

Hector by Achilles *before death*, which Euripides also assumes, has in all probability an Epic origin¹; but Sophocles is fairly to be credited with making Ajax perform his last act in presence of the Sun, and not, as Pindar describes it, at dead of night, or as Arctinus (according to the Scholiast on Pind. Isthm. 3. 59), in the grey dawn.

It is more important to notice, what is evident on the surface of the play, that for dramatic purposes the poet sets forth the same action from various points of view. How far any of these rest upon tradition, how far upon invention, is again doubtful, though we are naturally tempted to assign what is crude to primitive legend, and to Sophocles what is noblest and most refined. Thus the incident of Ajax' slaughter of the cattle could not have been referred to the invention of Sophocles, even if we had not been told that it was included in the *Little Iliad*.

1. The interposition of Athena supplies the mainspring of the story. Her appearance in the opening scene produces a deep impression, which remains with the spectator to the end. Although dimly visible, and not blazoned to the view, as she would have been in an Aeschylean drama, her voice must have thrilled the vast audience with a no less overpowering awe.

In the course of the drama her action is differently regarded by different persons.

a. She comes at the height of that which mortals deem her wrath:—but what calmness, what sublime self-possession, breathes in every word! We see that she has done nothing but in care for the army and for Odysseus, whose wisdom, inspired by her, preserves the army. In maddening Ajax, she has saved the generals, from whom she has brushed away the impending danger, 'as a mother flicks a fly from her sleeping child,' and in the defeat which caused his rage and made her interference necessary, he suffered the inevitable consequence of his overweening pride. Her face is still against him—that the spectator sees—and her divine irony is terrible. The gods know no half-measures; they are as inexorable 'as a law of Nature.' But we are made to feel that without this act of her displeasure the host must have perished, and the severe warning to Odysseus with which she withdraws to the unseen Olympus, justifies her in the mind of the spectator of all suspicion of vindictiveness and party spirit. She herself draws from Odysseus the admission that Ajax, when in his right mind, was distinguished both for bravery and foresight.

b. Not so does Tecmessa in her bitter grief read the lesson of the situation.—'The terrible daughter of Zeus has contrived this calamity to please Odysseus.' Not so does Ajax understand it in his rage. He only knows that she has defeated his purpose:—'The resistless goddess of the petrifying glance, daughter of Zeus, foiled me with madness when in the act of stretching forth my hand against them.' In his dissembling speech he professes himself anxious to avoid her

¹ It may notwithstanding have been preferred by Sophocles, as making the analogy between sword and girdle more complete. See 1029 ff. and note.