

LANG ANDREW

TALES OF TROY:
ULYSSES, THE SACKER
OF CITIES

Andrew Lang
**Tales of Troy: Ulysses,
the Sacker of Cities**

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BATTLE AT THE SHIPS

With dawn Agamemnon awoke, and fear had gone out of his heart. He put on his armour, and arrayed the chiefs on foot in front of their chariots, and behind them came the spearmen, with the bowmen and slingers on the wings of the army. Then a great black cloud spread over the sky, and red was the rain that fell from it. The Trojans gathered on a height in the plain, and Hector, shining in armour, went here and there, in front and rear, like a star that now gleams forth and now is hidden in a cloud.

The armies rushed on each other and hewed each other down, as reapers cut their way through a field of tall corn. Neither side gave ground, though the helmets of the bravest Trojans might be seen deep in the ranks of the Greeks; and the swords of the bravest Greeks rose and fell in the ranks of the Trojans, and all the while the arrows showered like rain. But at noon-day, when the weary woodman rests from cutting trees, and takes his dinner in the quiet hills, the Greeks of the first line made a charge, Agamemnon running in front of them, and he speared two

Trojans, and took their breastplates, which he laid in his chariot, and then he speared one brother of Hector and struck another down with his sword, and killed two more who vainly asked to be made prisoners of war. Footmen slew footmen, and chariot men slew chariot men, and they broke into the Trojan line as fire falls on a forest in a windy day, leaping and roaring and racing through the trees. Many an empty chariot did the horses hurry madly through the field, for the charioteers were lying dead, with the greedy vultures hovering above them, flapping their wide wings. Still Agamemnon followed and slew the hindmost Trojans, but the rest fled till they came to the gates, and the oak tree that grew outside the gates, and there they stopped.

But Hector held his hands from fighting, for in the meantime he was making his men face the enemy and form up in line and take breath, and was encouraging them, for they had retreated from the wall of the Greeks across the whole plain, past the hill that was the tomb of Ilus, a king of old, and past the place of the wild fig-tree. Much ado had Hector to rally the Trojans, but he knew that when men do turn again they are hard to beat. So it proved, for when the Trojans had rallied and formed in line, Agamemnon slew a Thracian chief who had come to fight for Troy before King Rhesus came. But the eldest brother of the slain man smote Agamemnon through the arm with his spear, and, though Agamemnon slew him in turn, his wound bled much and he was in great pain, so he leaped into his chariot and was driven back to the ships.

Then Hector gave the word to charge, as a huntsman cries on his hounds against a lion, and he rushed forward at the head of the Trojan line, slaying as he went. Nine chiefs of the Greeks he slew, and fell upon the spearmen and scattered them, as the spray of the waves is scattered by the wandering wind.

Now the ranks of the Greeks were broken, and they would have been driven among their ships and killed without mercy, had not Ulysses and Diomedes stood firm in the centre, and slain four Trojan leaders. The Greeks began to come back and face their enemies in line of battle again, though Hector, who had been fighting on the Trojan right, rushed against them. But Diomedes took good aim with his spear at the helmet of Hector, and struck it fairly. The spear-point did not go through the helmet, but Hector was stunned and fell; and, when he came to himself, he leaped into his chariot, and his squire drove him against the Pylians and Cretans, under Nestor and Idomeneus, who were on the left wing of the Greek army. Then Diomedes fought on till Paris, who stood beside the pillar on the hillock that was the tomb of old King Ilus, sent an arrow clean through his foot. Ulysses went and stood in front of Diomedes, who sat down, and Ulysses drew the arrow from his foot, and Diomedes stepped into his chariot and was driven back to the ships.

Ulysses was now the only Greek chief that still fought in the centre. The Greeks all fled, and he was alone in the crowd of Trojans, who rushed on him as hounds and hunters press round a wild boar that stands at bay in a wood. "They are cowards that

flee from the fight," said Ulysses to himself; "but I will stand here, one man against a multitude." He covered the front of his body with his great shield, that hung by a belt round his neck, and he smote four Trojans and wounded a fifth. But the brother of the wounded man drove a spear through the shield and breastplate of Ulysses, and tore clean through his side. Then Ulysses turned on this Trojan, and he fled, and Ulysses sent a spear through his shoulder and out at his breast, and he died. Ulysses dragged from his own side the spear that had wounded him, and called thrice with a great voice to the other Greeks, and Menelaus and Aias rushed to rescue him, for many Trojans were round him, like jackals round a wounded stag that a man has struck with an arrow. But Aias ran and covered the wounded Ulysses with his huge shield till he could climb into the chariot of Menelaus, who drove him back to the ships.

Meanwhile, Hector was slaying the Greeks on the left of their battle, and Paris struck the Greek surgeon, Machaon, with an arrow; and Idomeneus bade Nestor put Machaon in his chariot and drive him to Nestor's hut, where his wound might be tended. Meanwhile, Hector sped to the centre of the line, where Aias was slaying the Trojans; but Eurypylus, a Greek chief, was wounded by an arrow from the bow of Paris, and his friends guarded him with their shields and spears.

Thus the best of the Greeks were wounded and out of the battle, save Aias, and the spearmen were in flight. Meanwhile Achilles was standing by the stern of his ship watching the defeat

of the Greeks, but when he saw Machaon being carried past, sorely wounded, in the chariot of Nestor, he bade his friend Patroclus, whom he loved better than all the rest, to go and ask how Machaon did. He was sitting drinking wine with Nestor when Patroclus came, and Nestor told Patroclus how many of the chiefs were wounded, and though Patroclus was in a hurry Nestor began a very long story about his own great deeds of war, done when he was a young man. At last he bade Patroclus tell Achilles that, if he would not fight himself, he should at least send out his men under Patroclus, who should wear the splendid armour of Achilles. Then the Trojans would think that Achilles himself had returned to the battle, and they would be afraid, for none of them dared to meet Achilles hand to hand.

So Patroclus ran off to Achilles; but, on his way, he met the wounded Eurypylus, and he took him to his hut and cut the arrow out of his thigh with a knife, and washed the wound with warm water, and rubbed over it a bitter root to take the pain away. Thus he waited for some time with Eurypylus, but the advice of Nestor was in the end to cause the death of Patroclus. The battle now raged more fiercely, while Agamemnon and Diomedes and Ulysses could only limp about leaning on their spears; and again Agamemnon wished to moor the ships near shore, and embark in the night and run away. But Ulysses was very angry with him, and said: "You should lead some other inglorious army, not us, who will fight on till every soul of us perish, rather than flee like cowards! Be silent, lest the soldiers hear you speaking of flight,

such words as no man should utter. I wholly scorn your counsel, for the Greeks will lose heart if, in the midst of battle, you bid them launch the ships.”

Agamemnon was ashamed, and, by Diomedes's advice, the wounded kings went down to the verge of the war to encourage the others, though they were themselves unable to fight. They rallied the Greeks, and Aias led them and struck Hector full in the breast with a great rock, so that his friends carried him out of the battle to the river side, where they poured water over him, but he lay fainting on the ground, the black blood gushing up from his mouth. While Hector lay there, and all men thought that he would die, Aias and Idomeneus were driving back the Trojans, and it seemed that, even without Achilles and his men, the Greeks were able to hold their own against the Trojans. But the battle was never lost while Hector lived. People in those days believed in “omens:” they thought that the appearance of birds on the right or left hand meant good or bad luck. Once during the battle a Trojan showed Hector an unlucky bird, and wanted him to retreat into the town. But Hector said, “One omen is the best: to fight for our own country.” While Hector lay between death and life the Greeks were winning, for the Trojans had no other great chief to lead them. But Hector awoke from his faint, and leaped to his feet and ran here and there, encouraging the men of Troy. Then the most of the Greeks fled when they saw him; but Aias and Idomeneus, and the rest of the bravest, formed in a square between the Trojans and the ships, and down on

them came Hector and Aeneas and Paris, throwing their spears, and slaying on every hand. The Greeks turned and ran, and the Trojans would have stopped to strip the armour from the slain men, but Hector cried: "Haste to the ships and leave the spoils of war. I will slay any man who lags behind!"

On this, all the Trojans drove their chariots down into the ditch that guarded the ships of the Greeks, as when a great wave sweeps at sea over the side of a vessel; and the Greeks were on the ship decks, thrusting with very long spears, used in sea fights, and the Trojans were boarding the ships, and striking with swords and axes. Hector had a lighted torch and tried to set fire to the ship of Aias; but Aias kept him back with the long spear, and slew a Trojan, whose lighted torch fell from his hand. And Aias kept shouting: "Come on, and drive away Hector; it is not to a dance that he is calling his men, but to battle."

The dead fell in heaps, and the living ran over them to mount the heaps of slain and climb the ships. Hector rushed forward like a sea wave against a great steep rock, but like the rock stood the Greeks; still the Trojans charged past the beaks of the foremost ships, while Aias, thrusting with a spear more than twenty feet long, leaped from deck to deck like a man that drives four horses abreast, and leaps from the back of one to the back of another. Hector seized with his hand the stern of the ship of Protesilaus, the prince whom Paris shot when he leaped ashore on the day when the Greeks first landed; and Hector kept calling: "Bring fire!" and even Aias, in this strange sea fight on land, left

the decks and went below, thrusting with his spear through the portholes. Twelve men lay dead who had brought fire against the ship which Aias guarded.

THE SLAYING AND AVENGING OF PATROCLUS

At this moment, when torches were blazing round the ships, and all seemed lost, Patroclus came out of the hut of Eurypylus, whose wound he had been tending, and he saw that the Greeks were in great danger, and ran weeping to Achilles. "Why do you weep," said Achilles, "like a little girl that runs by her mother's side, and plucks at her gown and looks at her with tears in her eyes, till her mother takes her up in her arms? Is there bad news from home that your father is dead, or mine; or are you sorry that the Greeks are getting what they deserve for their folly?" Then Patroclus told Achilles how Ulysses and many other princes were wounded and could not fight, and begged to be allowed to put on Achilles' armour and lead his men, who were all fresh and unwearied, into the battle, for a charge of two thousand fresh warriors might turn the fortune of the day.

Then Achilles was sorry that he had sworn not to fight himself till Hector brought fire to his own ships. He would lend Patroclus his armour, and his horses, and his men; but Patroclus must only drive the Trojans from the ships, and not pursue them. At this moment Aias was weary, so many spears smote his armour, and he could hardly hold up his great shield, and Hector cut off his spear-head with the sword; the bronze head fell ringing

on the ground, and Aias brandished only the pointless shaft. So he shrank back and fire blazed all over his ship; and Achilles saw it, and smote his thigh, and bade Patroclus make haste. Patroclus armed himself in the shining armour of Achilles, which all Trojans feared, and leaped into the chariot where Automedon, the squire, had harnessed Xanthus and Balius, two horses that were the children, men said, of the West Wind, and a led horse was harnessed beside them in the side traces. Meanwhile the two thousand men of Achilles, who were called Myrmidons, had met in armour, five companies of four hundred apiece, under five chiefs of noble names. Forth they came, as eager as a pack of wolves that have eaten a great red deer and run to slake their thirst with the dark water of a well in the hills.

So all in close array, helmet touching helmet and shield touching shield, like a moving wall of shining bronze, the men of Achilles charged, and Patroclus, in the chariot led the way. Down they came at full speed on the flank of the Trojans, who saw the leader, and knew the bright armour and the horses of the terrible Achilles, and thought that he had returned to the war. Then each Trojan looked round to see by what way he could escape, and when men do that in battle they soon run by the way they have chosen. Patroclus rushed to the ship of Protesilaus, and slew the leader of the Trojans there, and drove them out, and quenched the fire; while they of Troy drew back from the ships, and Aias and the other unwounded Greek princes leaped among them, smiting with sword and spear. Well did Hector know that the break in

the battle had come again; but even so he stood, and did what he might, while the Trojans were driven back in disorder across the ditch, where the poles of many chariots were broken and the horses fled loose across the plain.

The horses of Achilles cleared the ditch, and Patroclus drove them between the Trojans and the wall of their own town, slaying many men, and, chief of all, Sarpedon, king of the Lycians; and round the body of Sarpedon the Trojans rallied under Hector, and the fight swayed this way and that, and there was such a noise of spears and swords smiting shields and helmets as when many woodcutters fell trees in a glen of the hills. At last the Trojans gave way, and the Greeks stripped the armour from the body of brave Sarpedon; but men say that Sleep and Death, like two winged angels, bore his body away to his own country. Now Patroclus forgot how Achilles had told him not to pursue the Trojans across the plain, but to return when he had driven them from the ships. On he raced, slaying as he went, even till he reached the foot of the wall of Troy. Thrice he tried to climb it, but thrice he fell back.

Hector was in his chariot in the gateway, and he bade his squire lash his horses into the war, and struck at no other man, great or small, but drove straight against Patroclus, who stood and threw a heavy stone at Hector; which missed him, but killed his charioteer. Then Patroclus leaped on the charioteer to strip his armour, but Hector stood over the body, grasping it by the head, while Patroclus dragged at the feet, and spears and arrows

flew in clouds around the fallen man. At last, towards sunset, the Greeks drew him out of the war, and Patroclus thrice charged into the thick of the Trojans. But the helmet of Achilles was loosened in the fight, and fell from the head of Patroclus, and he was wounded from behind, and Hector, in front, drove his spear clean through his body. With his last breath Patroclus prophesied: "Death stands near thee, Hector, at the hands of noble Achilles." But Automedon was driving back the swift horses, carrying to Achilles the news that his dearest friend was slain.

After Ulysses was wounded, early in this great battle, he was not able to fight for several days, and, as the story is about Ulysses, we must tell quite shortly how Achilles returned to the war to take vengeance for Patroclus, and how he slew Hector. When Patroclus fell, Hector seized the armour which the Gods had given to Peleus, and Peleus to his son Achilles, while Achilles had lent it to Patroclus that he might terrify the Trojans. Retiring out of reach of spears, Hector took off his own armour and put on that of Achilles, and Greeks and Trojans fought for the dead body of Patroclus. Then Zeus, the chief of the Gods, looked down and said that Hector should never come home out of the battle to his wife, Andromache. But Hector returned into the fight around the dead Patroclus, and here all the best men fought, and even Automedon, who had been driving the chariot of Patroclus. Now when the Trojans seemed to have the better of the fight, the Greeks sent Antilochus, a son of old Nestor, to tell Achilles that his friend was slain, and Antilochus ran, and Aias and his

brother protected the Greeks who were trying to carry the body of Patroclus back to the ships.

Swiftly Antilochus came running to Achilles, saying: "Fallen is Patroclus, and they are fighting round his naked body, for Hector has his armour." Then Achilles said never a word, but fell on the floor of his hut, and threw black ashes on his yellow hair, till Antilochus seized his hands, fearing that he would cut his own throat with his dagger, for very sorrow. His mother, Thetis, arose from the sea to comfort him, but he said that he desired to die if he could not slay Hector, who had slain his friend. Then Thetis told him that he could not fight without armour, and now he had none; but she would go to the God of armour-making and bring from him such a shield and helmet and breastplate as had never been seen by men.

Meanwhile the fight raged round the dead body of Patroclus, which was defiled with blood and dust, near the ships, and was being dragged this way and that, and torn and wounded. Achilles could not bear this sight, yet his mother had warned him not to enter without armour the battle where stones and arrows and spears were flying like hail; and he was so tall and broad that he could put on the arms of no other man. So he went down to the ditch as he was, unarmed, and as he stood high above it, against the red sunset, fire seemed to flow from his golden hair like the beacon blaze that soars into the dark sky when an island town is attacked at night, and men light beacons that their neighbours may see them and come to their help from

other isles. There Achilles stood in a splendour of fire, and he shouted aloud, as clear as a clarion rings when men fall on to attack a besieged city wall. Thrice Achilles shouted mightily, and thrice the horses of the Trojans shuddered for fear and turned back from the onslaught, – and thrice the men of Troy were confounded and shaken with terror. Then the Greeks drew the body of Patroclus out of the dust and the arrows, and laid him on a bier, and Achilles followed, weeping, for he had sent his friend with chariot and horses to the war; but home again he welcomed him never more. Then the sun set and it was night.

Now one of the Trojans wished Hector to retire within the walls of Troy, for certainly Achilles would to-morrow be foremost in the war. But Hector said, “Have ye not had your fill of being shut up behind walls? Let Achilles fight; I will meet him in the open field.” The Trojans cheered, and they camped in the plain, while in the hut of Achilles women washed the dead body of Patroclus, and Achilles swore that he would slay Hector.

In the dawn came Thetis, bearing to Achilles the new splendid armour that the God had made for him. Then Achilles put on that armour, and roused his men; but Ulysses, who knew all the rules of honour, would not let him fight till peace had been made, with a sacrifice and other ceremonies, between him and Agamemnon, and till Agamemnon had given him all the presents which Achilles had before refused. Achilles did not want them; he wanted only to fight, but Ulysses made him obey, and do what was usual. Then the gifts were brought, and Agamemnon stood

up, and said that he was sorry for his insolence, and the men took breakfast, but Achilles would neither eat nor drink. He mounted his chariot, but the horse Xanthus bowed his head till his long mane touched the ground, and, being a fairy horse, the child of the West Wind, he spoke (or so men said), and these were his words: "We shall bear thee swiftly and speedily, but thou shalt be slain in fight, and thy dying day is near at hand." "Well I know it," said Achilles, "but I will not cease from fighting till I have given the Trojans their fill of war."

So all that day he chased and slew the Trojans. He drove them into the river, and, though the river came down in a red flood, he crossed, and slew them on the plain. The plain caught fire, the bushes and long dry grass blazed round him, but he fought his way through the fire, and drove the Trojans to their walls. The gates were thrown open, and the Trojans rushed through like frightened fawns, and then they climbed to the battlements, and looked down in safety, while the whole Greek army advanced in line under their shields.

But Hector stood still, alone, in front of the gate, and old Priam, who saw Achilles rushing on, shining like a star in his new armour, called with tears to Hector, "Come within the gate! This man has slain many of my sons, and if he slays thee whom have I to help me in my old age?" His mother also called to Hector, but he stood firm, waiting for Achilles. Now the story says that he was afraid, and ran thrice in full armour round Troy, with Achilles in pursuit. But this cannot be true, for no mortal men

could run thrice, in heavy armour, with great shields that clanked against their ankles, round the town of Troy: moreover Hector was the bravest of men, and all the Trojan women were looking down at him from the walls.

We cannot believe that he ran away, and the story goes on to tell that he asked Achilles to make an agreement with him. The conqueror in the fight should give back the body of the fallen to be buried by his friends, but should keep his armour. But Achilles said that he could make no agreement with Hector, and threw his spear, which flew over Hector's shoulder. Then Hector threw his spear, but it could not pierce the shield which the God had made for Achilles. Hector had no other spear, and Achilles had one, so Hector cried, "Let me not die without honour!" and drew his sword, and rushed at Achilles, who sprang to meet him, but before Hector could come within a sword-stroke Achilles had sent his spear clean through the neck of Hector. He fell in the dust and Achilles said, "Dogs and birds shall tear your flesh unburied." With his dying breath Hector prayed him to take gold from Priam, and give back his body to be burned in Troy. But Achilles said, "Hound! would that I could bring myself to carve and eat thy raw flesh, but dogs shall devour it, even if thy father offered me thy weight in gold." With his last words Hector prophesied and said, "Remember me in the day when Paris shall slay thee in the Scaean gate." Then his brave soul went to the land of the Dead, which the Greeks called Hades. To that land Ulysses sailed while he was still a living man, as the story tells later.

Then Achilles did a dreadful deed; he slit the feet of dead Hector from heel to ankle, and thrust thongs through, and bound him by the thongs to his chariot and trailed the body in the dust. All the women of Troy who were on the walls raised a shriek, and Hector's wife, Andromache, heard the sound. She had been in an inner room of her house, weaving a purple web, and embroidering flowers on it, and she was calling her bower maidens to make ready a bath for Hector when he should come back tired from battle. But when she heard the cry from the wall she trembled, and the shuttle with which she was weaving fell from her hands. "Surely I heard the cry of my husband's mother," she said, and she bade two of her maidens come with her to see why the people lamented.

She ran swiftly, and reached the battlements, and thence she saw her dear husband's body being whirled through the dust towards the ships, behind the chariot of Achilles. Then night came over her eyes and she fainted. But when she returned to herself she cried out that now none would defend her little boy, and other children would push him away from feasts, saying, "Out with you; no father of thine is at our table," and his father, Hector, would lie naked at the ships, unclad, unburned, unlamented. To be unburned and unburied was thought the greatest of misfortunes, because the dead man unburned could not go into the House of Hades, God of the Dead, but must always wander, alone and comfortless, in the dark borderland between the dead and the living.

THE CRUELTY OF ACHILLES, AND THE RANSOMING OF HECTOR

When Achilles was asleep that night the ghost of Patroclus came, saying, "Why dost thou not burn and bury me? for the other shadows of dead men suffer me not to come near them, and lonely I wander along the dark dwelling of Hades." Then Achilles awoke, and he sent men to cut down trees, and make a huge pile of fagots and logs. On this they laid Patroclus, covered with white linen, and then they slew many cattle, and Achilles cut the throats of twelve Trojan prisoners of war, meaning to burn them with Patroclus to do him honour. This was a deed of shame, for Achilles was mad with sorrow and anger for the death of his friend. Then they drenched with wine the great pile of wood, which was thirty yards long and broad, and set fire to it, and the fire blazed all through the night and died down in the morning. They put the white bones of Patroclus in a golden casket, and laid it in the hut of Achilles, who said that, when he died, they must burn his body, and mix the ashes with the ashes of his friend, and build over it a chamber of stone, and cover the chamber with a great hill of earth, and set a pillar of stone above it. This is one of the hills on the plain of Troy, but the pillar has fallen from the tomb, long ago.

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