

## INTRODUCTION.

§ 1. THE story of Orestes the avenger was complete in every essential particular before it came to the earliest of those three Attic dramatists, each of whom has stamped it so strongly with the impress of his own mind.

In the *Iliad* there is no hint that the house of Pelops lay under a curse which entailed a series of crimes. The sceptre made by Hephaestus for Zeus, and brought by Hermes to Pelops, is peacefully inherited by Atreus, Thyestes and Agamemnon<sup>1</sup>. Yet the *Iliad* makes at least one contribution to the material which Aeschylus found ready to his hand. It is the figure of Agamemnon himself, with eyes and head like those of Zeus, in girth like Ares, in breast like Poseidon<sup>2</sup>; 'clad in flashing bronze, all glorious, and pre-eminent amid all<sup>3</sup>.' As Helen stands with Priam on the walls of Troy, and watches the Achaean warriors moving on the battle-field, she asks who this one may be:—'There are others even taller by a head, but never did I behold a man so comely or so majestic (*γεραρόν*); he is like unto one that is a king<sup>4</sup>.' This is the royal Agamemnon, *ὁ παντόσεμνος*<sup>5</sup>, who lives in the Aeschylean drama, and whose image reappears in later poetry. For the rest, the *Iliad* gives us just one far-off glimpse of the king's home beyond the Aegaeon, where Orestes is a child in the fortress-palace at Mycenae, with three sisters, Chrysothemis, Laodicè, and Iphianassa<sup>6</sup>; children of that Clytaemnestra to whom, in the opinion of her lord at Troy, the damsel Chryseïs was 'in no wise inferior, in beauty or in stature, in wit or in skill<sup>7</sup>.'

<sup>1</sup> *Il.* 2. 100 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *ib.* 478 f.

<sup>3</sup> *ib.* 578 f.

<sup>4</sup> *Il.* 3. 168 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Aesch. *Eum.* 637.

<sup>6</sup> *Il.* 9. 142 ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Il.* 1. 113 ff.

The legend in Homer.