

Menelaüs,—‘A dread strife will be brought to the trial’¹; words which mark the *crescendo*, and prepare the way for Agamemnon. The whole process which leads up to the climax is skilfully managed. First, there is the scene between Teucer and Menelaüs. The king of Sparta has those traits of harshness and arrogance which Athenian audiences would expect in the part², and is clearly intended to be more odious than his brother. Though he is not the Captain General,—as Teucer reminds him,—yet the insubordination of Ajax is the topic on which he chooses to dwell. Ajax, he complains, would never obey him; and then he enlarges (like Creon in the *Antigone*) on the public danger of unruliness. After his angry dialogue with Teucer, he departs, with a hint of appeal to force. Then comes that beautiful scene which affords a pause between the two parts of the controversy; the child Eurysaces is brought in by Tecmessa, and placed as a suppliant by the corpse of Ajax. In the choral ode which follows, it may be noticed that the closing prayer—to pass beneath Sunium, and ‘greet sacred Athens’—is peculiarly suggestive at this point, when Teucer has just encountered the Spartan, and is about to withstand the Argive. The second chapter of the contest then begins with the entrance of Agamemnon. He alone can finally decide whether burial shall or shall not be granted. Whereas Menelaüs had resented the want of deference in Ajax, Agamemnon takes a more vital point, and depreciates his services. This calls forth the fine vindication of Ajax by Teucer, in which the debate culminates. The short dialogue which ensues between Agamemnon and Odysseus shows the former in a comparatively favourable light, and illustrates his superiority to Menelaüs. If he is not gracious or generous, he at least indicates a wish to see his duty³, and is capable of yielding to wise counsel. Thus the whole controversy concerning

¹ V. 1163.

² It is to Menelaüs that the Andromachè of Euripides addresses her invective against Sparta (*Andr.* 445 ff.).—Welcker (*Rhein. Mus.* for 1829, pt. iii. pp. 258 ff.) finds allusions in this part of the play to contemporary relations between Athens and Sparta (Menelaüs), and between Athens and Argos (Agamemnon): but I cannot think that the poet intended this.

³ See on v. 1350, τὸν τοι τύραννον εὐσεβεῖν οὐ ῥᾶδιον. There is a somewhat similar utterance of Agamemnon in a fragment of the *Polyxena* (fr. 481 Nauck), where he is perplexed by conflicting demands upon him.