were going from bad to worse and it seemed clear that the will of

heaven was against the Greeks. He asserted that radical measures must be taken. He said that Troy would never be taken unless the whole Greek force sailed back home, performed solemn expiatory rites there, and brought back the statue which had been sent away. This was what the Greeks were now engaged in doing, and soon they would be back. This last must have given the Trojans a nasty shock, since they no doubt hoped that the Greeks had cleared off for good. Their interest was sharpened.

Meanwhile, Sinon continued, to take the place of the missing Palladium and to propitiate the favour of the goddess, Calchas had instructed them to do something out of the ordinary, viz. to build a statue of a horse so big that it could not possibly be got through the gates of Troy and taken within the city. Just why the goddess should want a horse, Sinon did not explain, but no doubt there was some good reason. Herein, he said, lay the cunning of the seer. The horse would obviously tempt the Trojans to examine its interior, but if they desecrated it or in any way laid violent hands upon it, Pallas would certainly cause the destruction of Troy; on the other hand, if by any chance the horse were got up into the Trojan citadel where the Palladium had before stood, then it would acquire the same merit and even greater power, for as long as it stood there, not only would Troy not be taken, but it would give the Trojans the ability to lead a return expedition against the mainland of Greece. The rôles would be reversed; the Trojans would be the invaders and the Greeks the invaded.

The story, as Sinon told it, certainly had virtues. It fitted neatly into the facts and history of the long war as far as the Trojans knew them, and no doubt they thought they knew most of them. It was all of a piece and logical, and while there were no doubt flaws in it that the Trojans might have discovered if they had sat down calmly to dissect it, gripped as they were in the sway of powerful emotions, relief, joy, and hope, and wrought upon by the rhetorical arts of a master of speech, they had thought for nothing except immediate action.

Aeneas pauses to remark that the one man Sinon with his artful deceit did what the mighty warriors, Diomedes and Achilles, what ten years of fighting, what a thousand ships could not accomplish. The Trojans had been assailed in a quarter where they were not expecting it, and where they had no defence. How this ancient tale bears on the Fifth-Column tactics of the present war in Europe, I hope to show further in the *January DALHOUSIE REVIEW*.