

TROJAN HORSE AND FIFTH-COLUMN

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IN the October number of THE DALHOUSIE REVIEW the Trojan Horse story was narrated to the point at which that dangerous object was about to be received within the walls of Troy. By the simple device of telling them they were meant not to have it, but if they did get it, it would bring them enormous luck, an agent of the enemy had made the Trojans want it tremendously. From that point I resume the tale.

If there were any who were still inclined to hesitate, they were convinced by the amazing event which now took place. The priest of Apollo, Laocoon, who had rushed down from the citadel to protest against having anything to do with the wooden horse and who had hurled his spear against its side, had apparently been overborne by the assembled throng of the Trojans and by King Priam, who were under the spell of Sinon's tale. Whether Laocoon had also been won over or had simply been blocked by the majority, we are not told. At any rate he went about different business.

Aeneas says that he was chosen by lot as the priest of Neptune and was sacrificing a bull at the proper altar. From this very brief statement we may infer the following. The proper place to have an altar to Neptune, god of the sea, would be on the sea-shore, and there, no doubt, the Trojans had been accustomed to sacrifice to him. The war naturally had brought about an intermission in the rites, and hence there was no regular priest of Neptune available when finally the opportunity came to resume the sacrifices. Accordingly, Laocoon, priest of Apollo, was chosen by lot to perform the duties temporarily. Near by were his two sons who were either watching or assisting their father in his task.

Aeneas says that suddenly two immense snakes were seen swimming over the sea from the direction of Tenedos, with blood-red, crested heads protruding above the waves. They arrived on the shore and came over the fields with red and fiery eyes and hissing mouths. The Trojans fled from them in panic, all apparently except Laocoon and his sons, who, doubtless, could not leave their sacred task. Perhaps also they felt that they would be secure against the snakes, as snakes in general were thought to be under the direction and control of the gods, and they were performing a divine office. If so, they were

mistaken, for the serpents attacked, first the two boys, and when they cried for help, the father also, who came running to their aid. Soon all three were hopelessly caught in their coils and squeezed and bitten to death. In spite of Laocoon's roars for help, as loud as those of a wounded bull that has fled from the altar of sacrifice, no one came to his aid, and he and his two sons perished miserably. Then the serpents, Aeneas says, went into the citadel of Pallas Athene, and coiled about her feet and in the hollow of her shield. Perhaps a near-by shrine of Pallas is meant, but it sounds as though the temple of the citadel of Troy is referred to. If so, it is not the least remarkable feature of the recital that the two serpents would go all the way through the city and up to the citadel and into the shrine of Pallas there.

What strikes us most strongly about this story is Aeneas's calm admission that Laocoon was left to his fate without any attempt at aid on the part of the others, who seemingly were watching from a respectful distance. This can be explained only on the supposition that they thought they were witnessing a divine event, with which it was beyond their powers to interfere. Doubtless this is just what Aeneas intends to convey. For him the whole fall of Troy was brought about by the gods. He feels that the Trojans were being driven to their doom by the will of heaven, against which it was useless to struggle.

However, Vergil gives us a hint (hardly more) that this business of the snakes may not have been supernatural, but instead another piece of the plot of the Trojan horse, which had been planned with a thoroughness that was positively German. We are told that the snakes came from Tenedos; but that is precisely where the Greeks were hiding with their fleet. So we immediately suspect that the Greeks (and chiefly Ulysses) knew something about these snakes.

How they did it, if they did arrange the appearance of the snakes, we do not know, but it is the sort of thing that it is not beyond the wit of clever men to achieve. Let us suppose, for instance, that they had foreseen that one of the first things that the Trojans, if allowed to roam freely, would want to do, was to resume their old sacrifice at the altar of Neptune on the sea-shore; that they had therefore obtained a pair of large and vicious snakes and allowed them to nest there; then that they had removed them and confined them in some kind of trap which would release them after a time and would allow them to return to their home, when of course they would attack anyone who seemed to be endangering their abode. Let us suppose, also, that the scheme succeeded with amazing luck. Such runs

of chance actually do occur. The parts that are difficult to fit in are the swim from Tenedos and the final trip of the snakes to the citadel of Troy. But perhaps at such a time and amid such events we must make allowance for the natural exaggeration of the narrator. Snake stories under any circumstances tend to be exaggerated. Perhaps the snakes did not actually come through the sea nor go to the citadel, but someone said they did, and so Aeneas accepted it as gospel and puts it in his story as a matter of fact. It is not possible to say that we are meant to understand all this, but the more we study Vergil, the more we are convinced that he had a large understanding of men and what they do in varying situations, and that he was content to convey his knowledge by comparatively slight hints. Suffice it that in this, one of the greatest books of his greatest work, he does indicate something of the sort.

The Trojans at any rate were quite innocent of any suspicion of the Greeks. To them it was a sign of the will of heaven, and a clear case of the divine punishment of Laocoon for having dared to hurl his spear at the horse sacred to Pallas Athene. With one accord and with a hearty will they went at the difficult business of getting this tremendous creature up into their citadel. It would not go in the gates, so they made a breach in the wall. They put some kind of substructure on wheels under its feet. They stretched ropes from its neck, no doubt to steady it, for they could hardly pull it by these. The boys and girls fell in and headed the throng, singing their sacred songs as at a solemn religious procession. They put their hands to the ropes and made a pretence at pulling. The horse came with a rush. As it moved through the streets, it towered over the houses in a threatening manner.

The breach in the wall had apparently been made at a gate. Since the gate was too low to admit the horse, the wall above it was torn away. Here the most difficulty would be encountered in moving the horse, both on account of the loose masonry lying on the ground and because the width of the opening would be so narrow that it would entail extra care.

Aeneas says that four times on the threshold of the gate the horse stopped and each time there was an ominous sound of arms from the interior. As we learn later, there were nine armed men on the inside. They must have been very cramped, and any sudden stop would cause them to lose their balance and knock their arms about.

It is an age-old superstition that any stumble or pause on a threshold is likely to bring bad luck. A relic of this is now

seen in the custom of carrying a bride over the threshold of her new home so that she will not stumble on entering. Yet, although the horse stopped four times on the threshold of the city of Troy, the Trojans paid no attention to the ill omen, but pressed on heedlessly with their self-appointed task. Aeneas says that they were blinded with madness.

Finally they achieved their objective, and had the satisfaction of seeing the monstrous edifice towering among the buildings of their citadel. Cassandra, daughter of Priam and priestess of Apollo, who had the gift of foresight, came out of her temple to have a look at it and immediately prophesied that it would bring ruin. But they all laughed at her, for the god Apollo, as the result of a repulse that he had received, had ordained that Cassandra, although she prophesied the truth, would never be believed.

Then the Trojans spent the rest of this eventful day going about the shrines of the gods throughout the city and decking them with festal garlands. It was Troy's tragedy that it was assailed through its weakness, which the Trojans probably thought was their strength. They were a very religious people, so much so that their religion was almost a passion of superstition. Sinon had only to point out to them that the horse had a great religious significance to win them over to want it. Again, their punctiliousness in doing sacrifice to Neptune led to Laocoon's undoing. And now they were leaving nothing undone to propitiate all the gods. A few grains of common sense in their religion would have improved it enormously. But so it is when religion is divorced from morals and right-doing. One of the earlier steps along this path had been taken when they had refused to surrender Helen to the just demand of the Greeks, and had called upon their ancestral gods to support them in a war to keep her. It was the merit of Ulysses to discern the real weakness of Troy where it could be successfully attacked.

Finally the sun set and darkness fell over the wearied city. The Trojans had spent an exciting and exhausting day. They had given up all thought of immediate peril, so they scattered carelessly to their homes to celebrate and to sleep. However, they did not venture to omit posting the usual guards and sentries on the gates and walls. The moon rose and gave her light. Then the Greek fleet stood in from Tenedos led by the vessel of Agamemnon, which showed a light to give the signal for departure. Quietly they came back to the shores they knew so well and disembarked.

Meanwhile, we are told, Sinon secretly undid the bars and opened the horse. We should not have supposed that this was necessary, as we can hardly imagine the Greeks allowing themselves to be locked in a trap of that kind without any way of opening it from the inside. Still they needed Sinon to give them the signal that the coast was clear, and perhaps that is all that is meant. A rope was duly let down from the horse, and there appeared, one after another, nine Greeks, all prominent, some more so than others. Menelaus was there, the deserted husband and the brother of the commander-in-chief; so also was Ulysses, who was responsible for the scheme, Neoptolemus, son and successor of Achilles, Epeius, who was the actual builder of the horse, and Machaon, a doctor who may have been there in his professional capacity; also others, whose names are given. They were not many, ten in all with Sinon, yet they were enough to turn the tide of the war. They proceeded immediately to attack the unsuspecting guards on a gate and to let in the Greeks, who by this time were close at hand outside the walls. Presumably the night was already well advanced before Sinon thought the time ripe to release the men from the horse.

Aeneas now tells Dido for the first time about himself. So far he has not distinguished himself from the other Trojans. Presumably he was carried along with the rest to do what they did. Now, however, he says that at the time when sick men finally win sleep, he had a vision. Perhaps we can hear Vergil himself speaking here. We are reminded that he had a weak constitution, and suffered from an illness that carried him off to a nearly death. Doubtless he had often tossed many a long hour before he could woo elusive sleep. The inference here seems to be that Aeneas felt far from well, although not from physical illness. He was distraught, and had just managed to get to sleep in the wee small hours, when suddenly in a dream he saw Hector, the dead hero of Troy, stand beside him. Hector appeared now as he had last been seen, after he had been killed and dragged about the walls of Troy at the tail of Achilles's chariot, his beard grimy, his hair matted with blood and dust, and his body covered with wounds, certainly not that Hector who had returned proudly from the fight wearing the spoils of the Greeks. He looked gloomily at Aeneas, and tears swelled from his eyes and ran down his cheeks. Certainly it was an apparition to startle one, and Aeneas felt compelled to address him.

He heard himself speaking to Hector and welcoming him most cordially. Rather foolishly he added a string of questions

to which he already knew the answers, asking him what had delayed his coming, from what region he now came to the aid of his wearied countrymen, what was the cause of his mutilation and of his many wounds.

Hector, however, did not seem to hear his pointless questions. He drew a deep sigh, and burst forth in an impassioned plea to Aeneas to flee at once from Troy, since the city was in flames and the enemy held the wall. He said that Aeneas had done his duty to his king and country. If Troy could have been saved, Hector himself would have done so. It was Aeneas's task to take the household gods and seek far over the seas a new city for them. To lend weight to his words, Hector solemnly brought some of the household fire and the sacred garlands of the goddess of the hearth, and handed them to Aeneas as a sign that he must carry away the life of the place to live again in a new home.

This was a terrible dream for a man who had gone to sleep thinking that he had passed the happiest day of his whole life and that his city had just been delivered from a ten years war. It was sufficient, we might think, to startle him awake. But his sleep was too deep to be shaken off until other sounds gradually sank into his consciousness. He became aware of shouting and the clash of arms, noises that were wont to bring every man of Troy to his feet at once. Fully aroused at last, he was not long in mounting the roof of his house, which like that of most houses of the ancient world was readily accessible from the inner court-yard.

The house where he was living was his ancestral home, belonging to his old father Anchises. It lay behind the main street and was surrounded by trees. Even so, as he surveyed the city from its roof, he was able to discern something of what was taking place. He was amazed and stupefied at what he saw. He compares his plight to that of a farmer suddenly aroused in the night, who rushes forth from his dwelling to see fire sweeping through his ripened grain, or a mountain torrent in flood inundating his crop-fields and making havoc of his woods. A similar devastating tragedy lay before him. It now began to dawn on him what had happened and how the Greeks had tricked the Trojans. The fateful day that every Trojan had been dreading for the past ten years had come at last, at a most unexpected time.

From where he stood, he could see the flames leaping skyward and consuming certain houses. Most prominent of these was that of Deiphobus, son of Priam, and now the leading

prince since the deaths of Hector and Paris. He had married the widowed Helen. His house now crashed before Aeneas's eyes. The one next-door was also blazing. The whole scene was lit up by the conflagration. Even as far away as the Hellespont, the waters were reflecting the light.

Aeneas waited no longer. He acted in a way that was second nature to any warrior of the ancient world when danger threatened. He dashed down madly and seized his arms. He had no orders and no plan, but what he should do had been bred in the bone from a line of fighting ancestors and drilled into him by his training in arms. His one impulse was to join his comrades and make his way to the citadel. The fighting blood came singing into his ears, and one thought kept surging through his excited mind. Since he had to die, it was best to die fighting.

He was now armed, and setting out in a blind rage for the citadel. As he was leaving his own house, he ran into a wild figure of a man who was just rushing in. He was clutching some small statues of gods in one hand and dragging a small boy by the other. Aeneas recognized Panthus, son of Othrys, priest of Apollo, who was trying to save the most sacred of his holy charges and also his little grandson. He had evidently slipped through the lines of the Greeks and come the journey down from his temple on the citadel hill. This was a piece of luck for Aeneas, for now he would be able to find out how things were in the citadel for which he intended to make. Immediately he enquired the state of affairs there, and asked how much of the citadel the Trojans were holding.

The answer that he received was not reassuring. Panthus broke forth in a wild lamentation for his country. He cried that the last day of Troy had come, that the glory of the Trojans had departed, and that the angry Jupiter had given all the power to the Greeks. The city was on fire, and the Greeks were in possession. To his excited imagination it seemed that the wooden horse was pouring out streams of men, and that Sinon was victoriously racing around and setting buildings on fire. All the many thousands of the Grecian army were pouring through the gates and setting up barricades in the streets. Their swordsmen were advancing, and only the guards on the gates were putting up some show of resistance.

From all this, at any rate, Aeneas was able to gather that the citadel was invaded and that nothing was to be gained by hastening thither. Leaving Panthus, who was a priest and not a fighting man, he advanced up the street in the direction of

the shouting and of the fires, where the very furies seemed to have broken loose. Soon other Trojans joined him. The moon was shining brightly, and in its light he recognized Rhipheus and Epytus, a stout fighter, also Hypanis and Dymas and a young man Coroebus. Aeneas pauses to say a word about the plight of the last named. Only recently had he come to Troy and joined with his followers in a war that was not his own, through a mad passion that he had conceived for Cassandra, the priestess of Apollo. His peculiar tragedy was that she had foretold his fate to him, but he had not believed her any more than the rest had done.

Aeneas now had quite a little company who looked to him for leadership. His own training in command through ten long years of war asserted itself. He could see that they were badly shaken and needed some direction, so he paused to rally them. He was too wise to try to gloss things over or to attempt hollow optimism. These were men who had long been enured to danger, and who wanted to know the truth and the facts of the situation. So Aeneas acknowledged frankly that things were desperate. The gods in whom the Trojans had trusted so much seemed to have deserted them. The city was on fire, and armed enemy were everywhere. There was only one objective left, to die the death of fighting men and to give up any thought of their own safety.

These words had the desired effect. The Trojans were whipped to a deadly fury. As savage as wolves who go out to hunt for their starving young, they charged through the centre of the city, quite certain that they were going to their death.

Aeneas shrinks at the thought of relating all that happened to them in the gloom of that night. The streets, the houses, and the temples of the gods were filled with bodies. It was not alone the Trojans, men and women, who perished. Sometimes they found the valour to resist, and then it was the Greeks who fell. The general impression was one of grief, panic, and death in many forms.

The adventures of Aeneas's little band continued in the streets of Troy until most of them were cut down. Then Aeneas made his way to the palace of Priam in the citadel, where he found the fighting hot. The Greeks seemed to have a plan. First we saw that the house of Deiphobus was taken, and now it was Priam's palace. The Greeks were breaking in the doors with battering rams. The Trojans were defending them and also operating on the roof, throwing missiles and even prizing

the upper storeys of towers on the heads of those below. Aeneas went by a secret postern gate to the roof, where he aided the defenders and where incidentally he had an excellent view of the final assault on the palace and the death of King Priam, since from the roof he could look directly into the court-yards.

Hecuba, the queen, and the rest of the women were sitting about the altar in the inner court-yard, hoping for its protection. The old Priam armed himself to fight, but Hecuba forced him to join them. Finally, however, when the Greeks broke in headed by Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, Polites, one of Priam's sons, was killed before the latter's eyes, and when the old man in his rage attacked Neoptolemus, he too was slain by the altar. Perhaps if he had kept quiet, he might merely have been taken prisoner, but his fighting spirit led to his doom.

Aeneas now found himself alone on the roof. He was making his way down when he saw Helen lurking in the shadows. He would have killed her in his rage and grief, if he had not been prevented by the sudden appearance of his mother, the goddess Venus, who told him that it was the gods who were causing the downfall of Troy, and who bade him return to his family and secure their escape.

Apparently Aeneas's house was not on the first list of the Greeks, for when he got there he found it still unharmed. At first, his old father, Anchises, was averse from flight, saying that he was too old and that he wished to end his days there. Aeneas refused to go without him, and there was an impasse until suddenly Anchises was persuaded by a divine sign. The hair of the boy Ascanius was seen to catch fire, and yet was put out without harming him. Also thunder sounded in the sky, and a falling star showed above the court-yard.

Anchises bowed to the will of the gods. He was too weak to walk, so Aeneas carried him on his shoulders. He led his son, Ascanius, by the hand, and his wife, Creusa, followed behind. The servants were told to make their way as best they could to a rendez-vous outside the walls in an old temple of Ceres. They stuck to the back streets and all went well until they were nearly out of the gates, when suddenly they caught sight of a band of armed foemen. Aeneas started to run and managed to get clear; but when he arrived at the temple of Ceres, Creusa, his wife, was nowhere to be seen. He left the others and went back to look for her.

He found that by this time his house had been plundered and burnt. In the citadel the Greeks had begun to get things

into order. The spoil was being gathered there under guard. Already the women and children were being collected, but Creusa was not among them. Then Aeneas risked calling her in the streets, but without result.

Finally he was surprised by a vision of her, larger than in life. She told him that it was the will of the gods that she should not leave Troy, but that he should go on without her and found a new kingdom in the West. Only when she had vanished from his sight, did he reluctantly obey and return to the temple of Ceres. The refugees were now many in number and sadly convinced that Troy was no more and that they must flee. Accordingly Aeneas led them up Mount Ida for safety.

Such is the story of the Trojan horse as Vergil tells it by the mouth of Aeneas. We might observe a few points about it.

In the first place, it is not primarily a story of treachery, as many people appear to believe. There is, however, just a suggestion of this. Aeneas tells us (1.32) that Thymoetes was the first to urge that the horse be taken up into the citadel of Troy, whether through treachery or because such was the fate of Troy; and other writers tell us that Thymoetes nursed a grievance against Priam because the latter had put to death his wife and son most unfairly on account of an oracle. So Thymoetes and others may have been acting as traitors. But theirs were not the decisive voices.

The incident is in the main an exceedingly clever military stratagem, conceived and executed with a boldness and thoroughness which showed Ulysses to be the master-mind of the Greek camp. However, he had excellent assistants, particularly the spy Sinon, who truly deserves to be called the prince of spies. It succeeded because, as has already been said, it assailed the Trojans in a quarter where they least of all expected an attack, and where they themselves thought that they were especially strong, i.e. in their religion. As a matter of fact, their religion was peculiarly weak, consisting of scrupulous observance divorced from moral principles, and this was their undoing.

It was a genius of rare psychological insight who perceived and attacked the weak side of the Trojans. This characteristic of boring from within, or attacking a people on the inner front, where they think that they are sound but are really feeble, is what makes the whole episode of classic importance. It reveals brilliantly that under the assaults of a clever enemy it is not ordinary treachery that a people has to fear so much as its own internal weakness.