ROGER LANCELYN GREEN

THE TALE OF TROY

The camp was a deserted ruin of tumbled stone, and charred huts and palisades; and there were no ships to be seen drawn up on the shore, nor upon the sea.

While they were wondering at this and hardly able to believe their eyes, scouts came hastening to King Priam.

'The Greeks have indeed gone!' they cried. 'The camp lies in ashes; there is not a man, not a ship to be seen. But there stands in the midst of the ruins a great Wooden Horse the like of which we have never seen.'

ROGER LANCELYN GREEN

RETOLD FROM THE ANCIENT AUTHORS

'The tale of Troy divine'

MILTON

Illustrations by Pauline Baynes

INTRODUCED BY

MICHELLE PAVER

A percentage of the royalties from the sale of this book goes towards the endowment of six choral scholarships at the author's college (Merton, Oxford)

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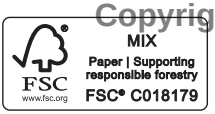

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To the memory of
two favourite authors
RIDER HAGGARD and *ANDREW LANG*
who together wrote The World's Desire
which first led me to
the study of
Greek legend and
literature

Sweet was your song of the world's desire
When life was yours: now your days are sped
I set at your feet my Lydian lyre,
And my Phrygian flute to mark your head.

Anonymous Greek Epitaph

INTRODUCTION BY
MICHELLE PAVER

The Tale of Troy tells one of the oldest and most famous stories in the world: a strange, violent, exciting adventure with many astonishing twists and turns.

The great city of Troy is besieged by its enemies, and we follow the fortunes of the heroes on both sides as they're helped or hindered by a host of quarrelsome gods and goddesses. Then the cleverest hero, Odysseus, comes up with an extraordinary plan to break the siege – but afterwards he must struggle for years to find his way back to his kingdom, surviving shipwrecks, sea-monsters and some man-eating but terminally stupid giants . . .

I first read Roger Lancelyn Green's brilliant retelling of this story when I was eight years old. I'd borrowed it from Wimbledon Library, but I loved it so much that I saved up my pocket money and bought my own copy. I've still got it, a slightly battered Puffin paperback that cost me five shillings in 1970. (That's 25p in today's money.)

Reading *The Tale of Troy* as a child helped instil in me a lifelong love of myths and legends. When I grew up, I read

translations of the Ancient Greek poems from which Roger Lancelyn Green took the story: the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. And years later, rereading these magnificent works spurred me on to write my own adventures about ancient times.

I want to say a little more about the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, because the story of how they survived from Ancient Greece to the present day is almost as amazing as the tale of Troy itself, and knowing about it might add something to your own experience of reading this book.

The *Iliad* means the 'Story of Ilion', which is an Ancient Greek name for the city of Troy. The *Odyssey* means the 'Story of Odysseus', the great warrior and seafarer who was the cleverest of all the Greek heroes (and my personal favourite).

According to tradition, both poems were created by a man called Homer, but he lived so long ago that we don't know anything about him. We don't even know for sure whether he even existed, and some people believe that the poems were made up by different poets. (Although, in case you're wondering, I'm not one of them. I think both were created by a single poet, a man of genius; but that's just my own view.)

What we do know is that *someone* created the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* about 2,700 years ago. And when I say he 'created' them, I don't mean he wrote them down, I mean he made them up in his head and memorized them, because this was long before writing was widely used. In fact, it's believed that, even before Homer's time, people had been making up long poems for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years.

Just think about that. I don't know about you, but I'd find it quite hard to memorize a hundred lines of anything. The *Iliad* has over *fifteen thousand*. In modern terms, that's a pretty hefty paperback. But in ancient times people used their memories a lot more than we do today, and they managed it.

So. An Ancient Greek poet of genius creates two astonishing poems. These are passed from one generation to the next, by one person telling them to another, without writing them down. Then at some stage in the next few hundred years, someone *does* write them down. But this is centuries before printing is invented, so all fifteen thousand lines of the *Iliad* and all twelve thousand lines of the *Odyssey* have to be *handwritten* on rolls of calfskin or papyrus.

These handwritten copies are then passed from person to person, and copied when they get tatty and fall to bits, again and again, for nearly two thousand years. And bear in mind that because writing each one takes so long there probably aren't more than a few hundred copies in the world at any given time; and yet, somehow, some of them manage to survive the Dark Ages, plagues, fires, earthquakes, wars . . . And, even when the first printed book of Homer's poems is made in 1488, there probably still aren't that many copies in existence, as books are so expensive; but, again, some survive.

Why? Because in each generation some people realize that these are among the most amazing stories ever told, so they look after them and pass them on. With their help, the stories in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have made their perilous journey

through the centuries; and in 1958, Roger Lancelyn Green played his part in retelling them, and thus they have found their way . . .

To you.

So when you read your copy of *The Tale of Troy* you become part of a chain of storytelling that stretches back almost three thousand years into the past.

And right at the start of that chain there must have been one night when a storyteller – whom I will call Homer – walked into the hall of an Ancient Greek chieftain and told his tale for the very first time. The rich people would have sat on benches covered in soft sheepskins, the poorer ones on the ground. The chieftain's hunting dogs would have lain about with their muzzles between their paws. But the same firelight would have flickered over the faces of peasants and goatherds, fishermen and warriors and slaves. The same wonder would have shone in their eyes.

And now that story has come to you.

I envy you as you set out for the first time on this adventure. And I'd urge you to be patient with the beginning, which moves fast through the causes of the Trojan War, and to persevere with those tricky Greek names; you'll find that they have a rough music of their own, once you get used to them.

Good luck – and may a fair wind speed you on your way as you set sail over the wine-dark sea, for the windy city of Troy . . .

Contents

CHAPTER 1

The Marriage of Peleus and Thetis

*

For late between them rose a bitter strife
    In Peleus' halls upon his wedding day,
When Peleus took him an immortal wife,
    And there was bidden all the gods' array,
    Save Discord only; yet she brought dismay,
And cast an apple on the bridal board.

ANDREW LANG
Helen of Troy

1

To the ancient Greeks the Siege of Troy was the greatest and most important event in the Age of the Heroes – that age of wonder when the Immortals who dwelt on Olympus and whom they worshipped as gods, mingled with mankind and took a visible part in their affairs.

The fall of Troy marks the place where legend ends and history begins; yet that great adventure had its beginnings in the early myths of the making of the world: for the Tale of Troy starts with the story of Prometheus.*

Now Prometheus was a Titan, a giant out of the earliest ages of the world who was himself an Immortal, and although he lacked the powers of Zeus, he could do what even Zeus could not: he could foresee the future. Also he had the power of love, which at first Zeus lacked, and this love was given to humankind, to the poor mortals on this earth whom he had helped to fashion.

* See *Tales of the Greek Heroes* by Roger Lancelyn Green (Puffin Books, 9780141325286).

In the days before man was made, so the old stories said, Zeus fought and overthrew his own terrible father, Cronos – a horrible ogre who swallowed his children in case they should rebel against him. Prometheus helped Zeus in this righteous war, and helped him also to make Mankind to people the devastated earth. But then, out of his great love, Prometheus disobeyed Zeus and stole fire from Heaven as a gift to Man which should make him second only to the Immortals.

In his rage Zeus chained Prometheus to the great Caucasus Mountains beyond the Black Sea. But Prometheus then prophesied that Zeus would fall even as Cronos fell, and that only he could save him – for he alone knew what Zeus must do to avoid his doom.

Zeus threatened, bargained and begged, but all in vain. Then, in his fear and fury he sent a terrible eagle to feed day by day on the liver of the poor immortal Titan – the liver that night by night must grow again. But even under this terrible torture Prometheus would not tell his secret.

Time passed, and Zeus began to learn mercy and love through the suffering of the fear which was always before him: for he knew that Prometheus could see the future truly, and that nothing could change what he saw.

As Zeus began to help men on this earth, the Age of the Heroes came, and Zeus married many mortal women, in spite of the jealousy of Hera his Immortal wife.

The last of the mortal children of Zeus was the greatest

of all the Heroes, Heracles the strongest man who ever lived. And while Heracles was wandering about the earth performing his Twelve Labours and ridding it of many an evil creature, Zeus sent him to Caucasus to free Prometheus. There were no conditions attached to this act of mercy, and Prometheus went quietly back to his work among the men whom he loved.

But Heracles continued with his great deeds, finishing with the deed for which Zeus had caused him to be born, which was to fight on the Immortals' side in the great war with the Giants – which could not be won unless a mortal hero was there to slay the Giants when the Immortals had struck them down.

When that war was over, Zeus felt that for a while at least he was free from care and might make merry with the Immortals.

'I will have no other mortal sons,' he said, 'for Heracles, the hero who saved us from the Giants, must be the last of these. But I have heard tell of a lovely sea-nymph called Thetis: she shall be my bride, and maybe we shall have a daughter who will be the loveliest woman ever seen among men.'

So Zeus visited the caves of ocean, and found that Thetis was as lovely and as clever as he had heard. Then he arranged for a great wedding feast, and bade all the other Immortals make ready for it. And even jealous Hera was so happy at that time that she did not try to prevent it, or to bring any

harm to Thetis as she had always tried to do where the mortal wives of Zeus were concerned.

Then suddenly the good Titan, Prometheus, came to Zeus and said:

'Great Zeus, though you treated me cruelly in the beginning I know that what you did was due to fear. I would not tell you how to avoid the certain danger which threatened you: the danger of the son who would cast you out as you cast out Cronos, and rule in your place as you ruled in his. No, though you sent your eagle to prey on me, I would not speak. But you know well that the future, hidden even from you, is sometimes clear to me. Did I not warn you of the coming of the Giants, and that you would only defeat them if there was a human Hero strong and brave enough to fight on your side? That man was Heracles, and the battle fell out as I prophesied.'

Zeus bowed his head and answered:

'Titan Prometheus, it is even as you say. In the beginning I had no love for mortal men, and hated you for stealing fire to give to them. As you say, I was cruel and merciless: but I have learnt through suffering, and I no longer hate you, nor wish you ill, even though you know of the danger which threatens me. To prove this, I sent my son the hero Heracles to shoot the eagle and free you from your bonds, leaving only the Ring on your finger in token of your sufferings for mankind. I asked nothing of you in return for your freedom; and indeed I am glad and contented to see you working again upon the earth for the noble race of men.'

'Although I can see much of the future,' said Prometheus, 'I cannot see how the hearts of men and of Immortals may change. Yours has changed, great Zeus – and now I can speak to the merciful Father of gods and men, and tell you of your danger and how to avert it. Listen to the prophecy which I have known from the beginning: "*The son of Thetis shall be greater than his father*." So small a matter, so easy a danger to escape – yet it might have proved the overthrow of great Zeus himself!'

Then Zeus smiled, and uttered a great laugh of joy and relief: and the thunder rumbled, while the summer-lightning flashed out of a clear sky.

'I thank you, Titan Prometheus!' he cried. 'Now once again you are my friend and my helper . . . We will marry Thetis to a mortal husband, and their son shall be the last of the Heroes. It is in my mind to cause the great and glorious War of Troy that shall be famous to the end of time. Famous too shall be the names of the Heroes who fight at Troy; but with them the Age of the Heroes shall end, and the Iron Age of ordinary men shall follow.'

The Hero chosen to be the husband of Thetis was Peleus the Argonaut, who had assisted Heracles and Telamon to sack Troy, when King Laomedon refused to keep his word by giving up his magic horses in return for the rescue of Hesione from the sea monster.

It chanced that Peleus killed his friend Eurytion by

mistake and in consequence was forced to leave his own country. He went to live at Iolcus where Acastus the son of Pelias was king; and there lived happily for some time.

Now Zeus brought it about that Queen Astydamia fell in love with him, and begged him to run away with her. Peleus refused, he would not do anything so wicked and dishonourable as to steal the wife of his friend. Astydamia was furious, and her love turned to such hatred that she wished only to see Peleus dead. So she went to her husband with a lying tale that Peleus had tried to persuade her to run away with him, and had threatened to carry her off by force if she refused.

Naturally King Acastus was furious: he did not wish to kill Peleus, who was his guest, but he decided to cause his death. So he and his lords took Peleus out hunting on Mount Pelion, and they proposed a contest to see who could kill the most game that day.

Peleus was a skilful hunter, moreover he possessed a magic sword, given to him by the Immortals in reward for his virtue, which made him always successful in the chase and always victorious in battle. On this occasion, as he suspected trickery, whenever he killed an animal, he cut out its tongue which he put away in his pouch.

At the end of the hunt, Acastus and his followers claimed all the spoils as their own, and jeered at Peleus for having killed nothing.

'You have hunted well,' said Peleus quietly, 'but I have

hunted better: for I slew just as many animals as I have tongues here in my pouch!' And with that he produced his spoils, and made Acastus and his friends look thoroughly silly.

But it happened a little later in the day that Peleus fell asleep, lying on the lonely mountainside, and Acastus stole his sword and hid it in a pile of dirt. That done, he and his friends went softly away, leaving Peleus alone.

Evening came, and Peleus woke to find himself deserted, unarmed and surrounded by the wild Centaurs, who drew near to kill him. But one of them, Chiron the wise who had trained Jason as a boy, came to his rescue, found the sword and brought him in safety to his own cave.

There he taught Peleus many things, and finally instructed him how he should catch and hold the sea-nymph Thetis, his destined bride.

Peleus did as he was instructed, lying in wait for her on the sea-shore at the foot of Pelion, and catching her unawares. She changed herself in turn into fire, water, wind, a tree, a bird, a tiger, a lion, a serpent and a cuttle-fish: and when she was a fish, Peleus seized her so tightly and held her so fast that she gave up the struggle and returned to her own shape.

Then Peleus led her unwillingly up Pelion to Chiron's cave, but soon she grew happy again and consented to become his wife: for Zeus promised her that she should have a son who would be the most famous Hero to fight at

Troy; and that, meanwhile, all the Immortals would attend her wedding.

On the slope of Pelion, by the cave of wise Chiron the good old Centaur, such a wedding-feast was prepared as had never before been seen on earth. The divine food of the Immortals, sweet Nectar and the scented Ambrosia, was brought from Olympus in golden jugs and dishes and set upon silver tables; and all the Immortals gathered to the feast. The Muses sang sweetly to the company, and the Nymphs danced for them, while Hephaestus filled the cave with cunningly wrought flame that harmed nobody, but shed a heavenly radiance over all.

The Immortals gave wondrous gifts to the honoured bridegroom: there was a matchless spear of ash-wood hewn by Chiron, polished by Athena and pointed by Hephaestus; and two deathless horses Balius and Xanthus, the gift of Poseidon.

But one Immortal was forgotten that day, and her name was Eris. She was hated by all the other dwellers on Olympus, for she was disagreeable and mean; her other names were 'Strife' and 'Discord'. But she arrived – suddenly and quite uninvited, at the banquet.

'I have come!' she cried harshly, 'and I bring with me a present!' She cast a Golden Apple on the table, and went laughing away; and on the apple were written these words: 'For the Fairest.'

As she had intended, discord broke out immediately

where all had been peace and happiness before, and there was strife as to who could claim the golden apple.

'It is mine!' cried Hera. 'To me the Queen of Olympus, it belongs by right.'

'I claim it,' said Athena, 'I, the eldest daughter of Zeus. And I will prove my right to it . . . Not for nothing am I the Immortal Lady of Wisdom!'

'You are both mistaken,' murmured Aphrodite gently. 'It is mine. No one else has any right to take it. Am not I the Immortal Lady of Beauty and of Love?'

Zeus stilled the wrangling of the three Immortals for the moment, and the wedding ended without its brightness having been marred.

Peleus and his lovely bride thanked their Immortal guests, bade farewell to kindly Chiron and came down from Pelion to dwell in their kingdom by the sea. Before long Peleus ruled Iolcus also, having deposed Acastus and his wicked queen.

The people of his own land were delighted to welcome King Peleus, the most virtuous of men, who had been honoured so greatly by the Immortals:

'Thrice and four-times blessed are you, happy Peleus, son of our old king Aeacus!' they cried. 'And blessed be you also, lovely Queen Thetis, whom Zeus has given you as wife, and honoured your marriage, and given you such wondrous gifts. Truly Zeus has set you apart among men, the Hero more honoured than any other of the heroes!'

The new King and Queen dwelt happily for a while; but as year followed on year Peleus grew troubled. For six sons were born to him and Thetis and all six of them disappeared mysteriously, nor could he learn what became of them. But Thetis grew more and more silent and sad; and her eyes turned with longing to the bright sea-waves under which she had lived before her wedding to Peleus.

Then a seventh son was born, and they called him Achilles.

'See now,' said Thetis, 'I will make our child invulnerable, so that he may be the greatest of heroes!'

And she carried him away by night to the River Styx, the Black River of the Underworld, and dipped him in the swift-flowing stream. But, fearful lest he should be drowned or washed away, she held him by the heel; and the heel and instep alone remained untouched by the magic water.

When she carried him home, Peleus breathed a sigh of relief that the child was still alive and well. But he determined to watch carefully, and that night he remained awake, though pretending to be asleep.

Presently he saw his wife slip quietly out of bed, take the baby from the cradle, and, having annointed him with Ambrosia, advance towards the fire. He watched anxiously, and saw Thetis place the child in the heart of the flames.

At that he leapt out of bed with a cry, snatched Achilles from the fire and turned in fury upon Thetis.

But she exclaimed: 'Oh fool, fool! Had you left him, he