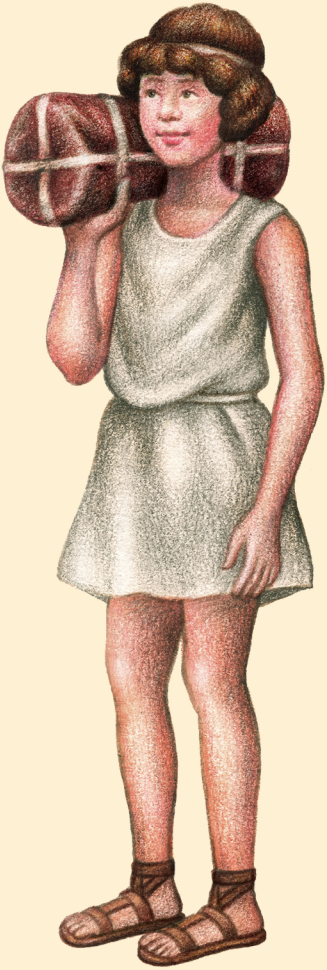
OUR LITTLE CORINTHIAN COUSIN OF LONG AGO



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by

PHYLLIS AYER SOWERS

The Chariot Race

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FOREWORD

THIS is not meant as a history. The author will be content if she has given a clear and realistic picture of life in those days somewhere between 500 and 400 B.C. when Greece was in its glory, and she hopes to interest young readers in some of the splendor and culture of those days whose influence may be recognized even in modern times.

P.A.S.

CHAPTER I

TIMON OF CORINTH

"THERE is no other city so rich and gay as Corinth," declared Timon proudly. "If you argued all day and all night you could not make me think or say that any other place is half so fine!"

He was talking to a boy from Athens, a trader's son about his own age, who had just come in on a ship.

Athens and Corinth were both great cities in Greece, but in those ancient times the large cities were like separate states and there was much rivalry between them. In fact, Timon felt as though his own city of Corinth were a separate country, and loved it dearly, as did all the Corinthians.

The boy from Athens looked at Timon's muscular arms and strong brown legs which showed below his workman's tunic, and decided not to argue any more. If they should quarrel, he was sure Timon would win, so the rich young Athenian picked up his embroidered cloak and walked away without another word.

Timon looked at the sun, hanging low over the sea,

and hastily picked up a big bundle he had been carrying when he met the trader's son. "I must get back to the shop by lamplight time or old Ambrose will be very angry and perhaps no longer let me work for him. But how I wish I were rich enough so I could do as I like with my time!"

With a parting look at the many ships from different countries which lay in the harbor—and finest of all, the two Corinthian war galleys guarding the entrance—he turned and hurried up the hilly road.

The road from the harbor was bordered by two long city walls and Timon went through a stately gateway, on past the marketplace, now quiet and deserted, and on along the shadowy road where many other workers were hurrying homeward.

Part way up the hill, Timon paused, shifted his bundle onto the other shoulder and looked up at the beautiful citadel called the Acro-Corinthus, which guarded the city, and the splendid temple, its tall columns gleaming in the last rays of the sun. Though he had seen them many times before, Timon never grew tired of such a fine sight.

An old man leaning on a knotty stick stopped and smiled at him. "I see you like beautiful things, boy," he said. "That is the true spirit of a Grecian. Man has been

"I See You Like Beautiful Things, Boy"

able to make many beautiful things by studying nature—and nature is always beautiful!"

"He must be a poet or a philosopher," thought Timon with interest. You might meet all kinds of learned and interesting people on the streets of Corinth.

The old man went on speaking. "Now look over there at the peak of sacred Mt. Parnassus still shining with light. I suppose you know it is the home of the Delphic oracle who can foretell the future; and there also is the cave of the muses, who inspire the hearts of men with art and music; and the famous fountain of Castalia. If you drink from that you will be able to write fine poetry!"

"I have heard of these wonders, good sir," said Timon, "but I don't suppose I can ever go to Mt. Parnassus or travel beyond the city of Corinth, for I am poor!"

"Who knows?" answered the old man, patting Timon on one sturdy shoulder. "Go your way, boy, but don't forget that to the young, all doors may open!"

As Timon walked on, thinking of these words, he felt as though his heavy bundle had grown lighter. It was nice to be young and healthy, even if one were poor.

When he was a baby, Timon's father was a wealthy merchant and the family had many comforts and riches—but that was too long ago for him to remember. His father's ship had been lost at sea and his mother then had

to work hard for food and clothes. And now Timon was an orphan and had to earn his living as best he could.

The road now dipped down into the dusty, crowded streets of the city, where one house elbowed up close to another and there were many shops. Timon was jostled and bumped by all kinds of people. There were no sidewalks nor street lights in this ancient city, and no clocks to tell time—but men knew the day was nearly over and were hurrying home.

"Out of the way!" shouted a voice, and Timon heard the sound of wheels and of horses' pounding hoofs. A chariot came down the narrow street, driven by a tall man who stood holding the reins. Beside him stood a boy about the age of Timon, but dressed in a fine linen cloak, high-laced sandals ornamented with silver, and with curly hair cut short but carefully arranged in the latest style of that day.

Timon stared a little, even as he tried to step back out of the way, but the proud driver was not satisfied. "Out of the way, slave!" he cried, and leaning sideways gave Timon a push with the handle of his whip. Timon lost his balance and fell down in the dirty street, but jumped to his feet at once, frowning angrily.

The boy in the chariot looked around and grinned a little at the sight of Timon brushing dust from his tousled

hair, but was a little sorry for him and tossed him a coin of money as they drove on.

On one side of the coin was a picture of Pegasus, the winged horse of mythology stories, and Timon knew it was enough money to buy him a pair of sandals which he needed very much—for his feet were bare—but he was too angry to keep it and instead threw it right back and muttered: "If I ever see that boy again, I'll tell him what I think of him! Even his charioteer was better dressed than I!" And feeling the world was not treating him very well, he hurried on.

Timon looked up at the houses, most of them two stories high. There were no windows on the first floor looking toward the street, but the upper story was built out over it a little, and there he could see the lights of lamps beginning to flicker—and quickened his steps still more.

From the curtained window of one large house, Timon saw a pretty little girl and a woman looking out. As the women of the best families hardly ever went out of the home, it was a change for them to watch what went on in the street, and Timon thought, "I wouldn't want to be even a rich girl."

Just to see what they would do, he waved his hand,

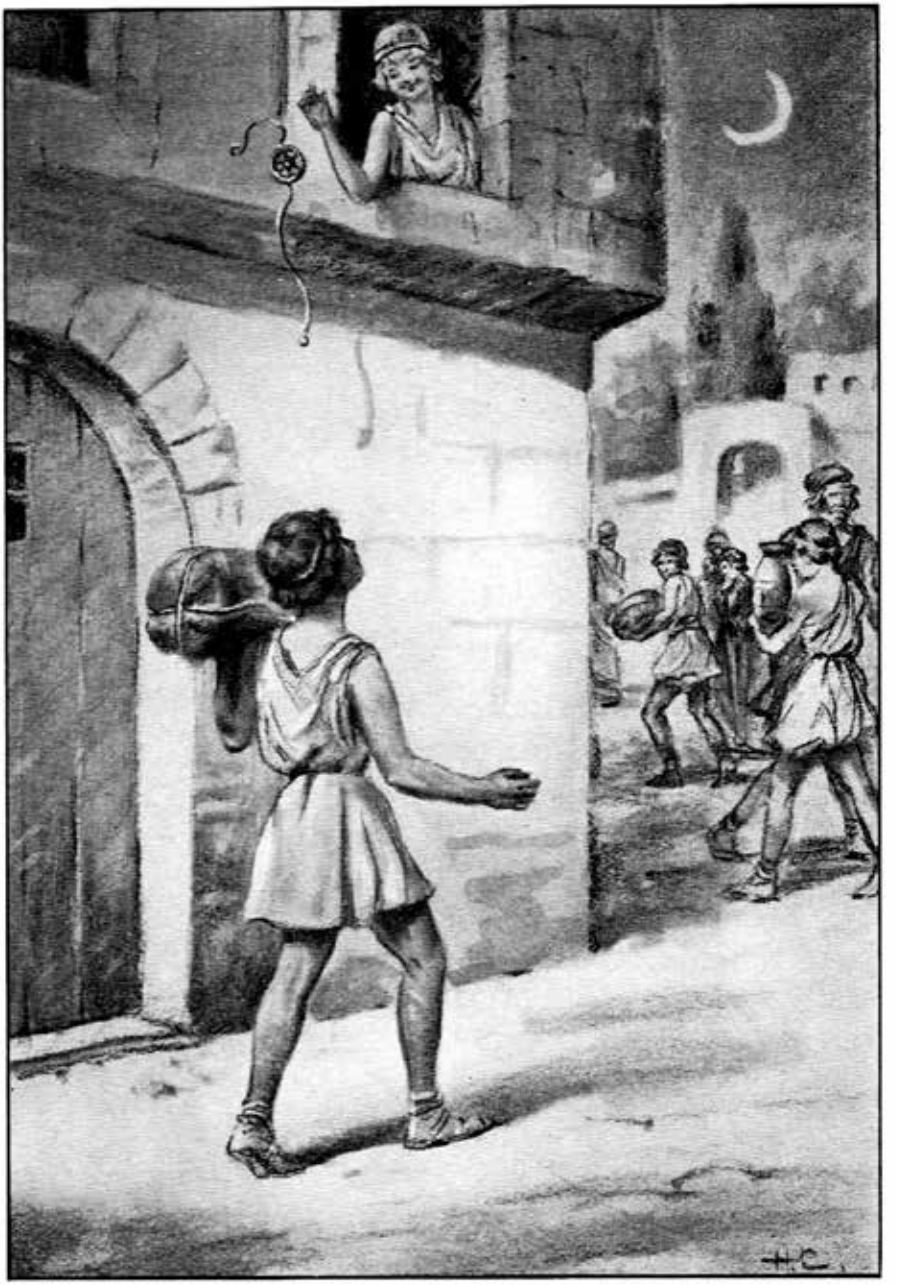
and the little girl giggled and, calling, "Here is something for you, boy," tossed a small toy out the window.

The nurse slapped her and pulled her back into the room, but Timon picked up the toy and saw that it was a little silver wheel on a linen cord. When he jerked the string, the wheel would wind up and down it. Even grown women liked to amuse themselves with such toys in Greece, and as Timon whirled the pretty thing, he felt more cheerful.

When at last he reached the shop entrance, there was old Ambrose the overseer, with his grizzled white beard, peering out into the dusky street. "I thought perhaps you had decided to go to Egypt," he said angrily. "What makes you so late, worthless boy? Oh, I see you have been buying a toy. Get inside with the load of clay before I beat you!"

Timon hastily thrust the little wheel into his belt and began helping the other workers to sweep the shop, put away the tools, and cover half-finished pieces of pottery they had been making with damp cloths. There really wasn't much he could say in excuse for having taken so much time.

As soon as it was entirely dark, the workshop was locked and the men allowed to go home, and in a few



"Here Is Something For You, Boy"

swift strides, Timon had reached the blacksmith's shop where he lived.

"Good evening, Cosimo," he called cheerfully.

It wasn't much of a place to call home, but the orphan boy was very grateful to be allowed to live there.

Cosimo waved a knotty fist in greeting. He was sitting on a stool in the light of the forge, cleaning some fish to eat, and the firelight on his great beard and shining body made Timon think of old Greek stories of Vulcan, god of fire, who was supposed to make all the armor for the gods of Olympus and to have made the chariot of the sun. It was even said that Vulcan made himself automatic hand-maidens out of gold and silver to help him, and that he had workshops under the volcanoes which sometimes spouted out fire from his mighty forges! (Our word volcano comes from Vulcan.)

But Cosimo was dressed only in a short leather apron which wrapped around his waist and fastened in front, and his longish curly hair was held in place by a fillet of leather.

"Come and sit by the forge, my young friend," he said. "Even in this gentle climate of Corinth the evening air is chilly. Tell me the adventures of the day."

"It has not been a very lucky day for me," said Timon gloomily. "Ambrose, the overseer, treats me only a little better than he does the slaves and I am afraid will soon get

tired of letting me work there. Do you think it wrong, Cosimo, for me to like to linger and watch the shipping and all the busy life of fair Corinth? When I am in the shop I work fast and do my best!"

"Of course you do, Timon," agreed the smith, giving him a hearty slap on the back. "I think you are too good a craftsman for him to send you away! You have learned well how to handle a paint brush or engraving tool after the artists have drawn a picture on a clay vase!" Cosimo tossed his fish onto a pan and went on cheerfully:

"I remember the first time I saw you. Then you were only a thin little boy helping the cleaners whiten the soiled clothes of wealthy people, but I liked you and brought you here to live, and now you work in the rich trader's factory where they make fine pottery to send on ships to far parts of the world. Already I am proud of you!"

By this time, Timon felt happy and encouraged. "I hope the little work I do for you will help someday to make you wealthy," he said, laughing. "And when I become a famous athlete, since I have no father alive, I shall name you, along with the city of Corinth, to share the honors!"

Cosimo laughed. "I am afraid you are looking too far ahead, my boy, but if that day ever comes, I shall be glad indeed. Come now and eat."

As soon as they had finished their simple meal of fish

and a kind of porridge flavored with peppers and garlic—which the people of the south liked as well in those days as in these—Timon jumped to his feet saying: "Now for a little exercise to strengthen my muscles. Is there anything I can make for you, Cosimo?"

"Take yonder bar and flatten it. Perhaps later I may use it to make a spear or a shield or to mend that chariot wheel." He pointed to one which stood against the wall.

After a hard day's work, Cosimo himself was glad enough to lean back against the wall of sun-dried bricks and do nothing, while Timon drew his tunic up under his belt so it would be still shorter and let the sleeve of it fall off his right shoulder, as many workmen did, the better to use his right arm. For a while, there was no sound but the ring of the heavy iron hammer against the red-hot bar.

But before long, some visitors strolled in from the street, for the sea-air at night was a little chilly and the forge-fire looked comfortable. Some of these men were rich young idlers with nothing much to do. They scorned most kinds of work, but did not look down upon the work of a powerful blacksmith. There were also two young officers from the city fortress and an old soldier named Ajax.

Of all the callers who sometimes dropped in, Timon liked best to listen to the tales of the old soldier, and fortunately his work was done, so he laid down the hammer

and said: "Tell us some of the adventures you had when you were young, good Ajax?"

The old man sat down on the three-legged stool which Cosimo pushed forward, and the others made themselves comfortable, and with his keen eyes shining like those of the eagle for which he was named, he told tales of war—of battering-rams carried against the enemy cities; fighting-towers full of brave archers, of whom needless to say Ajax had been one (for he seemed to have been the hero in every one of his stories). He told how they had piled mounds of earth secretly at night against some foreign city's walls and how Ajax had been among the first of the soldiers to scramble over and win the praise of his mighty general.

Most exciting of all was the story of the tremendous sea-battle of Salamis, which had saved the Greek world from the conquering Persian hosts and their King Xerxes.

"I doubt if he is old enough to have fought at Salamis," Cosimo whispered to Timon, "but anyway it is a good story!"

"Ay, it was a goodly fight," the old man was saying. "The Greek fleet, which numbered three hundred and seventy-eight great galleys, had cornered the Persian ships in the narrow waters near the enemy island of Salamis.

"Xerxes, the Persian king, sat upon a lofty throne built on a mountain-side, watching it all and wearing his tall

golden crown. He was shaded by fine purple tents and surrounded by generals in shining armor, but on the sea was galley against galley, ramming each other, ripping off each other's great oars, while the air was full of flying arrows.

"Many Persian galleys broke to pieces, others escaped around the headland, and in the sea were many men—the Greeks, all good swimmers like young Timon here, but the Persians fared less well, and many drowned. Of all the Greek fighters from the many states, the Corinthians were the bravest!"

"Of course," murmured all the patriotic listeners, though this wasn't true, for the people called the "Athentians" had been judged to have first place for victory and given three golden stars on a mast in the sacred shrine at Delphi, and golden tablets were placed on the altar at Corinth.

Prizes were to be given to the two bravest men, and every captain was allowed to write down two names, one for first and one for second place. But each captain put his own name first and that of a hero named Themistocles, the second. So no prize could be given after all, for no one could decide who was really first.

"They should have chosen me," old Ajax chuckled.

One of the young officers laughed and said teasingly,

"Now tell us about the time you fought against the hero Hector and the men in the Trojan Wooden Horse!"

"And did you sail with brave Ulysses (sometimes called Odysseus) on his adventures?" asked another young man.

The old soldier grinned and nodded. He knew they were only joking, for these were heroes of ancient Greek stories and legends told by the Greek poet Homer in his books the 'Iliad' and the 'Odyssey', about times so long ago that not even the oldest man on earth could remember them, though the Greeks liked to think they were descendants of those heroes.

"Listen, masters," went on Ajax as heartily as ever. "I will tell you about the time our ship encountered the dreadful monsters Scylla and Charybdis, and how we were nearly wrecked on the rocks by the songs of the beautiful sirens."

"Enough!" cried one of the men, laughing and rising to his feet. "In a minute you will be telling us that Cosimo is really old Vulcan himself come down from Mt. Olympus! My friend and I must go on to a party, and good Cosimo and his apprentice lad are probably ready for sleep."

CHAPTER II

THE BOY IN THE CHARIOT

AFTER he had passed Timon on the street, the boy in the chariot began to feel sorry for what had happened. "Perhaps I ought to tell Gruno to drive more carefully," he thought. "It must be horrid to be poor and have the dust of the street all over one's only clothes, and he was a nice, strong-looking boy—but just the same he had no right to throw the money after me in that scornful way, and I'd like to tell him so!—Look, Gruno, at all those people standing around my father's house, looking at the door. Something interesting must be happening!"

The charioteer stopped the two great horses with a flourish and said, "Indeed yes, young master Arius. There is a large wreath of olive branches hung on the door. That means you have a new baby brother!"

"So it does!" cried Arius. "How happy my father and mother must be!" He jumped from the chariot and knocked loudly on the door. If the new baby had been a girl, they would have hung a wooden 'fillet' on the door

so everybody would know. A 'fillet' which represented the bands Grecian people often wore about their hair.

A big black slave opened the door in a hurry. Even he was grinning happily and showed his white teeth, and a voice from upstairs called, "Hello, Arius. Come and see the new baby. It is so little and nice, almost like one of my dolls!"

"Hello, Althea," called the boy as he saw his little sister looking over the railing.

"Be careful not to make any noise," the black nurse-maid warned him when he reached the door of the nursery. This nurse was a slave, but she had been with the family for so many years that she had a good many rights and often told the children what to do.

Arius was allowed to look at the new baby, which was wrapped tightly in swaddling-clothes, yards and yards of cloth wound all about its little body and even binding its arms and legs. It looked like a big cocoon, and Arius could only see its wrinkled little red face.

"Run away now, Arius, and find your father," said the nurse. "He is in the living-room of the house, planning a party for his friends."

The nurse laid the baby in its hanging cradle, woven something like a basket. "Now will you tell me a story, please, Cora?" asked Althea, who had had an unusually

dull day, for nobody had had time to think of anything much excepting the new baby.

"Shall I tell you about my old home in Ethiopia?" asked the woman, sitting down and taking the little girl on her lap.

"No, thank you, I know all about the monkeys and wild parrots and the traders who came and caught you and took you away on the ship," answered Althea, who had heard the story many times. "But you aren't sorry to be living here in Greece with us now, are you, Cora?"

"No, I am not sorry, for your father is a very kind master.—Now shall I tell you a fable of the old man named Aesop, who lived long ago? Some say he was a black slave like me, but so clever that nobody ever forgets his stories!"

"Yes, indeed. I'd like to hear the one about the fox and the grapes he said were sour because he couldn't reach them." Althea knew this story already, but liked the funny way Cora could tell it.

The people of Corinth, and indeed of all the world in those olden times, did not think it wrong to own slaves, and every rich person had a great many. Some had been captured in wars and were educated men and women, and others just poor people who were bought and sold like any other merchandise. But it sometimes happened

that a master would let his slave make money at a trade until he had enough to buy his own freedom. Slaves did nearly all the work in ancient Corinth.

"Please tell me one more story," begged Althea when the fable was finished. "This time I would like an exciting one."

"Then I shall tell you the story of Phæton, whose father was Apollo, the ruler of the sun, who lives in the flaming palace of the sky. Each day, as you know, Apollo drives the Sun Chariot up and down the sky, giving light and warmth to all the earth!"

"Oh yes, sometimes I even see it start its journey, climbing up over Mt. Parnassus, or see him driving down under the sea at night," said Althea.

The Grecian people did not know there is only one God, but thought the many Gods of earth and sea and sky lived on the top of lofty Mt. Olympus in the part of Greece called Thessaly, and they liked to imagine life in things like trees and rocks, sun and water. Poetry and stories by the hundred grew up around these supposed characters—'nymphs' of the streams 'fauns of the woods' (gay goat-like little creatures), Pan the god of Nature who played on merry shepherd pipes, and many others. Althea and Cora thought the story of Apollo and Phæ-

ton had really happened once upon a time, and so Cora went on telling it.

Phæton lived upon the earth, but he was brave and ambitious and wanted very much to drive the sun-chariot at least once. He begged and begged until his father at last said yes. "But remember, Phæton," he warned him, "the horses are very strong and hard to manage. Be sure and keep them in the beaten course, for if you don't drive carefully, it will make a lot of trouble!"

"The sun-chariot, as you know, Althea, is made of gold and diamonds, so no one can even look at it when it is on the highest peak of the sky hill, but the father rubbed Phæton's face and arms with a magic ointment so he wouldn't be burned.

"The first part of the blue sky hill was so steep that the horses could hardly climb it even when fresh in the morning, but they soon noticed that the chariot was lighter than usual and tossed their fiery heads eagerly. Phæton felt very proud and happy as he saw the Moon leaping into her chariot and the Hours harnessing their horses to start on their sky journey one after another, but when he looked down from the high center of the sky, it almost took his breath away to see the earth so far below. Then they started down the sky, faster and faster! Phæton couldn't keep the horses in the road, and