

INTRODUCTION.

§ 1. ON the eastern coast of Greece, just north of Thermopylae, lies a region which in ancient times was called Malis, 'the sheep-land.' This was the country of Philoctetes,—the home to which, in the play of Sophocles, his thoughts are constantly turning¹. It will be well to form some idea of its chief features and associations.

The home
of Phi-
loctetes.

Pindus, the spine of northern Greece, terminates at the south in Typhrestus, a great pyramidal height from which two mountain-ranges branch out towards the eastern sea. One of these is Othrys, which skirts the southern border of Thessaly; the other, south of it, is Oeta, which, like Malis, takes its name from its pastures. The deep and broad depression between them is the fertile valley of the Spercheius (the 'hurrying' or 'vehement')—which rises at the foot of Typhrestus, and flows into the Malian Gulf. A few miles from the sea, the valley opens. While Othrys continues its eastward direction, Oeta recedes southward, and then, with a sudden bend to the south-east,

¹ The Homeric Catalogue includes this district in Phthia, the realm of Achilles (*Il.* 2. 682). It assigns Philoctetes to a more northerly part of Thessaly,—viz., the narrow and mountainous strip of coast, N. and E. of the Pagasaeon Gulf, which was known in historical times as Magnesia. His four towns were Methonè, Thaumacia, Meliboea and Olizon. (*Il.* 2. 716 f.) This agrees with the fact that Poeas, the father of Philoctetes, was called the son of Thaumacus, and was numbered among the Argonauts who sailed from Iolcus (*Apollod.* 1. 9. 16). In its original form, the story of Poeas and his son must have belonged, like that of Jason, to the legends of the Minyae who dwelt on the eastern coasts of Thessaly. Cp. *Anthol.* append. 61 (vol. II. p. 754 ed. Jacobs):

τόξων Ἡρακλέους ταμίην, Ποιάντιον υἷόν,
ἧδε Φιλοκτήτην γῆ Μινυᾶς κατέχει.

It was when the myth became interwoven with the apotheosis of Heracles that the home of Poeas was transferred to the country around Trachis.