

councillors, which is represented by the feeble and anxious remnant, who form the principal chorus of the play: and the poet has spared no pains to expose their weakness¹. As we shall see, the very crisis of the action turns upon their inevitable defect in quickness, decision, and courage. Meanwhile the generation coming up was far from compensating in loyalty for the generation going down. As more and more lives were sacrificed to the revenge of Menelaus, discontent grew deeper and wider; until at last, before the end came, the friends of the king, seeing the course of affairs, yet not daring to interfere, acknowledged to themselves that all was ripe for an outbreak against the government. Powerless already, they lived in constant fear of some dark design, and began to look with desperate eagerness for the king's return².

Meanwhile the queen and the partner of her guilt were using and aiding the natural course of events. How much the king's friends knew, or how much they suspected, of the queen's unfaithfulness, the dramatist nowhere determines, nor would anything have been gained dramatically, but much lost, by doing so. In such a case the question of moment is not so much what is known or suspected, but much rather what cannot be ignored and what is publicly acknowledged. It is plain from the whole course of the play that the correspondence and intimacy of Clytaemnestra with Aegisthus remained to the last at least a pretended secret, not an open scandal³. Upon any other supposition the behaviour of the elders, the king's devoted subjects, towards the queen in the early part of the play and towards the king at his return, is inconceivable, and indeed the whole story is palpably impossible. We are directed to suppose that by the end of the war the repute of Clytaemnestra had reached that only too familiar stage, when a wife's adultery is known to every one and proclaimed by no one, and when those know least or speak least of it who are most nearly interested but, expecting yet weakly dreading the discovery, still say to themselves with the Argive elders

πάλαι τὸ σιγᾶν φάρμακον βλάβης ἔχω.

Down to the day of the king's return Aegisthus was still nominally, as well as legally, a banished man, coming and going of course more and

¹ *vv.* 72—83 and *passim*.

² *vv.* 437—480, and *vv.* 543—555, the first a passage of great importance, in which this part of the story is effectively summed up.

³ 'Aegisthos und Klytämnestra schliessen zwar einen Bund, allein er muss, wenn

die List gelingen soll, vor der Welt geheim gehalten werden.' Enger, *Einleitung*. This is perfectly true; but if Clytaemnestra had recalled from banishment her husband's hereditary enemy, what concealment could any longer be pretended?