

between Troy and Argos that sometimes the very ashes of the dead were sent home for burial¹. It is needless to look further for reasons why he should not have placed the queen in the house of Aegisthus; and the same reflexion, we may add, should make us very slow to assume, as we commonly do, that he has placed Aegisthus in the palace or even in the realm of Clytaemnestra.

Aeschylus then, or the predecessors whom he followed, in adapting the Homeric tradition to the expectations of their public, could not but drop the incident upon which in Homer the whole mechanism of the story depends. But neither surely could they drop it without compensation. The story of Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra is essentially the story of a daring venture, which against all probability and by the favour of circumstances succeeded. The epic bard, after the fashion expected of him, provides the circumstances. With the change of manners and knowledge this fashion became unsuitable; and the difficulty of saving the situation at all was increased in many ways too obvious to be specified. The problem then standing thus, how does the Aeschylean narrative deal with it? The Homeric solution being discarded, what solution does Aeschylus provide? Absolutely, if we are to accept the interpretation of the Byzantine critics, no solution or attempted solution at all. It is hard to say whether the story, as they would reconstruct it, is more amazing in what it affirms or in what it ignores. To the question, the inevitable question, of the Homeric Telemachus, 'How was the imperial Agamemnon slain, and by what cunning device was he overpowered?' the answer of Aeschylus, we are to understand, would have been this, 'Clytaemnestra entangled him in a bath-drapery made for the purpose'!

We will now rapidly follow the action, from the point where we left it to pursue this criticism. Our difficulties will not disappear or diminish as we proceed. It is true that all that part of the drama which lies between the entrance of Agamemnon and the entrance of Aegisthus, though perplexing in the highest degree if considered in connexion with what precedes or in reference to the unprovided requirements of the situation, does not offer, if taken by itself, any obstacle sufficient to mar its magnificent and astounding effect. The exit of the king, the whole part of Cassandra, the whole scene between the queen and the elders after the murder are such as it would be impertinent to praise. Upon this part of the play, something less than half of it, regarded practically as an independent piece, now reposes

¹ v. 448; see also v. 855 foll.