

SHAKSPERE TALKS WITH UNCRITICAL PEOPLE.

XXI.—JULIUS CÆSAR.

(Supposed date 1601; published 1623.)

‘How should I best study a Shakspeare play?’ This question is often asked when people not very familiar with Shakspeare are anxious, for some reason or other, to gain a certain degree of positive knowledge either of a single play or of the whole collection. They ask it sometimes with such profound seriousness, that perhaps they would be shocked at being asked to consider first, ‘How does one best enjoy a Shakspeare play?’ Yet the answer to the one question has really more to do with the answer to the other than might at first be supposed, for you will never truly study your play if you do not enjoy it. There are many ways of enjoying a Shakspeare play. The ideal one, hardly to be attained under present conditions, would be to see it perfectly well acted, every part getting absolute justice from a thoroughly competent artist, with adequate scenic arrangements applied with good taste and judgment. Even an approach to this is very delightful, but it is pleasant too on a hot day to lie alone under a tree and people the breezy solitude with glorious figures from the pages under your hand. You can enjoy a play when a party of intelligent people read it together, and enjoy one perhaps even more when two or three enthusiasts gather round the fire, and talk over the dear people whose life seems as vivid as our own, and whose feelings, thoughts, words and deeds are as real to us as those of our everyday friends. Whatever method succeeds best in thus making us feel the characters real and alive, that we shall find to be the best way of enjoying the play, and consequently of studying it. For unless you get to know the people themselves, all grinding at dates, succession in production, sources, in a word criticism generally, is simply staring at the picture frame and forgetting the picture. Doubtless the frame is useful and valuable; but we must remember the picture first. I have noticed that when people who know their Shakspeare but slightly, undertake, as the phrase goes, ‘to get up’ a particular play, they are given to reversing the process, and burdening themselves with a quantity of theories, criticism and information about their play, and letting the real substance of it go unheeded. Now in this particular play of *Julius Cæsar* there are plenty of interesting points to be studied, and things which may be learnt about it; but if I had the pleasure of advising

any 'uncritical person' intending to study it, I should say, 'Don't read a word of notes, criticism, explanations of any sort or kind (not even this little paper) till you have realised Brutus and Portia and Antony and the rest as human beings, not as representing so many lines of verses, and till you have got some notions of your own as to the scenes in which they reveal themselves. Then turn as much as you please to getting the odd words and allusions explained, and to any question of criticism which makes the whole clearer. Then you can profitably ask questions as to the date of the play, the materials of which it is composed, and how these are used, whether it fails of artistic perfection either in arrangement or diction, and whether it throws any light on Shakspeare's own character and sentiments.' If the 'uncritical one' objects that all this takes a long time, it can only be answered that to 'cram' Shakspeare is not a process which can be recommended to any one, and does as much injustice to the poet as to yourself.

Some of the above questions may now be answered as far as we can, for the benefit of those who are ready for them. Some others we must bear in mind as we go along, and see whether we can pick up answers for them. Taking first the question of dates, though, as far as is known, *Julius Cæsar* was not published till 1623, the wise in such things seem fairly agreed that it must have been written and acted about 1601. As to the subject of materials, and the source of the story, we are able to speak much more positively than usual, and the authority to be referred to is a much more interesting one than the little Italian novels which Shakspeare transformed into his romance plays. Here Plutarch's "Lives of the noble Grecians and Romans" supplies the groundwork, coming to Shakspeare through a double translation, first turned into French by Jacques Amyot, Bishop of Auxerre, and then into English by Sir Thomas North. What a difference it must have made to Shakspeare, after picking out perhaps the one good point in a stupid little story, to turn to one of the great scenes in the world's history related in the vividly picturesque English of the sixteenth century! We can judge how keenly he felt the advantage by the full and free use which he made of his better materials. Critics have been so anxious sufficiently to acknowledge Shakspeare's obligations to Plutarch in this respect, that they have somewhat forgotten to consider what he added of his own, and they sometimes speak as if *Julius Cæsar* were simply Plutarch and North beautifully versified. Whereas it is only fair to remember that for such splendid scenes and passages as Brutus' soliloquy in the second act; and succeeding address to the conspirators, Antony's oration, the quarrel of Brutus and Cassius, and many others, Shakspeare is magnificently expanding the barest of hints in Plutarch, or drawing entirely on his own imagination, though he takes most of his incidents from his authority, and often reproduces the very language of the translation. The serene calm with which the Elizabethan dramatists use

other people's words when they happen to suit them, is one of their noticeable features. It is very easy to judge for oneself as to Shakspeare's debts to Plutarch, as a collection of the passages which bear on this play can be readily procured.

Leaving now the other questions to be solved as we pass along, let us turn to the play and look at the Rome of Julius Cæsar through Shakspeare's mind. We may boldly admit that in many external points he probably conceived it all wrong, that the Romans of his brain wore most unclassic clothes, and used English weapons and customs, but what then? They were truly human beings, and therefore nearer to the real Romans of 44 B.C. than any of the wax dolls on wires which other dramatists could drape in the correctest of togas. In one respect Shakspeare's work is simplified when he chooses a well-known historical subject, for he can go straight into the thick of it, assuming that the audience will know enough of the story to understand who is who, and the relations between the characters without needing explanations. So at once he plunges us into the bustling, noisy streets of Rome, decked out for Cæsar's triumph, which is here conveniently transferred in date to the feast of Lupercalia, in the month of February. Instantly we find ourselves confronted with the great subject which exercises all the minds of Rome, the power of Julius Cæsar. Here we have the two parties of his open friends and his half-concealed foes, the one represented by the quaint cobbler and his friends, so easily swayed in any direction, and more anxious for a holiday or a profitable job of work than about affairs of state. The other side is represented by the clever, unscrupulous, glib-tongued tribunes, veiling their spiteful jealousy of Cæsar under all sorts of beautiful sentiments about the defeat of 'great Pompey's blood.' This scene naturally suggests the subject of Shakspeare's own feelings towards what is rather vaguely called 'the democracy,' and it is very interesting to compare the scenes in which the Roman populace figure with the Jack Cade scene in the second part of *Henry VI*. The Cobbler of Rome with his puns and twists is own brother to Cade's butcher and weaver, half duped, half knowing, and we should judge that their representatives are still extant both in Rome and London. Shakspeare never gets savage with *them*, however foolish they may be; their fickleness and shortsighted ways make him laugh in kindly fashion; he is as far from hating as from flattering them, but he has different measure for their misleaders. Them he does intensely dislike and scorn, and shows it by painting the demagogue in his true colours, false, cunning and treacherous. We see no more of the tribunes after this first scene, but their natures are sufficiently indicated by their change of tone after the citizens leave them. All their indignation and zeal turns into a vicious attempt to spoil Cæsar's triumph, and destroy the manifestations of his popularity.

Perhaps this first scene should be regarded as something of an

introduction. At all events the homely figures of the workpeople are in strong contrast with the stately procession which sweeps on to the stage as the second scene opens, combining the features of a public festivity and pageant with something of a religious ceremony, for the wild race for which Antony comes prepared has a sort of sacred character. Nearly all the persons of any importance in the play pass before us at this point, and though most of them remain but a brief space, we get a glimpse of them ere the action goes further. First among those who thus cross the stage, both in dignity and claim to our attention, comes the nominal hero of the story, the great Julius himself. It has often been remarked that we see so little, comparatively speaking, of Julius Cæsar, that the play might have been named after Brutus with greater propriety. But on the other hand, if Brutus occupies the larger share of our attention, it is on Julius Cæsar that the whole play turns. His power, his supposed ambition, the conspiracy against him, his murder and the vengeance taken for it, make up the whole story, and to the very last his influence is felt. Shakspeare's imagination seems to have been strongly affected by Cæsar's character and history, as we may see by references to him in other plays, but he certainly gives a curious picture of him here. His Julius Cæsar seems like a man who has somehow got outside of the ordinary feelings of humanity, and really and honestly believes that he is absolutely different from other men, and this in spite of failing health and growing infirmity, neither of which he tries to disguise. In addition to the historical ailments which oppressed Cæsar towards the end of his life, Shakspeare makes him partly deaf into the bargain. Cæsar's strange way of thinking of himself is made noticeable by his habit of continually speaking of himself in the third person, as if unwilling even to talk like other people. Not that the other characters, Brutus especially, do not sometimes fall into this trick, but with them it is a mark of some excitement and a wish to be emphatic, while with Cæsar it is customary. He has depended so long and successfully on his own unconquerable will and determination, that he has become his own idol. In weaker hands this conception would have been intolerable, and we suspect that even Shakspeare must have modified it if he had shown us more of Cæsar. As it is, his object seems to be less that of making a full portrait of his hero, than to impress us with the power, strength and confidence which are presently to be attacked, and in this he fully succeeds. All Cæsar's strange phrases, his medley of courage and superstition, his capacity for receiving flattery and the facility with which he can be deceived, do not prevent us from seeing that he is a really great man, doing and thinking on a large scale, what the old writers meant by magnificent. This is the last characteristic which either friends or enemies would assign to Antony at this stage of his career. Both Cæsar and Brutus speak of him much as Henry IV. spoke of Prince Hal, as a creature wholly given up to

amusing himself in fooleries of all sorts. Nor could either Prince Hal or Antony deny that there is much foundation for this notion, but in both cases there is power and capacity hidden under the wild mask, which nobody seems to divine, excepting possibly such an unusually clear-sighted man as Cassius. He guesses that Antony may be something more than a mere reveller, but Brutus only thinks of him as dependent on Cæsar; and Cæsar, though regarding him with a certain affection, evidently thinks him too feather-headed to be at all a dangerous personage. All this adds greatly to the dramatic effect when Antony's latent force at last breaks out.

The two noble ladies of the story, Calpurnia and Portia, are only part of the pageant of this scene. Doubtless their graceful figures add to the picturesque effect of the whole, moving among the stately forms of the men, but we see no more of them at this point. Another form we notice, restlessly busying himself with anything that turns up, while affecting indifference to it all the time. Casca is a fussy mortal, sharply noticing all that goes on, but pretending that it is beneath him. After being prominent in the first half of the play, he vanishes suddenly and completely without a hint being given as to his fate. He affects a curious bluntness, very effective in its way, but Cassius is clearly right in calling it only affectation, as it drops off completely when Casca is frightened in the storm, or excited over the conspiracy.

As the splendid procession again sets itself in motion, a wild cry from the crowd strikes Cæsar's ear, the famous 'Beware the Ides of March,' the first of the various warnings which might save Cæsar if he would heed them. Thus from the outset of the play the struggle over his fate has begun, though he knows nothing of it, and in his unconsciousness is active in defeating those who try to rescue him from his impending doom. The voice of warning is to him as that of a dreamer, and he passes forth. But the stage is not left empty, for the two most important people in the story remain behind. We cannot complain that we do not know Brutus, for few of Shakspeare's characters are more fully displayed than he, though, of course, everybody will not read him the same way. He is by nature a man for thought rather than action. Not that he is any way incapable of action, but he goes into it slowly and deliberately, after much consideration. He inclines to view everything in the abstract; even the human beings about him represent abstract principles to him. Cæsar, for instance, represents embodied power, and Brutus muses on this power till it appears something distinct from the Cæsar of flesh and blood whom Brutus admires, and who trusts him in return. That the two are really inseparable seems a sort of lamentable accident. From this disposition come both Brutus' strength and his weakness. He is strong because he can reason out and dispassionately consider the things which disturb him without any of the interested and personal motives which sway his companions. He

thinks of Rome as a whole, not as a bundle of conflicting interests, and from anything of low ambition and jealousy he is utterly free. But then he is weak, because his lofty, impersonal way of looking at things prevents his really understanding his fellow-creatures. He is a theorist, and while imagining he understands the men round him, he not only fails to influence them as he wishes, but is liable to be played on by his inferiors, who have the practical wisdom which he wants. Singularly pure and high-minded himself, he becomes an instrument in the hands of those who have neither his noble intellect nor his unsullied motives. Something clear-cut and cold there is about Brutus, yet much that is lovable too. Perhaps his full confidence in his friends develops their fidelity, and enables him to boast in his last hour that they had all been true to him. Cassius is of a very different mould—restless, vivid, passionate yet cunning, keen as a steel blade, seeing everything that Brutus misses, a student of books but knowing men even better. Cassius is essentially a practical man, much less disturbed by abstract principles than by the present Cæsar, whose greatness dwarfs him to insignificance. But he is far from a mere commonplace plotter, masking his private ambition and revenge under cover of love of his country. His sense of his own wrongs mingles with his sense of the wrongs of Rome, but both are real. Cassius is a far better revolutionary leader than Brutus, not only as understanding more of human nature, but because he is clever and unscrupulous enough to make use of arts which would be quite beneath Brutus. We shall see that whenever Brutus overbears Cassius' wishes on a practical matter, the result is disastrous to their cause; yet there can be no doubt which has the finer mind of the two, and Cassius really loves and looks up to his friend, even while half despising the facility with which he is influenced. In this their first conversation Shakspeare has slightly altered their relations as represented in Plutarch, where we find they had been enemies, and that Cassius began his intrigues for destroying Cæsar by getting reconciled to Brutus. This being dramatically awkward, Shakspeare ignores it, and makes them friends from the outset. The great interest of this talk is in the gradual approach of Cassius to the point which he has proposed to himself, and the skill with which he feels his way before committing himself to anything dangerous, for he is very cautious, though as brave as need be. Slowly, and rather by hint and suggestion than by anything direct, he advances to his object, when the sudden burst of cheers from the distant crowd and Brutus' interpretation of it facilitates his way. Catching at Brutus' admission that he would not willingly see Cæsar king, he advances more boldly to disparage Cæsar's claims to supremacy, then to infer the weakness and dishonour of thus yielding to one no better than themselves. He grows more familiar as Brutus shows some emotion, which Cassius dexterously increases by asserting Brutus' real equality with the mighty Cæsar. Obviously Brutus has a pretty good idea

what Cassius is aiming at, and is more stirred than he quite likes by his friend's impassioned words, for he has an instinctive objection to being hurried into action. The measured formality of his reply suggests the determined self-control of a man moved beyond his wont, and resolute not to allow himself to be carried away. The return of Cæsar and his train stops the conversation, and in a few lines Brutus paints for us the disturbed aspect of that dignified company. Notwithstanding all that has passed to annoy him, Cæsar is sufficiently cool to give Antony his masterly sketch of Cassius, and of the type of man to which he belongs. The unerring judgment of the great conqueror fixes on the really dangerous man, divines his secret envy, and expresses in a passage which has grown into a proverb, like so many in this play, the power for harm which lies latent in him. As Cæsar disappears, Casca lingers to give his two friends his account of the late scene in his own crabbed but graphic fashion. He is rather absurd himself with his pretences of not having noticed what he describes so minutely, and there is a modern ring about his sourly humorous talk; but how lifelike it all is! His queer, grumbling discontent with Cæsar is as unlike Brutus' abstract disapproval or Cassius' passionate jealousy, but there will be a place for him in the future conspiracy. It is interesting to notice the change in Cassius when he is left alone to meditate on the effect of his first attempt on Brutus. The passion disappears as if by magic, and he remains the cool schemer, confident in his own power of influencing the noble nature on which he works, even while reflecting that the result would be different if he and Brutus were to change places. In spite of Cassius' distinct admiration for Brutus, he has no hesitation in deceiving him, and making him think himself the object of the petitions of Rome. We should notice that it is Shakspeare, not Plutarch, who makes Cassius a deceiver in this matter of the anonymous papers.

By rights nearly a month should be supposed to intervene between this scene and the next, which begins in the night of the 13th of March; but we should think Shakspeare hardly intended such a long break. The storm and horror with which the third scene opens add to the sense of the approach of a great catastrophe which weighs on us as we go on. It sobers Casca out of his affectation; he is honestly alarmed, and not afraid to own to it in his interview with Cicero. It is curious that Cicero is about the only famous historical personage whom Shakspeare brings on to his stage without giving us a tolerably clear notion of his personality. Except for the one touch, 'Ay, he spoke Greek,' Cicero might as well not be in the play at all. This is the more remarkable, as Shakspeare carefully points out that he is a very important person in the eyes of all Rome; but nothing can be more commonplace than the few words he utters on this occasion. The wild storm which cowers other people is, characteristically, entirely congenial to Cassius. His mind is never more active and busy than

when the lightning is flashing round him, and he is ready even to take advantage of the storm to collect his friends together without fear of notice in the general terror and confusion. In another sense he also makes use of the storm as a means of appealing to Casca, and inciting him against Cæsar. With him he uses more direct means than with Brutus. He argues less, but aims at stirring Casca's passion by dwelling on Cæsar's power, avoiding, however, directly naming him till Casca distinctly shows his own feeling in the matter. Then Cassius gives vent to his own fierce determination in the rolling lines addressed to the gods. Whenever he has a purpose in view, we have always an uncomfortable feeling that his bursts of passion have an intention in them; not that they are exactly feigned, but managed so as to have the right effect on his listeners. For instance, he is in no real danger of being betrayed by Casca, but the suggestion serves its purpose, and as Casca repudiates it with real dignity, he is fixed as Cassius would have him. The plot now shapes itself; all depends on Brutus, and Cassius leaves nothing undone to gain his support. The same night of storm and portent is still going on as the second act opens, and we pass from the streets of Rome to the comparative silence of Brutus' orchard; but the terrors of the storm pass almost unheeded over him. His abstracted mind is so intensely occupied that he only notes the flashing meteors as giving him light enough to read one of Cassius' mysterious appeals. A long fit of musing seems to precede his call to Lucius. This young follower of Brutus rather resembles another famous page—but in modern literature—in that he is mostly asleep when he is wanted; still we would not part with Lucius, for he helps to show the gentler side of Brutus' nature. The kindness of his comment on the boy's sound sleep contrasts well with the usual peremptory dealings between master and servant in the Elizabethan drama. It is curious, too, when considered beside the main current of Brutus' thought. This kind-hearted man, carefully sending the lad back to finish his night's sleep, is yet deliberately planning murder, and arguing out the whole question of killing Cæsar. He faces the obvious fact that there is no stopping short of his death, and proceeds to consider why he should die. No touch of personal feeling sways Brutus' judgment; the matter is only how would the state be affected were Cæsar crowned. With rare honesty Brutus admits that Cæsar has not yet let his desires overpower his reason, he cannot be said to deserve death yet; but then the theorist assumes what would happen were his power increased, and decides that it must be prevented by taking Cæsar's life. It does not strike Brutus that it is unjust to kill a man for what he has not yet done, because the idea of harm to the state outweighs all other considerations. Never was a crime resolved on from purer motives, or with a more curious absence of passion, though Brutus is so earnest and intent, that we feel indignant that he should be partly swayed in this momentous decision by one of Cassius' false appeals. The process

of making his mind up is hard almost to agony to Brutus ; but once he is resolved he is calm again, composed enough to note the essentially evil nature of conspiracy, not daring to show its face even by night. Here we may observe what a fixed idea Shakspeare had about 'smiling villainy,' as if deeper wickedness might be covered by 'smiles and affability,' than by the most elaborate of disguises. Lucius' description of the appearance of Cassius and his friends suggests rather the cloaked conspirators of a melodrama, conventional ruffians rather than Romans ; but that is no great matter. Apparently they have settled all the details of the plot before coming to Brutus, as little is arranged here, and they all seem to know exactly the plans proposed. Cassius no doubt explains these to Brutus in their brief private talk, after which the latter at once assumes the position of leader in the enterprise, no longer affecting any doubt as to the reason of their coming to him. Then follows the magnificent speech on refusing to let them swear to their resolution (expanded from the briefest hint in Plutarch), so stirring in its high appeal to faith and honour, so characteristic of Brutus himself if not of his associates. Other of the Elizabethan dramatists dwell with enthusiasm on the sacredness of the simple word, but none express their meaning in such superb fashion. We cannot tell why Shakspeare threw in that 'Swear priests,' as it is very unlike his usual tone, unless he thought that the philosophic Brutus would probably have a contempt for the race. So far Cassius has succeeded very well in utilising Brutus' great influence, but he finds it sometimes an unmanageable weapon. Twice in this conference it crosses Cassius' wishes ; it prevents their drawing Cicero into their plot, and it saves Antony from being slain with Cæsar. This reveals Brutus' fatal want of insight, for, of course, Cassius was right, as a matter of prudence, in desiring Antony's death ; but Brutus bears him down with his lofty style of argument, mingled with a strange grief over the painful necessity of killing anyone, especially Cæsar. It is pretty clear that the others share none of this regret ; they are only eager for the work to begin, and disposed to meet again before long. Then, with her noble face pale in the dawning light, and her long robes trailing round her, comes in that gracious presence who throws such a fair light over this tragical story. Portia, though not to be called one of Shakspeare's *creations*, yet stands out with the vivid clearness of his own women, in the small space which is all that can be spared to her, a beautiful wifely ideal. Devoted to her husband, watching him closely, but never worrying him, making all allowance for the natural infirmities of men in general, she still has no notion of being excluded from his confidence. She feels a well-grounded sense that she merits his trust, and claims it as the right of her position. Her grave and sober pleading is the very opposite of the kitten-like coaxing and scratching of sweet Kate Percy on a similar occasion, just as Brutus is the very antipodes of Hotspur. With womanly readiness she puts by his excuses, and with

a beautiful mixture of dignity and tenderness presses her point, that to be thus excluded from confidence is not to be treated as Brutus' real wife at all, which is a shocking idea to him. Even while admitting the weakness of her woman's nature, she claims some exemption from it, on account of her father and her husband, finally and most convincingly, by her own resolution proved by her self-inflicted wound. No wonder this overpowers Brutus, and he resolves to confide fully in her, and obviously does so after his interview with Ligarius is over. But there is a little confusion here, for Brutus speaks to Ligarius as if they were starting there and then for Cæsar's house, where however they do not arrive for nearly five hours. Ligarius gives us another point of contrast with the Percy group in *Henry IV.*; unlike Northumberland, he has *not* 'leisure to be sick, in such a bustling time.'

We reach Cæsar's house (Act ii., sc. 2) before the conspirators, and find no quiet abode, for the horrors of the night have penetrated, disturbing even the realms of sleep. Cæsar does not let them pass unnoticed like Brutus, but they do not make a very profound impression on him. Beside his natural courage and confidence in his own power of dealing with danger, his nerves are steadied by a strong feeling of fatalism, which, cold and hard as it is, yet lifts him above the region of anxiety and personal fear. Moreover the position which he has assumed, of being superior to human weakness, prevents his owing to any such feelings if he does experience them. But Calpurnia is under no such compulsion. We see very little of this famous lady, and then she is so absorbed in one feeling that the rest of her character is unrevealed; but the abruptness of her entering speech shows that she is no feeble creature only echoing Cæsar's will. All her fear is purely for her husband; all these portents must refer to him alone. He may hold the enlightened view that all the world was as much concerned in them as he; Calpurnia clings to the popular faith that 'the heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.' We do not blame Cæsar for finally yielding to her entreaties, though possibly a touch of superstitious feeling strengthens his willingness to soothe her fears. Now is renewed the struggle over Cæsar's fate, and hence comes the importance of each slight incident which follows. The auguries of the priests and Calpurnia's prayers seem to have erected a temporary barrier which will protect Cæsar for this day, but then comes Decius with his flattering persuasions and knocks it all down. Cæsar's sudden revolt from sending a false excuse to the Senate gives Decius a chance of expounding Calpurnia's dream his own way, and of skilfully touching Cæsar's weak points, while veiling a deadly purpose under hypocritical professions of attachment. Decius has not overrated his power of influencing Cæsar, who is easily recalled to his former resolve, and the appearance of the other conspirators fixes the matter. Being slightly ashamed of his indecision, Cæsar becomes for the moment

quite like other people; he is the friendly, courteous host, surrounded as he thinks by loyal friends. The difference between the outside look of things and their reality strikes Brutus with a sudden pang, but with no relenting. His strangely constituted mind, which recoils from an unnecessary oath, can yet bear this scene of deadly treachery.

Meantime, two independent efforts are being made to warn Cæsar. The rhetorician Artemidorus has somehow got a knowledge of the whole conspiracy, if he can but convey it to Cæsar (Act ii. sc. 3), and the soothsayer meditates one last appeal (Act. ii. sc. 4). Then we are shown the situation from Portia's point of view. The knowledge of Brutus' terrible secret has proved a heavier burden than she perhaps expected, and strong as is her spirit, her woman's nerves are sorely taxed. Her excited and irritable state shows in her puzzling orders to Lucius, which perplex that youth not a little. Between intense anxiety, physical weakness, and terror of betraying herself, poor Portia has a hard time of it. Still, true to her devotion to Brutus, she gasps out with failing lips a splendidly false message, 'Say I am merry!' ere she disappears. One would like to know how Shakspeare conceived the scenery of the opening of the third act, and why he persisted in representing Cæsar's death as taking place in the Capitol in defiance of Plutarch? However, the scene must represent the meeting-place of the Senate, and some kind of open space or street before it, this space being crowded with people. As the trumpets sound, the crowd parts, and Cæsar comes in sight, closely guarded by his vigilant foes, while his friends are either unsuspecting like Antony, or powerless like Artemidorus. The soothsayer's vague warning seems to pass unheeded, Decius is again at hand to keep Cæsar from throwing a hasty glance at Artemidorus' paper, and the earnest entreaty of the latter unfortunately touches a wrong string in Cæsar's pride. The conspirators combine to hustle the well-meaning rhetorician on one side, and Cæsar passes on to his fate. Again all seems to hang on a thread when Popilius glides by with his ambiguous words and advances to Cæsar, leaving the conspirators terror-stricken, yet not daring to stop him. For the moment Cassius quite loses his head, and only Brutus is cool enough to watch the effect of Popilius' words on Cæsar, and to see that they are not important. Meantime, Antony is quietly wiled away, and we may suppose that all this breathless byplay goes on during the bustle attendant on Cæsar's entrance into the Senate, and that now all is prepared for business. Now the conspirators draw closely round their victim, while Metellus Cimber begins his fawning appeal. Cæsar evidently anticipates his petition, and is thoroughly determined not to grant it. He is startled when Brutus joins in it, but absorbed in his own resolve he never sees how the ring is closing in round him, and there is a terrible irony in his likening himself to the immovable pole star, just as his course is to be violently closed in blood. His decided tones ring out alternately

with the feigned entreaties round him, then sharp and sudden sounds Casca's 'Speak, hands, for me,' and then a wild clashing of steel and Cæsar's dying voice. The catastrophe has been long impending, but it comes with no less startling force at last, and we feel as if we stood in the midst of the wild confusion which follows. The conspirators seem not to have clearly settled what is to be done after the murder, and are almost bewildered by the rapidity with which it has been effected. They are intoxicated with victory; even Brutus seems carried out of himself; for in no other way can we account for his bathing his hands in Cæsar's blood, a bit of theatrical savagery very unlike his usual character. Just as the triumphant victors are preparing to go forth and proclaim their deed to the people, a new element comes into the scene. Up to this point the influence of Antony on the story has been next to nothing. From this point it steadily increases. As if the sudden shock of Cæsar's death had developed all Antony's latent powers, the message brought by his servant shows the union of craft and courage which will effect so much before long. In this brief space of time Antony has decided on his line of conduct, and begun to carry it out. With all his revelry and folly, Antony has measured his fellow-citizens to some purpose. Brutus is the leader of this revolution, and Antony knows exactly how to treat Brutus, and uses his knowledge in this crisis, being fully determined to avenge Cæsar's death whatever it costs. He is such a perfect actor that it is difficult to judge when his utterances are spontaneous and when the result of calculation. Not that they are necessarily false. There is no doubt that his grief for Cæsar is perfectly sincere; but where a weaker man would have tried to hide it, Antony's genius shows him the better policy of expressing it freely. Brutus wants to count him harmless, if not as an ally; and nothing could better win Brutus' trust than Antony's unfeigned horror at the murder, for this he considers quite natural, and even laudable under the circumstances, but expects (here again is the man of theory, not experience) to be able to reason it away. Antony's honesty is more deceptive than a hundred lies. The profound pathos of his first address to Cæsar's corpse, his half defiant, half reckless demand to be slain there and then, if the murderers want his life; these move Brutus far more strongly than any professions of friendship or entreaties for mercy. He never guesses at the firm purpose hidden behind all this; never detects the covert sarcasm with which Antony accepts his promises of explanation, 'I doubt not of your wisdom,' as who should say, 'Yes, you will have endless fine excuses for treachery and murder.' The same veiled sarcasm is evident when he takes the bloodstained hands, in the only two epithets which he applies to any of the party. 'My valiant Casca,' who had, like a cur, behind, struck Cæsar down; and 'good Trebonius,' whom Antony must hate worse than the rest for having beguiled him out of the way. But all this is lost on the

conspirators: they only see that Antony is apparently making friends with them and finding it a difficult position. With wonderful skill he avoids making professions which they would not believe by pointing out the baseness of being reconciled to them at all, over the body of his beloved Cæsar, which he once more passionately addresses till interrupted by Cassius, anxious to be in action, and suspicious of all this. But Antony is not going to be meek to him, and turns almost fiercely on him, asserting his right to defend his dead friend. Here Cassius thinks it best to evade argument by bringing Antony to the point as to whether he is to be reckoned as their friend or not. Again the underlying bitterness of his conditional promise seems to escape them all. Brutus is so satisfied that he instantly assents to Antony's request, made so quietly, to be allowed to speak in Cæsar's funeral. Cassius' practical mind at once takes alarm, but he again finds himself unable to resist Brutus, who expects to keep all quiet and safe with argument and reasoning and show of generosity to a conquered enemy. Antony accepts the qualified permission with the same studied calm, knowing full well his own power of snapping these packthread bonds at the right moment. But there is a quick change when he is left alone with Cæsar's body. Whatever art may have mingled with his other speeches, he now speaks out his heart as he leans over the mangled form, and sees the dread vision of the horrors to arise from this one deed. Truly Cæsar will be avenged before all is done. In the midst of his grief, Antony does not lose sight of active measures. Cæsar's heir must not fling himself unprepared into this stormy Rome, unless indeed Antony succeeds in changing the face of things before he comes.

Shakspere condenses the story to some extent after Cæsar's death, and lets the scene of the orations follow closely that of the murder, omitting a good deal which shows the divided condition of Roman opinion; but he gives us the drift of the original as we watch the conduct of the citizens. As the next scene (Act iii, sc. 2) opens we see them wildly perturbed about Cæsar's death, but owing the sway of Brutus' influence, and inclined to accept anything he says. So now Brutus has a grand opportunity for bringing forward those convincing reasons of which he spoke to Antony; but here comes in the defect in his mind which cripples so much of his action—his incapacity for understanding other people. He cannot the least realize the feelings of the excitable but shallow-minded crowd, and knows not how to touch them. To him it is clear as daylight that every one not absolutely base and vile must feel as he does; and if his affection for Cæsar did not prevent his slaying him for the good of Rome, the people surely may be equally contented with the deed. But his cold, argumentative, antithetical speech only impresses the heads of the people without rousing them, though it elicits a certain expression of transitory attachment to Brutus personally, and a vague sense that

somehow they were greatly benefited by Cæsar's death. However, Brutus is satisfied, and so sure of the people that he contentedly leaves the last word with Antony, and even begs the people to stay and hear him. This they are very willing to do, being just in that quivering state of excitement when any fresh appeal meets with a ready response, and being, besides, very curious to hear what Antony will say, speaking avowedly by Brutus' leave. They little suspect what he is going to do with them, and how completely they are in his hands. He takes them artfully by surprise, for they are expecting direct praise of Cæsar, and some blame to his slayers, which they are prepared to resent; but Antony starts from an opposite point, seeming sadly to resign all claims for Cæsar, and to allow all honour to Brutus and the rest, so that his hearers are instantly disarmed. They hear no irony at first in the famous refrain of the whole oration, 'For Brutus is an honourable man.' Then Antony gently takes up the charge of Cæsar's ambition, does not argue against it, but brings forward facts which tell against it, and indirectly works into the people's minds a recollection of all Cæsar's services to Rome, and of their old love for him, letting them see his own emotion, always contagious in a crowd, till they are fast melting to a mood when he can turn them to what shape he pleases. The simplicity of his words and seeming informality of the whole speech deepen its effect, as the people feel they quite understand him. As he pauses we see how their unsteady sympathies are coming round to him and Cæsar. Resuming, he touches their pity by his swiftly drawn picture of the suddenness of Cæsar's fall, the veiled and motionless form on the bier lending double effect to his words; then growing bolder, he suggests something behind, makes them feel themselves defrauded by the 'honourable men,' and by his pretence of concealing the contents of Cæsar's will, rouses both their cupidity and curiosity to fever heat. He could hardly calm them now if he tried, and he knows right well that his exhortations to patience will have exactly the opposite result, just as he knows the effect of the intensely bitter

'I fear I wrong the honourable men
Whose daggers have stabbed Cæsar!'

An indignant pity begins to thrill the crowd, and Antony stepping down among them unfolds Cæsar's bloodstained cloak, showing the gashes of the daggers, and pouring out the full stream of his eloquence in telling the story of his murder, dwelling on the fact that Cæsar died finally from the hand of his friend, and that Brutus' ingratitude had pierced his heart, till tears of passionate anger are flowing among the excited audience. Then with a sudden movement Antony lifts the covering and shows the mangled body itself. The spectacle could not fail to arouse emotion, and it produces a storm of rage and grief, only calmed by the sound of Antony's voice. This seeming return to the tone in which he began really adds fuel to the fire,

for the idea that Brutus might try to argue them out of their wrath is the one thing which is needed to infuriate the citizens. With a climax of skill Antony makes them think that he has done nothing to stir them, that all their feeling is spontaneous, and if they were really worked up then every stone in Rome would rise and mutiny. At this point the flood of emotion nearly gets beyond him, but he means them to hear Cæsar's will before he has done with them. As he proclaims the legacy to each citizen, the cries for vengeance redouble; and when he tells of the benefactions to the town, his work is done, and he can boldly challenge them with 'Here was a Cæsar: When comes such another?' At once the answering shout of 'Never, never,' drowns everything; the tide of popular fury breaks loose, and the citizens carry off Cæsar's body, vowing wildest vengeance on his murderers, and leaving Antony triumphant. Never was a more vivid picture presented of the swift changes possible in popular feeling. Brutus and Cassius vanish from Rome in this sudden storm, which has an tragicomical effect in the death of poor Cinna the poet, killed in consequence of his unlucky name by the raging people.

After the fierce excitement of this great Act we must feel a flatness in what follows. We have, in fact, had our climax too soon, and must take the consequences. One does not see how it could be helped, but it is certainly a defect in the arrangement of the play. Moreover, our interest is now divided between the opposing sides, and the action becomes more desultory. Shakspeare does not say how much time he supposes to pass between the third and fourth acts, rarely troubling himself with exact chronology. In reality about eighteen months passed between the death of Cæsar and the proscription by the triumvirs, and nearly another year between that and the battles of Philippi. Also Shakspeare expects his audience to understand without explanation how it is that we find Antony, Octavius and Lepidus thus all-powerful at Rome and able to dispose of people's lives at their pleasure, each willing to give up his blood relations to gain revenge on his enemies (Act iv, sc. 1). Of the two fresh characters presented to us in this short scene we see very little, and have to wait for their full portraits for *Antony and Cleopatra*. Lepidus is only shown here for a moment, but we get a brief sketch of him dashed off by Antony's incisive sarcasms. Conscious of his own powers of leading most people as he likes, Antony is very contemptuous of his colleague's feeble, though convenient, pliability. But with all his talent, brilliancy, and unscrupulous energy, Antony has got his match in the youthful Cæsar at his side. At present Octavius chooses to work with Antony and make use of his experience, but once he means to take his own line Antony will not be able to stop him.

The next two scenes may be taken as one, there being no interval of time between them. We find Brutus near Sardis, at the head of an army, waiting to be joined by Cassius. Things do not seem quite comfortable between the two friends, and one can well imagine that

Brutus with his high strung scruples and impracticability would be a distracting colleague in action for Cassius, who with rough energy cares little what means he uses so long as his work is done. Then Brutus has a touch of imperiousness in him, and expects to be obeyed by Cassius more implicitly than suits the latter's fiery independence. Each suspects the other of cooling in affection, and feels aggrieved accordingly. As soon as Cassius appears he is ready to dash into the subject, and we must own that the calm superiority of Brutus' reply would provoke a saint. Still Cassius sees the propriety of adjourning the discussion out of hearing of the troops. In Brutus' tent his indignation breaks out, but he has lost his old power of swaying his colleague, who, still calmly superior, retorts with counter charges which nearly drive Cassius frantic with anger. He cannot meet an attack from Brutus as he would that of another man, and while fretting at the restraint, he feels as if his colleague were abusing his advantage over him. For a philosopher, Brutus is unwontedly excited, mainly because he thinks that by money-grasping and injustice Cassius is stultifying all their previous course. If they are to support injustice, they might as well have let great Julius alone, and this thought angers Brutus beyond anything else. He is too strong for Cassius, clever and vehement as he is; for when the two natures are fairly confronted the finer asserts its sway over the coarser. In his wrath Brutus still comes deliberately back to his specific charge, that Cassius had refused him money to pay his soldiers. While admiring Brutus' reluctance to squeeze funds from the peasants, one wonders a little how he meant Cassius to raise the necessary supplies, but he rarely condescends to such details. It does not seem quite clear what Cassius has done about it; he rather implies that Brutus has misunderstood his answer, and should not have been so quick to condemn him. Suddenly giving up defence and anger together, Cassius attacks Brutus in another way, a wild, pathetic appeal to his feelings, as well adapted to its purpose as was Antony's oration. Brutus, the man of argument and logic, cannot resist this; his short-lived anger vanishes, and he promptly draws away the sting of his bitterest words. There is only one drawback to this famous quarrel scene, so real and lifelike, that even coolly reading it we seem to hear the eager voices and see the flashing eyes and hasty gestures. It wants an object. It leads up to nothing, and only shows us more of the two characters. The momentary episode of the crazy poet is useful as distinctly closing the dispute between the two leaders, and as they settle to calmer talk, Brutus discloses the deep trouble tearing at his heart under his composed bearing. He tells of Portia's death, forcing himself to do so, but in the briefest possible phrases, shrinking from many words on the subject even from Cassius. Still we do not understand why, directly afterwards with Messala, he should affect ignorance of her death. It looks like a display of stoicism, unlike the rest of his character. As the leaders proceed to arrange their plans for

meeting Antony and Octavius, Brutus once more overbears Cassius' better judgment through his idea that their affairs have now reached a crisis. As usual, Cassius yields, though with a mental protest, and the stormy interview comes to an end. The pleasant little scene between Brutus and his servants is refreshing after all this disturbance, and we willingly dwell on the picture of his gently releasing Lucius of his instrument, so as not to wake the tired boy, even among the great scenes of this play. The silence of the camp now grows eerie as Brutus turns to his book, and the dim lights indicate the presence of something supernatural; and presently he becomes aware of some strange form advancing towards him, chilling even his blood by its unearthliness. He does not recognise it, yet in some way it is impressed on him that Cæsar's spirit has returned with words of mysterious warning, and will return once more. All is vague and weird, and Brutus somehow divines that this reappearance will mark the limit of his own course. Cæsar's spirit will then be triumphant.

Once again we have a change of scene, and all the remaining characters meet in the plains of Philippi, where Brutus has flung away the advantage of the higher ground and come down to his enemies. We could almost dispense with the interview between the leaders before the battle. As in all similar scenes, there is something ludicrous in a set of generals having a regular scolding match before beginning to fight. Still, there has been so much pretending, that the plain speaking is not amiss. How Antony revels in flinging out at last all his scorn and hatred for Cæsar's treacherous flattering murderers! We rather feel for Cassius as the taunt goes home, as he is conscious that *his* advice would have effectually silenced Antony's bitter tongue; now it is difficult to know what to say. So with proud defiance the leaders part, and before the battle begins, we see with what feelings Cassius goes into it. He is depressed and dispirited, partly by the ominous signs which have attended their march, partly by disapproving of giving battle here at all; so naturally his mind turns to forecasting the consequences of defeat. He knows what he will do, and turns to ask what Brutus' course would be under these circumstances. Shakspeare here makes Brutus contradict himself and puzzle Cassius, having in this place stuck too close to his original, for he reproduces a bit of mistaken translation from the French. Plutarch's Brutus really says that when he was young he had blamed Cato for suicide; now being himself in danger, he had changed his mind. This is consistent, and would have given Shakspeare a better preface for the last parting between the friends, so profoundly touching in its simplicity that comment on it would mar it. But it makes one feel a lump in one's throat. We have often noticed the difficulty of effectively putting a battle on the stage, as we can only see little bits of it; and the end of *Julius Cæsar* makes no exception to the rule, for the last scenes are straggling. Shakspeare compresses the two battles of Philippi, really separated by

nearly three weeks, into one day, which adds to the difficulty of following the complications of the fight. At first there is an even combat: Brutus overpowers Octavius' division, and Antony is equally successful against Cassius. Then the fortune of the day declares for Antony, and Brutus' army is dispersed. But we have to get at these facts by degrees, to see different parts of the field, and to stand with Cassius on the little hill, watching the real success of Antony and the imaginary capture of Titinius. This mistake destroys Cassius' last hope, the stormy light of his life quenches itself 'in his red blood,' and Cæsar's death is in part avenged. It may be said that the various suicides lose their effect by repetition, but it seems as if Shakespere could not leave out the devotion of Titinius, crowning Cassius with his dying hand; and certainly the loyalty of all Brutus' and Cassius' followers appeals irresistibly to our sympathies.

The 4th scene shows the renewed battle going sorely against Brutus in spite of his efforts, the desperation of young Cato, and the chivalrous attempt of Lucilius to personate his leader and draw off the pursuit from him. Antony's treatment of Lucilius does him credit, and, indeed, both he and Octavius show that they can be generous in victory. Now the last scene opens, as Plutarch describes it, among trees and walls of rock, where a little river divides the defeated Brutus from his enemies, and he sits below a great rock gazing into the starry heavens. Brutus feels this is the end. He can fight no more and will fly no further, and has received double warning that his time has come and his story ended. His only difficulty now is to find some one to help him to close the volume. Standing thus at life's verge, he can yet feel a thrill of joy at the matchless fidelity of all his friends to him. The sounds of pursuit come nearer. Hastily dismissing his followers, Brutus only retains the one whom he can enforce to render the last service to him, and thus Cæsar's blood is finally expiated. Even the bondman Strato seems to catch a glimpse of Brutus' spirit as the conquerors pour on to the scene and surround the dead body; he still loftily upholds his master's honour—

'For Brutus only overcame himself,
And no man else has honour by his death.'

Over such a victory and such an end anything like commonplace exultation would be horribly out of place. Instead, therefore, we have Antony's beautiful epitaph on Brutus, doing now full justice to the purity of his motives, his vast superiority to the other conspirators, and the nobleness of his nature. So the play ends, not in either extreme of mourning or rejoicing, but in a kind of elevated sadness, fitting well with the whole idea of Brutus' character, and the greatness of the general theme.

CONSTANCE O'BRIEN.