PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

This is an attempt to reinterpret the plays of Æschylus, on which I have been working for many years, in the light of the general evolution of Greek society and in particular the transition from tribal society to the state. The range it covers is so wide that I should have been glad to spend more time on it, but in the immediate future research is likely to be difficult, and therefore I have decided to publish it without further delay.

The books to which I owe most are, in my special field, the works of Jane Harrison and Ridgeway, and the earlier works of Cornford, and, more generally, Morgan’s Ancient Society, Engels’ Origin of the Family, and Caudwell’s Illusion and Reality. Other obligations are acknowledged in the notes and references.

I must also mention a special debt to my friends the peasant-fishermen of the Blasket Island in West Kerry, who taught me, among many other things that could not have been learnt from books, what it is like to live in a pre-capitalist society. It is true that nominally they fall within the orbit of the capitalist system, because they are liable for rent, but most of them refuse to pay it; and in general their traditions, especially their poetry, date from a time when social relations were profoundly different from those in which I have been brought up.

These, then, are the principal sources to which I am indebted for what is new in the present work—apart from the political events of the last ten years, which have forced me, in common with many others, to reorientate my whole attitude to life.

I wish to thank Mrs. H. F. Stewart for the drawings, and the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press for permission to reproduce, in Chapters XV and XVII, material from my editions of the Oresteia and Prometheus Bound.

George Thomson.

September, 1911
PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Looking back on this piece of work after five years, I regard it as a preliminary sketch of an extensive field which needs to be systematically re-explored. There are many details I would like to modify, but in general both the method and the results have stood the test of further research, which I hope to publish in due course. Meanwhile, the book is still in demand, and accordingly it is now reissued with only a few minor corrections and additions.

GEORGE THOMSON.

September, 1916.