

defective at the lower end as for the history of religion it is at the higher. Between Stesichorus and Aeschylus we have only the allusion of Pindar already mentioned, which, except that it rests on the common Pythian foundation, disagrees with Aeschylus in almost every detail given, and moreover occurs in a poem not at all likely to have been well known or appreciated in Athens. But it would be gratuitous and unreasonable to suppose that the subject had not been treated, and treated in Athens itself, during the full century which separates the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus from that of Stesichorus. Of what was really important to Aeschylus at the moment, the conception of the story then generally prevalent in his own city, we have no extraneous information at all. And it must be remembered, that the significance of particular writings, as matter of commentary upon other writings, is not measurable by their independent value or permanent place in literature. Among the books which served Shakespeare, and even in his case are sometimes indispensable to a full comprehension of his text, were several which, except in this connexion, are now hardly ever mentioned, and probably some of which all vestige has disappeared. How many of us, reading *Mansfield Park* for the first time, have found ourselves equipped with a perfectly adequate notion of *Lovers' Vows*? The conception of the Jewish Kingdom given in the Old Testament is not only more true, but for almost every purpose far more important, than that which pervaded the Whig and Tory sermons of the seventeenth century. But without some notion of the sermons *Absalom and Achitophel* is scarcely comprehensible, while a vivid recollection of *Kings* and *Chronicles* will embarrass the reader of Dryden more than it will assist him. That which, as students of Aeschylus, we should like to possess, but do not, is a collection of the writings relevant to his themes, which had vogue in Athens during the times of Cleisthenes and Themistocles. Fortunately however his dramas, though they do not pretend to state all the data explicitly, do in the main, if carefully considered, suggest them: so that we may hope at least not to miss the principal lines.

In the version attributed to Stesichorus, which was probably as important as any in the development of details, there is one trait specially noticeable. There, as in Aeschylus, Clytaemnestra had a warning dream. She saw a snake with blood upon his head, which turned into the figure of Agamemnon. We have here expressly that identification of the snake with the dead, which, as will be shown in the commentary, is of great, though secondary, significance in the *Choephoroi*.

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