

home. The queen, however, enters and cuts short their colloquy, and bids the herald to convey a message of welcome to Agamemnon.

The stage is left empty and the chorus sing a choral ode, at the close of which the king enters, and in a stately way thanks the gods of Argos for the success of the expedition, and then referring to the intimation of the chorus that there is some discontent among the citizens, muses upon the jealousy and insincerity of men, and states that with any disaffection in the state he will promptly deal. There is no ecstasy, no word of joy, no spontaneous outburst of feeling, everything measured, self-contained, frigid.

At this point Clytemnestra enters and to our surprise there is no word of joyful welcome, but with an action that indicates a lamentable perversion of feeling, she turns to the chorus, and in a fulsome and offensive way dilates upon the mental anguish which she endured during her lord's absence. After a long peroration, still using this oblique mode of speech, she assumes the strain of adulation:

"But now these weary days  
Are o'er, and I shout, exempt from care:  
Here stands the watch dog of the fold, the mainstay  
That saves the vessel; yea, the lofty pillar  
That holds the roof from the ground; an only son  
Returning to his father, or, to mariners  
Firm land appearing beyond hope, fair day  
Seen after tempest: to the thirsty traveller  
A spring of running water 'mid the sand."

Beautiful words, but in her case mere rhetoric, false at the core. And when at last she turns to greet him, it is only with an invitation to participate in an action which will pluck on him the envy of the gods, to enter the palace on a floor strewn with purple tapestries.

Agamemnon is not deceived by the queen's specious welcome, and with cutting sarcasm says:

"Daughter of Leda, guardian of my hall,  
Thy welcome, like mine absence, hath been long."

But the proffered courtesy of the woven carpets he deprecates, as it would be presumptuous on the part of a man to celebrate his own triumph in such a manner in the midway of his career.

"When one  
Shall end a happy life in peace and joy,  
Then celebrate his glory."

After a short parley the king yields to her wishes and accepts the perilous honour. With a burst of triumph, yet controlled, she shows with terrible intensity her ravenous and cruel hatred, suggested in the words:

"There is a sea that will quench it!"

And then with reiteration of her former strain of hypocritical flattery, she ushers him into the palace. The chorus, left alone with Cassandra, a daughter of Priam and Agamemnon's captive, are filled with apprehension over so ominous a reception. Shape-

less fears press upon them with strange weight. The boding thought comes to them that men may recover from calamities.

"But once let blood of man drop to the ground  
Before his time, and darken all the sod,  
What spell to call it upward shall be found?  
What tact so wise? Though he were all but God  
Who learned the secret of restoring health  
To mortals sunk in death.  
Zeus put an end to that forevermore."

The tragedy deepens, the pathos, terror and pity of the following scene are unsurpassed. The prophecies which Cassandra utters foretelling with startling cries the undoing of her master and her own sad fate, would pierce the heart of those who are touched with the "still, sad music of humanity," would thrill the most unconcerned. The chorus are deeply impressed with the scene and as she passes out sadly meditate. With a burst of triumph she barely conceals the intensity of her rancor and hatred, and then with reiteration of her former strain of hypocritical flattery, ushers him into the palace.

The chorus are left on the stage with Cassandra, a captive Trojan maid, who foretells with startling cries the fate that awaits her master and in which she will also be involved.

The chorus are deeply wrought, feeling that this is more piteous than the ruin of pride. At this moment the death cry of Agamemnon is heard and causes consternation among the elders. Clytemnestra immediately appears and shamelessly avouches the deed, casts off all feigning, and gloats with a truly demoniac hatred over the death of her husband. The chorus reproach her and threaten her with the curse of the city. In the violent controversy which follows, Clytemnestra reveals the thoughts of her heart regarding herself as the minister of the gods in avenging on her husband the unnatural sacrifice of her daughter.

In the midst of this scene, Aegisthus, Clytemnestra's paramour, appears and the altercation begins afresh, with even an approach to violence. Clytemnestra, however, whose anger and hatred are appeased, allays the strife, expressing the hope that the blow which she has struck may be "the be-all and the end-all here."

Let us now make some remarks on the leading characters.

The play bears Agamemnon's name because he is the leading actor in the course of events with which the drama deals, just as in the play of Julius Cæsar the dictator is not the main personage, but has the shaping hand in the events upon which the action of the play depends.

Clytemnestra is a more fully drawn character, a well defined and striking figure. Her nature appears throughout side by side with that of her husband;