

it the interest is thoroughly sustained¹. The foreground is full of movement and animation, as Menelaüs, Agamemnon and Odysseus successively appear; while the pathetic group in the background—the child kneeling in supplication by his father's body, with Tecmessa near him—keeps before the mind the significance of the issue which is in suspense. It is then, far more easily than in a mere perusal of the text, that one can view the whole action of the play in a right perspective; and justice is instinctively rendered to the degree in which, here as elsewhere, Sophocles evinces his command over the highest art of the theatre.

§ 17. A few words may suffice to characterise those minor Tecmessa. persons of the drama whose principal function is to bring the central figure into relief. Tecmessa, the daughter of a Phrygian prince, whom the fate of war has given to Ajax, loves him with a submissive devotion, and has won from him a constant affection. He is 'her dread lord, of rugged might'; standing to her in the place of country, parents, everything; her only stay and hope on earth. She appreciates his great qualities in their obvious aspects. His laments, in his first despair, affright her, because they seem alien from his nature; but she has no insight into the workings of his mind. She is easily lulled into the belief that he has abandoned the purpose of self-destruction, since the only distinct idea which she had connected with it was that of the misery which it would bring upon her. When her fears are suddenly re-awakened, she bitterly cries that she has been 'deceived.' To her, the one question had been whether the love that he owed her would prevail on him to live; she had no clear perception of any other motives, that might urge him to die; still less could she measure their force. After his death, her simple loyalty refuses to think of him as crushed by his foes. It is no triumph for them, but a blank loss: the victory is rather his: 'All that he yearned to win hath he made his own,—the

¹ The *Ajax* was performed at Cambridge, by members of the University, in 1882. No result of that experiment was more striking than the decisive proof which it afforded that the *Ajax*, as a whole, is a thoroughly effective play for the stage, and that its power of holding an audience is not diminished by the death of the hero at a comparatively early moment in the action.