

PART FOUR

The Heroes of the Trojan War

13 The Trojan War

This story, of course, is taken almost entirely from Homer. The Iliad, however, begins after the Greeks have reached Troy, when Apollo sends the pestilence upon them. It does not mention the sacrifice of Iphigenia, and makes only a dubious allusion to the Judgment of Paris. I have taken Iphigenia's story from a play by the fifth-century tragic poet Aeschylus, the Agamemnon, and the Judgment of Paris from the Trojan Woman, a play by his contemporary, Euripides, adding a few details, such as the tale of Oenone, from the prose-writer Apollodorus, who wrote probably in the first or second century A.D. He is usually very uninteresting, but in treating the events leading up to the Iliad he was apparently inspired by touching so great a subject and he is less dull than in almost any other part of his book.

More than a thousand years before Christ, near the eastern end of the Mediterranean was a great city very rich and powerful, second to none on earth. The name of it was Troy and even today no city is more famous. The cause of this long-lasting fame was a war told of in one of the world's greatest poems, the *Iliad*, and the cause of the war went back to a dispute between three jealous goddesses.

Prologue: THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS

The evil goddess of Discord, Eris, was naturally not popular in Olympus, and when the gods gave a banquet they were apt to leave her out. Resenting this deeply, she determined to make trouble—and she succeeded very well indeed. At an important marriage, that of King Peleus and the sea nymph Thetis, to which she alone of all the divinities was not invited, she threw into the banquet hall a golden apple marked *For the Fairest*. Of course all the goddesses wanted it, but in the end the choice was narrowed down to three: Aphrodite, Hera and Pallas Athena. They asked Zeus to judge between them, but very wisely he refused to have anything to do with the matter. He told them to go to Mount Ida, near Troy, where the young prince Paris, also called Alexander, was keeping his father's sheep. He was an excellent judge of beauty, Zeus told them. Paris, though a royal prince, was doing shepherd's work because his father Priam, the King of Troy, had been warned that this prince would some day be the ruin of his country, and so had sent him away. At the moment Paris was living with a lovely nymph named Oenone.

His amazement can be imagined when there appeared before him the wondrous forms of the three great goddesses. He was not asked, however, to gaze at the radiant divinities and choose which of them seemed to him the fairest, but only to consider the bribes each offered and choose which seemed to him best worth taking. Nevertheless, the choice was not easy. What men care for most was set before him. Hera promised to make him Lord of Europe and Asia; Athena, that he would lead the Trojans to victory against the Greeks and lay Greece in ruins; Aphrodite, that the fairest woman in all the world should be his. Paris, a weakling and something of a coward, too, as later events showed, chose the last. He gave Aphrodite the golden apple.

That was the Judgment of Paris, famed everywhere as the real reason why the Trojan War was fought.

THE TROJAN WAR

The fairest woman in the world was Helen, the daughter of Zeus and Leda and the sister of Castor and Pollux. Such was the report of her beauty that not a young prince in Greece but wanted to marry her. When her suitors assembled in her home to make a formal proposal for her hand they were so many and from such powerful families that her reputed father, King

Tyndareus, her mother's husband, was afraid to select one among them, fearing that the others would unite against him. He therefore exacted first a solemn oath from all that they would champion the cause of Helen's husband, whoever he might be, if any wrong was done to him through his marriage. It was, after all, to each man's advantage to take the oath, since each was hoping he would be the person chosen, so they all bound themselves to punish to the uttermost anyone who carried or tried to carry Helen away. Then Tyndareus chose Menelaus, the brother of Agamemnon, and made him King of Sparta as well.

So matters stood when Paris gave the golden apple to Aphrodite. The Goddess of Love and Beauty knew very well where the most beautiful woman on earth was to be found. She led the young shepherd, with never a thought of Oenone left forlorn, straight to Sparta, where Menelaus and Helen received him graciously as their guest. The ties between guest and host were strong. Each was bound to help and never harm the other. But Paris broke that sacred bond. Menelaus trusting completely to it left Paris in his home and went off to Crete. Then,

Paris who coming
Entered a friend's kind dwelling,
Shamed the hand there that gave him food,
Stealing away a woman.

Menelaus got back to find Helen gone, and he called upon all Greece to help him. The chieftains responded, as they were bound to do. They came eager for the great enterprise, to cross the sea and lay mighty Troy in ashes. Two, however, of the first rank, were missing: Odysseus, King of the Island of Ithaca, and Achilles, the son of Peleus and the sea nymph Thetis. Odysseus, who was one of the shrewdest and most sensible men in Greece, did not want to leave his house and family to embark on a romantic adventure overseas for the sake of a faithless woman. He pretended, therefore, that he had gone mad, and when a messenger from the Greek Army arrived, the King was plowing a field and sowing it with salt instead of seed. But the messenger was shrewd too. He seized Odysseus' little son and put him directly in the way of the plow. Instantly the father turned the plow aside, thus proving that he had all his wits about him. However reluctant, he had to join the Army.

Achilles was kept back by his mother. The sea nymph knew that if he went to Troy he was fated to die there. She sent him to the court of Lycomedes, the king who had treacherously killed Theseus, and made him wear women's clothes and hide among the maidens. Odysseus was dispatched by the chieftains



The judgment of Paris