

CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

THE STORY  
OF THE ILIAD

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Rev Alfred J. Church

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

# The Story of the Iliad

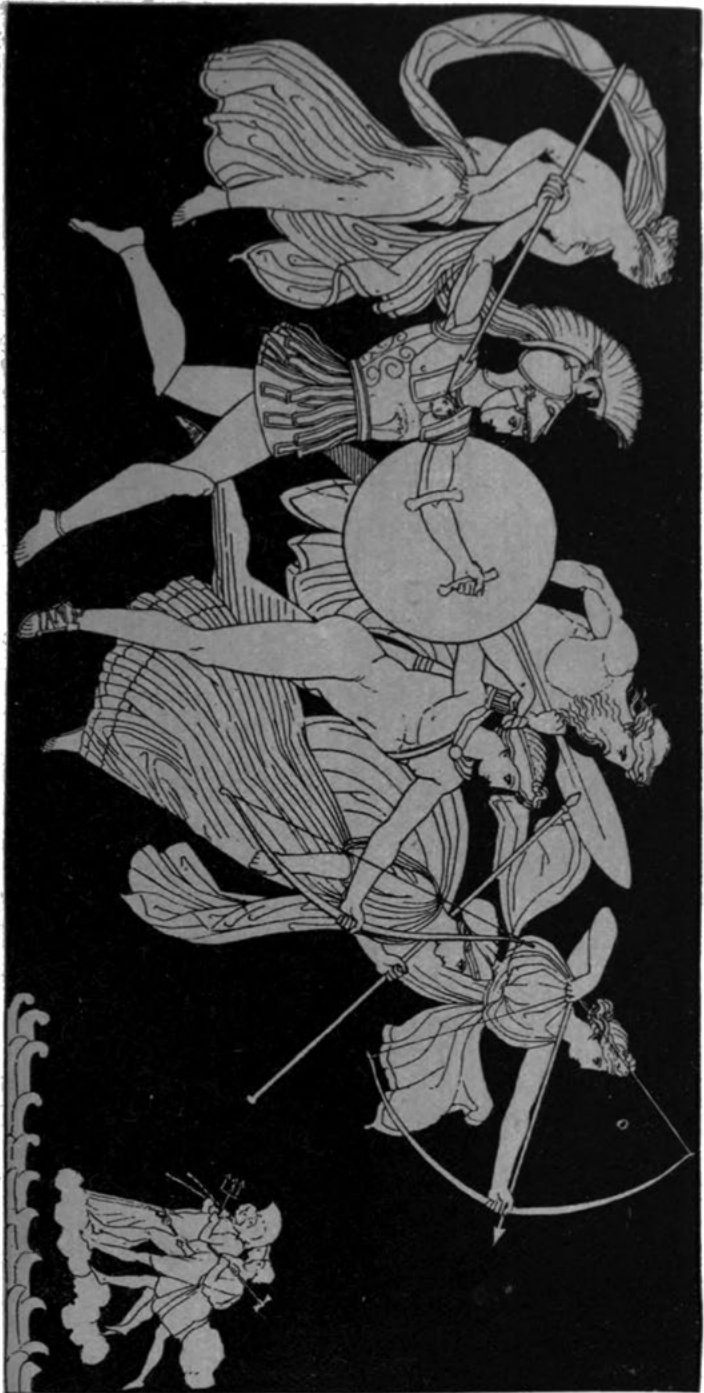
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THE GODS DESCENDING TO BATTLE.

## PREFACE

FOURTEEN YEARS ago, in introducing my 'Stories from Homer' to the public, I expressed the hope that they would 'represent Homer not unfaithfully to readers, old and young, who did not know him in the original.' The book has found, on both sides of the Atlantic, many such readers, and not a few, I am proud to think, who, knowing the original, have judged this adaptation to be not altogether unworthy of it. If I could have anticipated so warm a welcome for my little work—the sale now exceeds twenty thousand copies—I should not have attempted to compress into a single volume the substance of the two poems. The two volumes which I now publish, under the titles of 'The Story of the Iliad,' and 'The Story of the Odyssey,' give a much fuller, and, I trust, a more adequate presentment of them. In the first of these the narrative has been made continuous and completed by a beginning and an ending, both very brief, and containing, it may be said, nothing that is not strictly Homeric; in the second, Homer's own order has been restored, so that Ulysses now tells his adventures in the first person.

A. C.

CHAPTER I.

OF WHAT BEFELL BEFORE THE QUARREL.

**L**EDA, THE wife of Tyndareus, King of Sparta, bare a daughter, Helen by name, that grew to be the fairest of all women upon earth. She married Menelaüs, son of Atreus, and for a while dwelt in peace with her husband, bearing him a daughter, Hermioné by name. But there came to the court of Menelaüs, who was by this time King of Sparta, a certain Paris, second in birth among the sons of Priam, King of Troy. Him did Menelaüs hospitably entertain, but Paris repaid his kindness with evil, for he carried off his wife, the fair Helen, and took with her many of the King's possessions.

Then Menelaüs, with his elder brother Agamemnon, who was over-lord of all the Greeks, went to all the chiefs, and prayed that they would help them to avenge this wrong. Thus was a great host gathered together, even a hundred thousand men, and eleven hundred fourscore and six ships. At Aulis in Eubœa was their gathering; and from Aulis they crossed over to Troy.

The great chiefs of the host were these:—

First the two brothers, the sons of Atreus.

Next Diomed, the son of Tydeus, and with him Sthenelus.

Nestor, son of Neleus, who had outlived three generations of mortal men.

Ulysses, son of Laertes, from Ithaca.

Thoas the Ætolian.

Idomeneus, King of Crete, and Meriones with him.

Tlepolemus, son of Hercules, from Rhodes.

Eumelus, son of Admetus and Alcestis, from Thessaly.

And, bravest and strongest of all, Achilles, and with him Patroclus.

For nine years did the Greeks besiege the city of Troy. They prevailed, indeed, in the field, but could not break through the walls.

Now because they had been away from their homes for many years, they were in want of things needful. Therefore it was their custom to leave part of the army to watch the city, and with part to spoil the cities in the country round about. And in this way the great quarrel that caused such trouble to the host came about.

CHAPTER II.  
THE QUARREL.

THE GREEKS sacked the city of Chryse, where was a temple of Apollo, and a priest that served the temple. And when they divided the spoil, they gave to King Agamemnon, with other gifts, the priest's daughter Chryseïs. Thereupon there came to the camp Chryses, the priest, wishing to ransom his daughter. Much gold he brought with him, and on his staff of gold he carried the holy garland, that men might reverence him the more. He went to all the chiefs, and to the sons of Atreus first of all, saying:—

“Loose, I pray you, my dear daughter, and take the ransom for her; so may the gods that dwell in Olympus grant you to take the city of Troy, and to have safe return to your homes.”

Then all the others spake him fair, and would have done what he wished. Only Agamemnon would not have it so.

“Get thee out, graybeard!” he cried in great wrath. “Let me not find thee lingering now by the ships, neither coming hither again, or it shall be the worse for thee, for all thy priesthood. And as for thy daughter, I shall carry her away to Argos, when I shall have taken this city of Troy.”

Then the old man went out hastily in great fear and trouble. And he walked in his sorrow by the shore of the sounding sea, and prayed to his god Apollo.

“Hear me, God of the silver bow! If I have built thee a temple, and offered thee the fat of many bullocks and rams, hear me, and avenge my tears on these Greeks with thine arrows!”

And Apollo heard him. Wroth was he that men had so dishon-



oured his priest, and he came down from the top of Olympus, where he dwelt. Dreadful was the rattle of his arrows as he went, and his coming was as the night when it cometh over the sky. Then he shot the arrows of death, first on the dogs and the mules, and then on the men; and soon all along the shore rolled the black smoke from the piles of wood on which they burnt the bodies of the dead.

For nine days the shafts of the god went throughout the host; but on the tenth day Achilles called the people to an assembly. So Hera bade him, for she loved the Greeks, and grieved to see them die. When they were gathered together he stood up among them, and spake to Agamemnon.

“Surely it were better to return home, than that we should all perish here by war or plague. But come, let us ask some prophet, or priest, or dreamer of dreams, why it is that Apollo is so wroth with us.”

Then stood up Calchas, best of seers, who knew what had been, and what was, and what was to come, and spake.

“Achilles, thou biddest me tell the people why Apollo is wroth with them. Lo! I will tell thee, but thou must first swear to stand by me, for I know that what I shall say will anger King Agamemnon, and it goes ill with common men when kings are angry.”

“Speak out, thou wise man!” cried Achilles; “for I swear by Apollo that while I live no one shall lay hands on thee, no, not Agamemnon’s self, though he be sovereign lord of the Greeks.”

Then the blameless seer took heart, and spake: “It is not for vow or offering that Apollo is wroth; it is for his servant the priest, for he came to ransom his daughter, but Agamemnon scorned him, and would not let the maiden go. Now, then, ye must send her back to Chryse without ransom, and with her a hundred beasts for sacrifice, so that the plague may be stayed.”

Then Agamemnon stood up in a fury, his eyes blazing like fire.

“Never,” he cried, “hast thou spoken good concerning me, ill prophet that thou art, and now thou tellest me to give up this

maiden! I will do it, for I would not that the people should perish. Only take care, ye Greeks, that there be a share of the spoil for me, for it would ill beseem the lord of all the host that he alone should be without his share."

"Nay, my lord Agamemnon," cried Achilles, "thou art too eager for gain. We have no treasures out of which we may make up thy loss, for what we got out of the towns we have either sold or divided; nor would it be fitting that the people should give back what has been given to them. Give up the maiden, then, without conditions, and when we shall have taken this city of Troy, we will repay thee three and four fold."

"Nay, great Achilles," said Agamemnon, "thou shalt not cheat me thus. If the Greeks will give me such a share as I should have, well and good. But if not, I will take one for myself, whether it be from thee, or from Ajax, or from Ulysses; for my share I will have. But of this hereafter. Now let us see that this maiden be sent back. Let them get ready a ship, and put her therein, and with her a hundred victims, and let some chief go with the ship, and see that all things be rightly done."

Then cried Achilles, and his face was black as a thunder-storm: "Surely thou art altogether shameless and greedy, and, in truth, an ill ruler of men. No quarrel have I with the Trojans. They never harried oxen or sheep of mine in fertile Phthia, for many murky mountains lie between, and a great breadth of roaring sea. But I have been fighting in thy cause, and that of thy brother Menelaüs. Naught carest thou for that. Thou leavest me to fight, and sittest in thy tent at ease. But when the spoil is divided, thine is always the lion's share. Small indeed is my part—'a little thing, but dear.' And this, forsooth, thou wilt take away! Now am I resolved to go home. I have no mind to heap up goods and gold for thee, and be myself dishonoured."

And King Agamemnon answered: "Go, and thy Myrmidons with thee! I have other chieftains as good as thou art, and ready, as

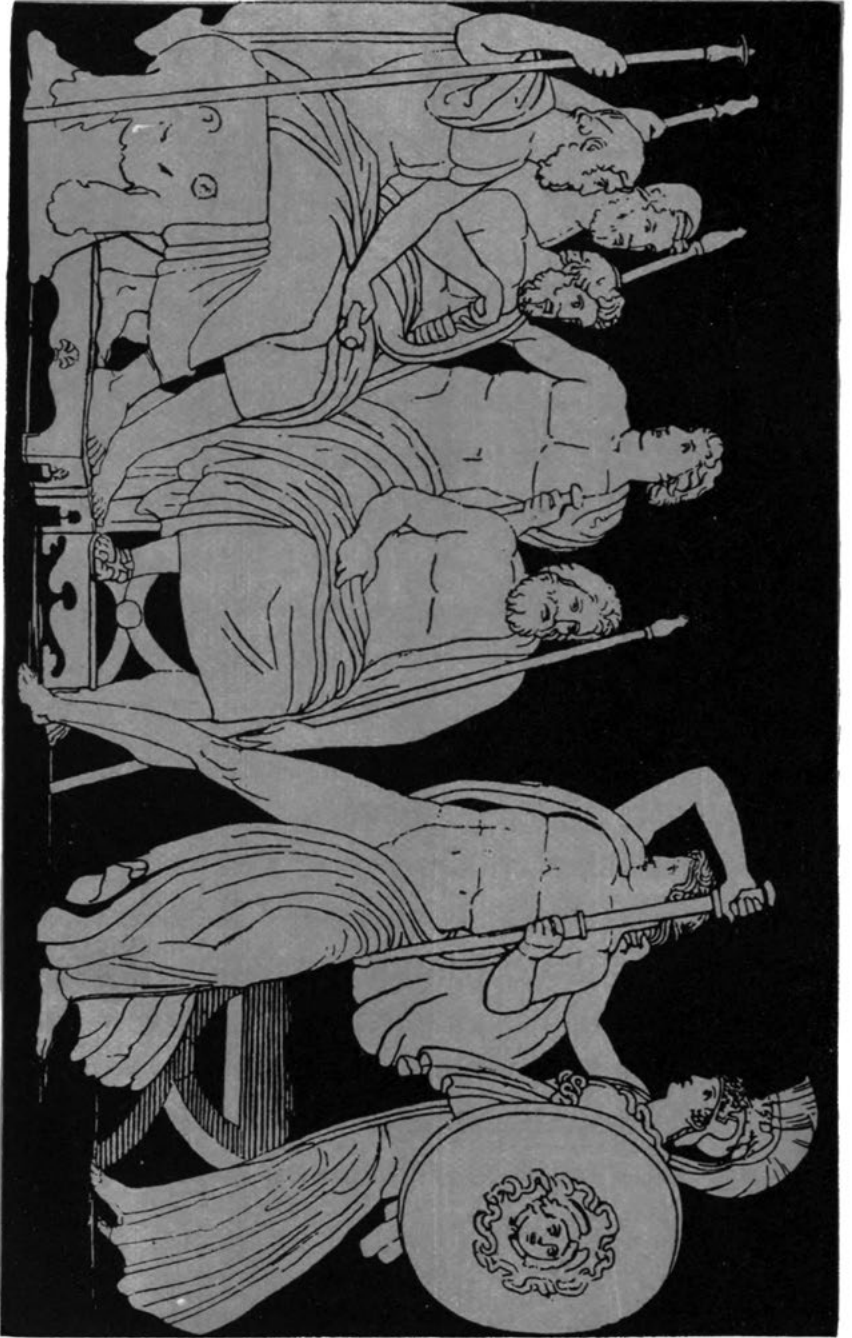
thou art not, to pay me due respect; and Zeus, the god of council, is with me. I hate thee, for thou always lovest war and strife. And as for the matter of the spoil, know that I will take thy share, the girl Briseïs, and fetch her myself, if need be, that all may know that I am sovereign lord here in the host of the Greeks."

Then Achilles was mad with anger, and he thought in his heart, "Shall I arise and slay this caitiff, or shall I keep down the wrath in my breast?" And as he thought he laid his hand on his sword-hilt, and had half drawn his sword from the scabbard, when lo! the goddess Athené stood behind him (for Hera, who loved both this chieftain and that, had sent her), and caught him by the long locks of his yellow hair. But Achilles marvelled much to feel the mighty grasp, and turned, and looked, and knew the goddess, but no one else in the assembly might see her. Terrible was the flash of his eyes as he cried: "Art thou come, child of Zeus, to see the insolence of Agamemnon? Of a truth, I think that he will perish for his folly."

But Athené said: "Nay, but I am come from heaven to abate thy wrath, if thou wilt hear me; white-armed Hera sent me, for she loveth and cherisheth you both alike. Draw not thy sword; but use bitter words, even as thou wilt. Of a truth, I tell thee that for this insolence of to-day he will bring thee hereafter splendid gifts, threefold and fourfold for all that he may take away. Only refrain thyself and do my bidding."

Then Achilles answered: "I will abide by thy command for all my wrath, for the man who hearkens to the immortal gods is also heard of them." And as he spake he laid his heavy hand upon the hilt, and thrust back the sword into the scabbard, and Athené went her way to Olympus.

Then he turned him to King Agamemnon, and spake again, for his anger was not spent: "Drunkard, with the eyes of a dog and the heart of a deer! never fighting in the front of the battle, nor daring to lie in the ambush! 'Tis a race of dastards that thou rulest, or this had been thy last wrong. But this I tell thee, and confirm



ATHENE SUPPRESSING THE FURY OF ACHILLES

my words with a mighty oath—by this sceptre do I swear. Once it was the branch of a tree, but now the sons of the Greeks bear it in their hands, even they who maintain the laws of Zeus; as surely as it shall never again have bark, or leaves, or shoot, so surely shall the Greeks one day miss Achilles, when they fall in heaps before the dreadful Hector; and thou shalt eat thy heart for rage, to think that thou hast wronged the bravest of thy host.”

And as he spake he dashed the sceptre, all embossed with studs of gold, upon the ground, and sat down. And on the other side Agamemnon sat in furious anger. Then Nestor rose, an old man of a hundred years and more, and counselled peace. Let them listen, he said, to his counsel. Great chiefs in the old days, with whom no man now alive would dare to fight, had listened. Let not Agamemnon take away from the bravest of the Greeks the prize of war; let not Achilles, though he was mightier in battle than all other men, contend with Agamemnon, who was sovereign lord of all the hosts of Greece. But he spake in vain. For Agamemnon answered:—

“Nestor, thou speakest well, and peace is good. But this fellow would lord it over all; yet there are some, methinks, who will not obey him. For if the immortal gods have made him a great warrior, do they therefore grant him leave to speak lawless words? Verily he must be taught that there is one here, at least, who is better than he.”

And Achilles said: “I were a slave and a coward if I owned thee as my lord. Not so: play the master over others, but think not to master me. As for the prize which the Greeks gave me, let them do as they will. They gave it; let them take it away. But if thou darest to touch aught that is mine own, that hour thy life-blood shall redden on my spear.”

Then the assembly was dismissed. Chryseïs was sent to her home with due offerings to the god, the wise Ulysses going with her. And all the people purified themselves, and offered offerings to the gods; and the sweet savour went up to heaven in the wreathing smoke.

But King Agamemnon would not go back from his purpose. So

he called to him the heralds, Talthybius and Eurybates, and said:—

“Heralds, go to the tents of Achilles, and fetch the maiden Briseïs. But if he will not let her go, say that I will come myself with many others to fetch her; so will it be the worse for him.”

Sorely against their will the heralds went. Along the seashore they walked, till they came to where, amidst the Myrmidons, were the tents of Achilles. There they found him, sitting between his tent and his ship. He did not rejoice to see them, and they stood in great terror and shame. But he knew in his heart wherefore they had come, and cried aloud: “Come near, ye heralds, messengers of gods and men. ‘Tis no fault of yours that ye are come on such an errand.”

Then he turned to Patroclus (now Patroclus was his dearest friend) and said: “Bring the maiden from her tent, and let the heralds lead her away. But let them be witnesses, before gods and men, and before this evil-minded King, against the day when he shall have sore need of me to save his host from destruction. Fool that he is, who knoweth not to look back and to look forward, that his people may be safe!”

Then Patroclus brought forth the maiden from her tent, and gave her to the heralds. And they led her away; but it was sorely against her will that she went. But Achilles went apart from his comrades, and sat upon the seashore, falling into a great passion of tears, and stretching out his hands with loud prayer to his mother, Thetis, daughter of the sea. She heard him where she sat in the depths by her father, the old god of the sea, and rose from the gray sea, as a vapour rises, and came to where he sat weeping, and stroked him with her hand, and called him by his name.

“What ails thee, my son?” she said.

Then he told her the story of his wrong, and when he had ended he said:—

“Go, I pray thee, to the top of Olympus, to the palace of Zeus. Often have I heard thee in my father’s hall, boast how, long ago,

thou didst help him when the other gods would have bound him, fetching Briareus of the hundred hands, who sat by him in his strength, so that the gods feared to touch him. Go now, and call these things to his mind, and pray him that he help the sons of Troy, and give them victory in the battle, so that the Greeks, as they flee before them, may have joy of this king of theirs, who has done such wrong to the bravest of his host."

And his mother answered him: "Surely thine is an evil lot, my son. Thy life is short, and it should of right be without tears and full of joy; but now it seems to me to be both short and sad. But I will go as thou sayest to Olympus, to the palace of Zeus; but not now, for he has gone, and the other gods with him, to a twelve days' feast with the pious Ethiopians. But when he comes back I will entreat and persuade him. And do thou sit still, nor go forth to battle."

Meanwhile Ulysses drew near to Chryse with the holy offerings. And when they were come within the haven, they furled the sail, and laid it in the ship, and lowered the mast, and rowed the ship to her moorings. They cast out the anchor stones, and made fast the cables from the stern. After that they landed, taking with them the offerings and the maid Chryseïs. To the altar they brought the maid, and gave her into the arms of her father, and the wise Ulysses said: "See now; Agamemnon, King of men, sends back thy daughter, and with her a hundred beasts for sacrifice, that we may appease the god who hath smitten the Greeks in his wrath."

Then the priest received his daughter right gladly, and when they had ranged the beasts about the altar, and poured out the water of purification, and took up handfuls of bruised barley, then the priest prayed, "Hear me, God of the silver bow! If before thou didst hearken to my prayer, and grievously afflict the Greeks, so hear me now, and stay this plague which is come upon them."

So prayed he, and the god gave ear.

Then they cast the barley on the heads of the cattle, and slew

them, and flayed them, and they cut out the thigh-bones and wrapped them up in folds of fat, and laid raw morsels on them. These the priest burned on fagots, pouring on sparkling wine; and the young men stood by, having the five-pronged forks in their hands. And when the thighs were consumed, then they cut up the rest, and broiled the pieces carefully on spits. This being done, they made their meal, nor did any one lack his share. And when the meal was ended, then they poured a little wine into the cups to serve for libations to the gods. After that they sat till sunset, singing a hymn to the Archer God, and making merry; and he heard their voice and was pleased.

When the sun went down they slept beside the stern-cables; and when the dawn appeared then they embarked, raising the mast and spreading the sail; and Apollo sent them a favouring wind, and the dark blue wave hissed about the stem of the ship as she went: so they came to the camp of the Greeks.

But all the time Achilles sat in wrath beside his ships; he went not to the war, nor yet to the assembly, but sat fretting in his heart, because he longed for the cry of the battle.



CHAPTER III.  
THE ASSEMBLY.

WHEN THE twelfth day was come, Thetis rose out of the sea, and went to high Olympus. There she found Zeus sitting apart on the topmost peak of Olympus, and she knelt down before him; with her left hand she clasped his knees, and with her right she took his beard, and she made her supplication to him.

“O Father Zeus, if ever I have aided thee by word or deed, fulfil now my prayer. Give honour, I beseech thee, to Achilles my son, that hath so short a space of life; for now Agamemnon hath put dishonour upon him, taking away the gift that the Greeks gave him. Grant, therefore, that the men of Troy may prevail for a while, so that the Greeks may do honour to my son.”

So she spake, but Zeus sate long time silent; but Thetis would not loose her hold. Then she spake again: “Give me now thy promise, and confirm it with a nod, or else deny me. So shall I know that I am held least in honour of all the gods.”

Then Zeus made answer much disturbed: “This is a hard matter, for thou wilt set me at strife with Hera, and she will upbraid me with bitter words. Even now she is ever reproaching me, saying that I favour the men of Troy in the battle. Therefore do thou get thee away, that she know not of thy coming; and I will consider how this thing may be best accomplished. And now I will assure my promise with a nod; for when I give my nod, then the thing may not be repented of or left undone.”

So he spake, and nodded with his dark brows, and the hair waved about his head, and all Olympus was shaken.

Then Thetis departed, diving into the deep sea, and Zeus went to his own house, and all the gods rose up before him. And when he sat upon his chair, then Hera, knowing that Thetis of the silver feet had held counsel with him, addressed him with bitter words.

“Who hath been in counsel with thee, thou plotter? Thou dost always take pleasure, when I am absent, in secret devices, and never tellest thy thought to me freely.”

To her the sire of gods and men made reply: “Hera, think not to know all my thoughts; that were too hard for thee, even though thou art my wife. That which is fitting thou shalt hear first; but into such counsel as I take by myself inquire thou not.”

Hera answered: “What sayest thou? I have not pried into thy counsels. These thou devisest as thou wilt. And now I sorely fear that Thetis of the silver feet hath prevailed with thee. At dawn of day I saw her kneeling before thee; thou hast granted, I doubt not, that Achilles shall have honour, and that many of the Greeks shall die beside their ships.”

To this Zeus made reply: “Verily nought escapeth thee, thou witch. If it be as thou sayest, such is my will. Do thou sit silent, and obey. Else all the gods in Olympus shall not save thee, when I lay upon thee the hands that none may stay.”

Then Hera was afraid, and held her peace, and all the gods were troubled. But Hephæstus the craftsman spake, saying: “This indeed will be a grievous business, if ye two come to strife for the sake of mortal men, and make trouble among the gods. If such ill counsels prevail, what pleasure shall we have in our feasting? Now will I advise my mother that she make peace with Zeus, lest he rebuke her again. Were he minded to hurl her from these seats, who should withstand him?”

Thereupon he put the double-handled cup into his mother’s hand, and said: “Have patience, mother, for all that thou art vexed, lest I see thee beaten before mine eyes. I could not help thee. Once before, when I would have succoured thee, he grasped me by the

foot, and flung me from the threshold of heaven. All day I fell, and at sunset I lighted in Lemnos.”

Then Hera smiled, and took the cup from her son. And he went round to all the gods, going from left to right as a cupbearer should, and poured the nectar from the mixing-bowl, and laughter without end was woke among the blessed gods, when they saw the Haltfoot go puffing through the hall.

So they feasted in the hall, lacking neither the lyre, for on this Apollo played, nor singing, for the Muses sang sweetly, answering one to the other.

Gods and men slept that night; but Zeus slept not, for he thought in his heart how he might do honour to Achilles. And as he thought, he judged it best to send a deceiving dream to Agamemnon. Therefore he said: “Go, deceiving Dream, to the swift ships of the Greeks, and seek the tent of Agamemnon. Bid him make haste and arm the Greeks, for that he shall of a surety take the city of Troy.”

So the dream went to the tent of Agamemnon, and found him wrapped in sleep. It took the shape of Nestor, the old chief, whom the King honoured more than all besides.

Then the false Nestor spake: “Sleepest thou, Agamemnon? It is not for kings to sleep all through the night, for they must take thought for many, and have many cares. Listen now to the words of Zeus: ‘Set the battle in array against Troy, for the gods are now of one mind, and the day of doom is come for the city, and thou shalt take it, and gain everlasting glory for thyself.’”

And Agamemnon believed the dream, and knew not the purpose of Zeus in bidding him go forth to battle, how that the Trojans should win the day, and great shame should come to himself, but great honour to Achilles, when all the Greeks should pray him to deliver them from death. So he rose from his bed, and donned his tunic, and put over it a great cloak, and fastened the sandals on his feet, and hung from his shoulders his mighty silver-studded sword,

and took in his right hand the great sceptre of his house, which was the token of his sovereignty over all the Greeks.

First he called a council of the chiefs by the ship of King Nestor; and when they were seated, he said: "Hear me, my friends. This night a dream came to me in my sleep; most like it was to Nestor. Above my head it stood, and said: 'Thou sleepest, son of Atreus. It is not for kings to sleep all through the night. Now mark my word; I come to thee from Zeus, who careth for thee, though he be far away. He bids thee call the Greeks to battle, for now thou shalt take the city of Troy.' So spake the Dream. Come, therefore, let us rouse the Greeks; but first I will try their spirit, counselling them to flee to their homes, and do ye dissuade them."

Then up rose Nestor in his place, and spake: "Had any other told us this dream, we had thought it false; but seeing that he hath seen it who is chief among us, let us call the people to arms."

Then the heralds made proclamation, and the people hastened to their places. Even as the bees swarm from a hollow rock and cluster about the flowers of spring, and some fly this way and some that, so the many tribes marched from the ships and the tents to the place of the assembly. Great was the confusion and great the uproar, and nine heralds sought to quiet the people, that they might listen to the speaking of the Kings; and at the last the Greeks ceased from their shouting, and sat in their places.

To them Agamemnon rose up, holding the sceptre in his hand, and spake thus: "O my friends, ill hath Zeus dealt with me. He promised me that I should take the city of Troy, and so return to my home. But his words were deceitful, for now he bids me go back to Argos, inglorious, having lost much people. Shame indeed were it for men to know hereafter that we who are so many have yet fought in vain; many we are, and we fight with them that are fewer than ourselves, and yet we see no end. Verily, if the Greeks and the men of Troy should make a truce and number themselves, and the Greeks should be ranked in tens, and for each ten should

take a man of Troy to pour the wine, verily, I say, many a ten would lack a cupbearer. Fewer indeed by far are the Trojans, but they have allies, valiant spearmen, who hinder me from taking the city. And now nine years have passed, and the timbers of our ships are rotted, and the rigging is worn; and our wives and our children sit at home and wait for us. Come, therefore, let us flee to the land of our fathers, for Troy we may not take.”

So spake the King, and stirred the hearts of the people; that is to say, of all that knew not his secret counsel. All the assembly was moved as the sea is moved, when the east wind raiseth the waves, or as a cornfield, when the strong west wind comes upon it, and shakes the ears. Shouting they hasted to the ships, and laid hands on them to drag them down, and some made clear the launching channels, and drew the shores from under the sides.

Then had the Greeks returned, even though fate willed it not. But Hera spake to Athené: “Will the Greeks thus idly flee to their homes? and will they leave Helen a boast to Priam and to Troy, Helen, for whom so many have fallen far from their fatherland? Hasten now, and turn them from their purpose.”

So Athené hastened down from Olympus, and she found Ulysses, who had laid no hand upon his ship, for grief had touched him to his heart. To him she said: “Son of Laertes, will ye indeed flee to your fatherland, and leave Helen, for whom so many have fallen, to be a boast to Priam and the men of Troy? Go now, and dissuade the Greeks, and suffer them not to drag their ships to the sea.”

And when Ulysses heard the voice of the goddess, he cast away his cloak, and ran. King Agamemnon gave him his sceptre, and, bearing that, he went among the ships. When he saw a chief, he said with gentle words, “Hold, sir, it ill becomes thee to be a coward; sit still and hold the people back. Thou knowest not the mind of the King; he did but make trial of the spirit of the Greeks. Anger him not, lest he do some mischief to the people.”

But when he saw a common man, he smote him with his scep-

tre, and said: "Fellow, sit still, and listen to them that are better than thou. Let there be one master, one king, to whom Zeus has given authority."

Thus did he turn them from their purpose. And they hasted again to the assembly with such a noise as when a wave breaks along the shore.

But, when all the rest were silent, Thersites alone flouted and jeered the princes, that he might move laughter among the Greeks. Most ill-favoured was he of all that came to Troy, bandy-legged, and halting on one foot, with a hump on his back, narrow-chested, and his head misshapen, with straggling down thereon. Loud he shouted now, reviling Agamemnon:—

"What lackest thou yet, son of Atreus? Full of bronze are thy tents, and many the fair women whom we have given thee for a prey. Wantest thou more than these? Surely a leader of men should not bring the Greeks into trouble. And ye, who are women rather than men, why sail ye not home, and leave this man to gorge himself with his spoils alone? For now he hath wronged Achilles, taking away his gift—Achilles, who is far better than he. Surely Achilles is mild of temper, or this, son of Atreus, had been thy last wrong-doing!"

Thereupon Ulysses rose up beside him, and spake in wrath: "Peace, babbler; take not the name of kings upon thy lips, nor taunt thy betters. Hearken now to me: if I hear thee speak idle words again as thou hast done this day, surely I will strip from off thee cloak and tunic, and drive thee to the ships with shameful blows." So speaking, he smote him with the sceptre on back and shoulders; and a bloody weal rose up beneath the blow. All dazed, the fellow cowered down and wiped away his tears.

Merrily laughed the others, saying one to his neighbour: "Often hath Ulysses done well, but never better than now, when he hath stopped this babbler's tongue. He will not rail against the kings again."

Then Ulysses stood up to speak, holding the sceptre in his hand; and Athené stood by his side, in the likeness of a herald, bidding the people keep silence that all, nearest and farthest alike, might hear his words.

“Now, O King,” he said, “the Greeks go about to shame thee, abiding no more by their promise which they made thee coming from Argos; to wit, that they would not return till they had taken the city of Troy. Truly there is toil enough here to make us sick of heart and wishful to return. For a man will feel weary if he be kept but a single moon from his wife by winter winds and stormy sea, and we have lingered here for twelve moons nine times told. But it is not well to tarry long and come back empty-handed, after all. Ye all remember—all whom death hath not carried away—what befell in Aulis when the host was gathered to make war on Troy, and we were sacrificing to the immortal gods under a fair plane tree by a spring,—ye remember, I say, how a great serpent, fiery red and horrible to behold, glided from beneath the altar, and darted to the tree. There on the topmost bough was a sparrow’s brood, crouching beneath the leaves. Eight were they in all, and the mother was the ninth. These the serpent devoured, one by one, twittering piteously; and the mother flew around, crying for her children. Her last he caught by the wing, twisting himself about. And when he had devoured the brood and the mother, the god that sent him made the sign yet more manifest, turning him into stone. Then Calchas said, as we stood wondering: ‘Why are ye silent? It is to us this portent hath been sent. As the snake hath eaten the brood of eight and the mother the ninth, so for nine years shall we make war in the land whither we go, and in the tenth we shall take the fair city of Troy.’ So he spake; and, without doubt, his words shall be fulfilled. Remain, therefore, ye Greeks, till ye have taken Priam’s mighty town.”

So he spake, and all the Greeks shouted in assent; and the ships sent back the shout as it had been thunder.

Then King Agamemnon stood up, and said: "Go now to your meal, and afterwards we will join the battle. Let every man whet well his spear, and fit his shield, and feed his horses abundantly, and look to his chariot, that all day long we may fight, and cease not, even for a little space, till, haply, night shall come and separate the hosts. Truly the band of the shield shall grow wet, and the hand be weary that holdeth the spear, and the horse shall sweat that draweth the polished car. And whoso holdeth back from the fight, tarrying at the ships, nothing shall save him from feeding the dogs and the fowls of the air."

Then the Greeks shouted again. Quickly did they scatter themselves among the ships and the tents, and make their meal. And Agamemnon made a feast, and called thereto the chiefs, Nestor and Idomeneus, and Ajax the Greater and Ajax the Less, and Diomed, and Ulysses; but Menelaüs, good at need, came uncalled, knowing that he would be welcome.

Then King Agamemnon stood up and prayed: "O Zeus, let not the sun set and the darkness fall before I humble Priam's roof-tree in the dust, and burn his doors with fire, and rend the coat of Hector on his breast!"

So he prayed, but Zeus hearkened not as yet.

And when the feast was ended, the chiefs marshalled their hosts for the battle; and Athené in the midst swept through the host, urging them to the conflict; and in every heart she roused delight of battle, so that there was no man but would have chosen war rather than to return to his home. As is the flare of a great fire when a wood is burning on a hilltop, so was the flash of their arms and their armour, as they thronged to the field. And as the countless flocks of wild geese or cranes or swans now wheel and now settle in the great Asian fen by the stream of Caÿster, or as the bees swarm in the spring, when the milk-pails are full, so thick the Greeks thronged to the battle in the great plain by the banks of the Scamander.