

he must be the first to see any facts which tell against himself. And now, when he is face to face with the gods, and no prophet stands between, the instinct of reverence inborn in his noble nature finds voice in the prayer, 'Forbid, forbid, ye pure and awful gods, that I should see that day!' After varying hopes and fears, his own mind is convinced of the worst. Reason, which had been the arbiter of faith, now becomes the inexorable judge of sin, the most instant and most rigorous claimant for his absolute abasement before the gods.

Iocasta.

§ 13. Plainly, it would be a mis-reading to construe the fate of Oedipus as a dramatic nemesis of impiety; but the case of Iocasta is at first sight less clear. She, at least, is one who openly avows scorn for oracles, and urges her lord to share it. It may often be noticed—where the dramatist has known how to draw from life—that the true key-note of a dominant mood is struck by a short utterance on which no special emphasis is thrown, just as, in life itself, the sayings most truly significant of character are not always long or marked. For Iocasta, such a key-note is given in the passage where she is telling Oedipus that a response from the Delphian temple had warned Laius that he was destined to be slain by the child whom she bore to him. 'An oracle came to Laius once—*I will not say from Phoebus himself, but from his ministers*' (v. 712). Iocasta thoroughly believes in the power of the gods to effect their will (724),—to punish or to save (921). But she does not believe that any mortal—be he priest or prophet—is permitted by them to read the future. Had not the Delphian priests doomed her to sacrifice her first-born child,—and this, without saving the life of her husband, Laius? The iron which years ago had entered into the soul of the wife and mother has wrought in her a result similar to that which pride of intellect has produced in Oedipus. Like Oedipus, she still believes in the wise omnipotence of the gods; like him also, she is no longer prepared to accept any mortal interpreter of their decrees. Thus are the two foremost persons of this tragedy separated from the offices of human intercession, and directly confronted in spirit—one by his self-reliance, the other by her remembered anguish—with