

Shakespeare. To the essential originality of the poet such questions are of course immaterial.

Indeed it would be a grave mistake to exaggerate the importance, in a literary aspect, of the whole subject which has been set forth, at great but I trust not unpardonable length, in this introduction. Undoubtedly the main purpose of the poet, or at any rate his chief value for us now, lies in things almost independent of his story, in the majesty and beauty of his language, in the bold delineation of character, and in the deep moral feeling with which the whole subject is coloured. To the temporary object of winning the prize, which we may guess that Aeschylus did not undervalue, the difference between an absurd and an effective plot would be vital: nor can it be thought indifferent to the mere reader, whether the beginning of the play has or has not any intelligible connexion with the middle and end of it. But I would not for my own sake leave the impression, that I have proportioned the topics to my estimate of their permanent significance. The story of the *Agamemnon*, once understood, might with justice to Aeschylus be stated and dismissed in a brief summary. The critical discussion of it is required only by the present state of the subject. It is however required now; and for this reason only I hope to be excused, if I seem unduly to neglect other matters of not less moment, upon which I have nothing to say which has not been excellently said before.

5. *The Text.*

The text of the *Agamemnon* depends mainly upon two MSS. The *Mediceus* (M) should be regarded as the sole authority for those parts which it contains (*vv.* 1—322 and *vv.* 1051—1158). Only one MS. of any value, the *Florentinus* (f) contains the whole play, and for nearly one half of it (*vv.* 361—1052) this is necessarily the sole authority. Fortunately it appears to represent M very closely. Cases such as *v.* 23, where the genuine $\phi\acute{\alpha}\omicron\varsigma$ of M could not be recognized in the conjectural supplement ($\nu\nu\nu\ \phi\acute{\omega}\varsigma$) of f, are rare. One other MS., the *Farnesianus* (h), contains the whole play, but it is worthless. Its very numerous variations are, in the great majority of cases, manifestly conjectures upon a text derived from M. Before therefore any weight can be assigned to its variation in a particular place, it must appear that the reading cannot be merely conjectural, that is, it must be such as the corrector could not have propounded for sense—a condition not