

2. *The Narrative.*

By Divine Providence it is appointed that sin shall tend to make more sin, and in the end that sin shall bring forth punishment. The fall of Agamemnon was the consequence of the sin of his father, seconded in its effect by further sin of his own. His father Atreus, by a horrible crime, brought upon his family an unappeasable enmity and the curse of heaven. Divine interference, punishing this crime in the son, exposed him to a temptation which he had not the virtue to resist. The sin of Agamemnon added to the enmity bequeathed by his father another enmity personal to himself, and the two joined together for his ruin.

The starting-point of the story is the Thyestean feast. Thyestes, brother of Atreus, having corrupted his wife and disputed his throne, and having been banished from Argos, endeavoured by throwing himself upon his brother's mercy to obtain restoration. Atreus pretended to welcome him and to celebrate his return by a feast, at which two of Thyestes' children were served as food to their father, and he was made to eat of it unawares. Thyestes, in the agony of the discovery, devoted the accursed house 'to perish in like manner', overturning the table with his foot as a symbol of his prayer. With his remaining child, Aegisthus, he was then sent again into banishment.

Upon Agamemnon, the son of Atreus, who with his brother Menelaus succeeded to the throne, the curse began to work its effect on the occasion of the expedition to Troy. The anger of heaven against the family delayed with contrary winds the assembled fleet<sup>1</sup>, until the seers suggested to the kings as a propitiation the sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter, Iphigenia. To this wicked act the father at last consented, and from this time was pursued by the hatred of his wife Clytaemnestra as well as that of the still-banished Aegisthus. During the expedition Argos was governed by Clytaemnestra, supported by those elders who necessarily remained at home.

Where Aegisthus was spending his exile, and at what time he first conceived that in the absence of the king and the wrath of the queen he might find the opportunity of restoration and revenge, we do not learn, nor is it material. It is implied that he did visit Argos, not of course openly, and so prevailed with the queen, that she was ready to be his accomplice, if occasion served. With many dramatists, with Euripides for example, it would have been a main point in such a

<sup>1</sup> See on *v.* 139—144.