

this happen?' 'This very night.' 'But how could the news possibly arrive so soon?' 'By a beacon-message,' replies the queen, and acquaints them with the arrangements above described, at which the elders are more astonished than ever. The queen makes some reflexions upon the appearance which Troy must present this morning after the ravages of the night, and expresses a hope that the victors will not abuse their triumph in such a way as to court divine punishment and so endanger their safe return. She then retires, leaving the elders to their thoughts.

But the stern satisfaction, which at first they feel for the punishment of the offending Trojans, soon passes away, as they consider the suffering which the war has cost and the deep discontents which it has bred; and they have already sunk again into melancholy and foreboding when the question arises—Is the news true after all? How doubtful is the interpretation of a beacon! How sanguine the imagination of an excited woman! The whole story may well prove to be a mere delusion. It will be best to wait.

They are in this frame of mind when they see approaching a herald, from whose appearance and from other visible indications (for the sun has now risen, *v.* 513) they at once perceive that he has come from the port and brings great tidings. Something grave then has really happened, and they will know in a few moments whether it is good, or what it is.

The herald—if it were possible to suppose the reader of this book absolutely ignorant of the play, I am certain that what I am now going to write would be set down by him as a manifestly absurd mistake or invention of mine—the herald enters and announces *that Agamemnon has arrived*.

But this staggering surprise is nothing to the miracles which remain. The conversation of the herald with the elders—if it can be called a conversation, in which the herald, almost beside himself with excitement and joy, speaks nearly all the time—is terminated by the brief reappearance of the queen, who bids the herald return with a message of welcome to his master. The elders beg him before he goes to satisfy them at least as to the safety of the king's brother, Menelaus. This leads him to disclose that the Greek fleet (which, be it remembered, must have traversed the whole Aegæan in a few hours at most) *encountered on the way a tremendous storm* and was thereby so completely scattered that those on Agamemnon's ship, which escaped destruction, know not even which, if any, of their companions are saved. And with this the herald departs on his errand. The elders, under the weight of