

the burial of Ajax has variety, dramatic life, and a gradually rising interest.

Modern criticism on this part of the play.

To those who further realise that the decision concerning the burial is the true climax of the drama, this part of the play will certainly not appear unworthy of its author. The disfavour which it has sometimes found with modern criticism may be ascribed partly to inadequate appreciation of its poetical art and dramatic significance, but more, perhaps, to the fact that a prolonged rhetorical debate has not the same attraction for modern readers which an ancient Athenian audience found in it. The example of Aeschylus in his *Award of the Arms*, where Ajax and Odysseus spoke in support of their respective claims, may have had some influence in leading Sophocles to compensate for the more restricted scope of his subject by providing a rhetorical interest of a similar kind. A fragment of Aeschylus<sup>1</sup> indicates that his heroes exchanged taunts of the same nature as those which pass between Teucer and the Atreidae. It may be granted that some parts of the scene between Teucer and Menelaüs are wholly repugnant to a modern taste<sup>2</sup>. The best apology for them is that Attic Tragedy was a popular entertainment, and that Athenian hearers not only tolerated but expected sharp personalities in a strenuous debate, however dignified the disputants or the occasion,—as Demosthenes is a witness. But there is no ground for any such suspicion as that of Bergk<sup>3</sup>, that the latter part of the play is by an inferior poet (such as Iophon, the usual scape-goat),—and has been tacked on to an early play of Sophocles, which stopped, or was left unfinished, at the death of Ajax. A careful and sympathetic study will rather leave a conviction on the mind that both the dramatic treatment and the diction bear the stamp of Sophocles, though some of the details are not in his happiest vein, and though the form of the whole—a prolonged controversy—makes a somewhat exacting demand on the modern reader. When the *Ajax* is seen on the stage,—and this is the proper test,—a modern spectator finds that in the latter part of

The test of performance.

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. xx, n. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Especially vv. 1142—1158.

<sup>3</sup> *Gr. Lit.* vol. III. p. 381. Cp. Bernhardt, *Gr. Lit.* pt. II. sect. ii. p. 366.