

there is no great elevation in his character, at least he performs a creditable part in dissuading the Atreidae from refusing burial to the dead. Here, he is found avowing that a falsehood is not shameful, if it brings advantage (v. 109); he can be superlatively honest, he says, when there is a prize for honesty; but his first object is always to gain his end (1049 ff.). He is not content with urging Neoptolemus to tell a lie, but adds a sneer at the youth's reluctance (84 f.). Yet, as we learn from Dion, he is 'far gentler and simpler' than the Odysseus who figured in the *Philoctetes* of Euripides. The Homeric conception of the resourceful hero had suffered a grievous decline in the later period of the Attic drama; but Sophocles, it would seem, was comparatively lenient to him.

In the *Ajax*, it will be remembered, Odysseus is terrified at the prospect of meeting his insane foe, and Athena reproves his 'cowardice' (74 f.). His final exit in the *Philoctetes* is in flight from the bent bow of the hero, who remarks that he is brave only in words (1305 ff.). And, at an earlier moment in the play, he is ironically complimented by Neoptolemus on his prudence in declining to fight (1259). All these passages indicate that the conventional stage Odysseus to whom Attic audiences had become accustomed was something of a poltroon. But it is instructive to remark the delicate reserve of Sophocles in hinting a trait which was so dangerously near to the grotesque. For it is no necessary disparagement to the courage of Odysseus that he should shrink from confronting Ajax,—a raging maniac intent on killing him,—or that he should decline to be a passive target for the 'unerring' shafts of Philoctetes,—or that he should refrain from drawing his sword on his young comrade, Neoptolemus.

§ 16. A few words must be added concerning the topography of the play¹. Mount Hermaeum, which re-echoed the cries of Philoctetes, may safely be identified with the north-eastern promontory of Lemnos, now Cape Plaka. His cave was imagined by the poet as situated in the cliffs on the north-east coast, not far south of Hermaeum (cp. 1455 ff.), and at some height above

¹ A sketch-map of Lemnos is given in the Appendix, note on v. 800.