

more frequently as the hopes of the exiles and the malcontents rose, while the other side still maintained the politic fiction of his absence. On the fatal morning itself he was actually not in the Argolid. Where he was, and where for a long while past he had spent the intervals between his visits, the story is presently to discover. Meanwhile all that the loyal elders knew and acknowledged to themselves respecting the dangerous state of the popular mind was naturally transmitted to their master¹. Nor was it possible but that with these reports a messenger less discreet or more courageous than the rest should sometimes whisper a more dark insinuation. Both the knowledge and the suspicion thus communicated determine, and are necessary to account for, the language held by Agamemnon during his brief appearance before the palace-gate.

But the fears of the seniors would have been much more cruel, and their representations more outspoken, if they had known but half the truth. They perceived that the common indignation against the war offered a ready bond for a conspiracy²; they were not aware that the fiercer spirits were already bound in a plot, and waited only to determine by circumstances how and when they should strike. To explain the sequel we will state so much as the story presumes to be known respecting the geography of the place. The Argolid or πόλις Ἄργους is a plain opening southwards upon a deep bay of the sea, and enclosed on the other sides by mountains. The mountains to the N. E. of the plain are continued southwards in a great promontory forming the eastern side of the bay, and northwards into a mass of hills which extends as far as the Isthmus of Corinth. This whole chain was a lonely region, and had an evil reputation in legend and fact as a haunt of outlaws and robbers³. Nearest to the town of Argos, on the site of which Aeschylus, disregarding the tradition attesting the earlier strength of Tiryns and of Mycenae, has placed the fortified seat of the Atridae⁴, lay Mount Arachnaeus, the *Spider-Mountain*, whose quaint name suggested more than one fanciful application, and not improbably gave the first hint for the story which Aeschylus followed⁵. Here, amid the web of hills and spurs, upon the edge of the forbidden land, lay Aegisthus in hiding with such power as he could make and fed himself, as he tells us, with the exile's bread of expectation⁶. Here

¹ v. 821.

² v. 463.

³ See the story of Theseus and Periphetes.

⁴ See a note on this by Prof. Mahaffy,

Rambles in Greece, chap. XIII. p. 355.

⁵ See the twice repeated v. 1493, and note.

⁶ v. 1668.