

was the fittest place from which to watch the communications of Argos by sea and land with the army in the far east; and hence it was easy, when the moment should come, to signal either by day or by night to his partizans in the castle and throughout the country. Supposing all for the best, a hard enough task lay still before him.

For it would have been madness to assume that because the Argives murmured against the absent princes, and because, while appearances were kept up, the malcontents seemed a formidable number, therefore all, or a majority, were ready to stand by while the queen disowned her husband and proclaimed her lover. In such a situation the very best restorative to loyalty is that the lawful authority should be assailed by violence one minute too soon. And so foul a treachery as that of Clytaemnestra must arm against it not only all those whose disaffection had spent itself in hot words, but every honest man. Only with the advantage of surprise and stratagem could her cause be won by such and so many as would support it when once proclaimed. The key to the country was its 'sole fortress', the city or rather the castle of the Atridae<sup>1</sup>. To put it into the hands of the traitors would with some management not be difficult. But of what use was this, if the king were thereupon to return armed with all the strength of Achaia and of Hellas? Plainly the ultimate success or failure of Aegisthus must turn on the question whether Agamemnon came back, and in what circumstances he came. Meanwhile the conspirators resolved at least not to be surprised. The seas were carefully scanned (with what result hereafter appears); and that communication might be instantly opened, if necessary, between the principals, a watchman upon the palace kept outlook every night for a beacon upon the Mountain of the Spider. Here a small difficulty had to be overcome. The servants of Agamemnon's household were devoted to their master. None of them could be trusted. Yet to introduce a stranger for such a special service would have attracted suspicion at once. Accordingly Clytaemnestra chose among the servants a fellow as simple as loyal, and, to explain to him his employment, pretended to be expecting a beacon-signal announcing the king's success. His vigilance and silence were secured by threats and bribes. This arrangement was maintained during the whole last year of the king's absence. The watchman, impatient of his task and disposed to regard it as an absurd effect of feminine eagerness and imagination, was for this very reason the less disposed to talk of it, and had never connected it, as he had no apparent reason to do, with

<sup>1</sup> v. 267.