V. Dénouement, Catastrophe, or Conclusion (the Knot Untied)

Act V, Scene iii. The charge ordered by Brutus has been successful, and Octavius has been driven back, but Cassius is thus left unguarded, and Antony's forces surround him. He takes refuge on a hill and sends Titinius to see "whether yond troops are friend or enemy." Believing Titinius to be slain, he begs Pindarus to stab him, and Cassius dies "even with the sword that kill'd" Cæsar. With the same sword Titinius then slays himself, and Brutus, when Messala bears the news to him, exclaims in words that strike the keynote of the whole falling action and dénouement:

> O Julius Cæsar, thou art mighty yet!
> Thy spirit walks abroad, and turns our swords
> In our own proper entrails.

Act V, Scene iv. Like Hamlet, Brutus at the last is a man of supreme action. He rallies his forces for a last attack. With hopeless failure before him, he is at once a heroic figure and one of infinite pathos. Young Cato falls. Lucilius is attacked; assuming the name of Brutus, he is not killed but taken prisoner. Antony recognizes him and gives orders that he be treated kindly.

Act V, Scene v. Brutus dies by his own sword, and his last words tell the story of failure and defeat. Like a true Roman, he meets his doom without a murmur of complaint. He had been true to his ideals. The tragic dénouement comes as the inevitable consequence, not of wilful sin, but of a noble mistake. In death he commands the veneration of both Antony and Octavius, who pronounce over his body the great interpretation of his character, and in their speeches the tragedy closes as with a chant of victory for the hero of defeat.

VI. MANAGEMENT OF TIME AND PLACE

1. *Historic time.* Cæsar's triumph over the sons of Pompey was celebrated in October, B.C. 45. Shakespeare makes this coincident with "the feast of Lupercal" on February 15, B.C. 44. In the play Antony delivers his funeral oration immediately after Cæsar's death; historically, there was an interval of days. Octavius did not reach Rome until upwards

of two months after the assassination; in III, ii, 261, Antony is told by his servant immediately after the funeral oration that "Octavius is already come to Rome." In November, B.C. 43, the triumvirs met to make up their bloody proscription, and in the autumn of the following year were fought the two battles of Philippi, separated historically by twenty days, but represented by Shakespeare as taking place on the same day.

2. *Dramatic Time.* Historical happenings that extended over nearly three years are represented in the stage action as the occurrences of six days, distributed over the acts and scenes as follows:

Day 1. — I, i, ii.
Interval.
Day 2. — I, iii.
Day 3. — II, III.
Interval.
Day 4. — IV, i.
Interval.
Day 5. — IV, ii, iii.
Interval.
Day 6. — V.

This compression for the purposes of dramatic unity results in action that is swift and throbbing with human and ethical interest.

3. *Place.* Up to the second scene of the fourth act Rome is the natural place of action. The second and third scenes of the fourth act are at Sardis in Asia Minor; the last act shifts to Philippi in Macedonia. The only noteworthy

deviation from historical accuracy is in making the conference of the triumvirs take place at Rome and not at Bononia. See note, p. 116. But there is peculiar dramatic effectiveness in placing this fateful colloquy in the city that was the center of the political unrest of the time.

VII. VERSIFICATION AND DICTION

Blank Verse

The characteristics of Shakespeare's blank verse — the rhymeless, iambic five-stress (decasyllabic) verse, or iambic pentameter, introduced into England by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, about 1540 — and its proportion to rhyme and to prose have been much used in recent years to determine the chronological order of the plays and the development of the poet's art. In blank verse as used by Shakespeare we have really an epitome of the development of the measure in connection with the English drama. In his earlier plays the blank verse is often similar to that of *Gorboduc*, the first English tragedy. The tendency is to adhere to the syllable-counting principle, to make the line the unit, the sentence and phrase coinciding with the line (end-stopped verse), and to use five perfect iambic feet to the line. In plays of the middle period, such as *The Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like It*, written between 1596 and 1600, the blank verse is more like that of Kyd and Marlowe, with less monotonous regularity in the structure and an increasing tendency to carry on the sense from one line to another without a syntactical or rhetorical pause at the end of the line (run-on verse, *enjambement*). Redundant syllables now abound and the melody is richer and

fuller. In Shakespeare's later plays the blank verse breaks away from all bondage to formal line limits, and the organic continuity is found in a succession of great metrical periods.

The verse of *Julius Cæsar* is less monotonously regular than that of the earlier plays; it is more flexible and varied, more musical and sonorous, but it lacks the superb movement of the verse in *Othello*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*. End-stopped, normally regular iambic pentameter lines often occur (as, for instance, I, i, 37, 41, 44, 62, 76), but everywhere are variations and deviations from the norm, and there is an unusual number of short lines and interjectional lines of two or three stresses. See Abbott's *A Shakespearian Grammar*, §§ 511, 512.

Rhyme

Apart from the use of rhyme in songs, lyrics, and portions of masques (as in *The Tempest*, IV, i, 60–138), a progress from more to less rhyme is a sure index to Shakespeare's development as a dramatist and a master of expression. In the early *Love's Labour's Lost* are more than one thousand rhyming five-stress iambic lines; in *The Tempest* are only two; in *The Winter's Tale* not one. In *Julius Cæsar* are found only thirty-four rhyming lines.

Prose

If "of the soule the bodie forme doth take," it is small wonder that attempts have been made to explain Shakespeare's distinctive use of verse and prose. Of recent years there have been interesting discussions of the question "whether we are justified in supposing that Shakespeare

was guided by any fixed principle in his employment of verse and prose, or whether he merely employed them, as fancy suggested, for the sake of variety and relief." [1] It is a significant fact that in many of Shakespeare's earlier plays there is little or no prose, and that the proportion of prose to blank verse increases with the decrease of rhyme. In *Julius Cæsar* three kinds of prose may be distinguished: (1) The prose of homely dialogue, as in the talk of the common people in I, i, and III, iii. (2) The prose of serious information as to the nature of a situation, as in Casca's description of the offer of the crown to Cæsar. This kind of prose reaches its highest development in Brutus's famous speech, III, ii, with its dignified defense and laconic exposition of his honesty of purpose. (3) The prose of formal documents, as in the letter of Artemidorus, II, iii, 1–8.

VIII. THE CHARACTERS

Julius Cæsar

The characterization of this drama in some of the parts is not a little perplexing. Hardly one of the speeches put into Cæsar's mouth can be regarded as historically characteristic; taken all together, they seem little short of a caricature. As here represented, Cæsar appears little better than a braggart; and when he speaks, it is in the style of a glorious vapourer, full of lofty airs and mock thunder. Nothing could

[1] Professor J. Churton Collins's *Shakespeare as a Prose Writer*. See Delius's *Die Prosa in Shakespeares Dramen* (*Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, V, 227–273); Janssen's *Die Prosa in Shakespeares Dramen*; Professor Hiram Corson's *An Introduction to the Study of Shakespeare*, pp. 83–98.

be further from the truth of the man, whose character, even in his faults, was as compact and solid as adamant, and at the same time as limber and ductile as the finest gold. Certain critics have seized and worked upon this, as proving Shakespeare's lack of classical knowledge, or carelessness in the use of his authorities. It proves neither the one nor the other.

It is true, Cæsar's ambition was gigantic, but none too much so for the mind it dwelt in; for his character in all its features was gigantic. And no man ever framed his ambition more in sympathy with the great forces of nature, or built it upon a deeper foundation of political wisdom and insight. Now this "last infirmity of noble minds" is the only part of him that the play really sets before us; and even this we do not see as it was, because it is here severed from the constitutional peerage of his gifts and virtues; all those transcendent qualities which placed him at the summit of Roman intellect and manhood being either withheld from the scene or thrown so far into the background that the proper effect of them is lost.

Yet we have ample proof that Shakespeare understood Cæsar thoroughly, and that he regarded him as "the noblest man that ever lived in the tide of times." For example, in *Hamlet*, he makes Horatio, who is one of his calmest and most right-thinking characters, speak of him as "the mightiest Julius." In *Antony and Cleopatra*, again, the heroine is made to describe him as "broad-fronted Cæsar"; and in *King Richard the Third* the young Prince utters these lines:

> That Julius Cæsar was a famous man:
> With what his valour did enrich his wit,
> His wit set down to make his valour live:
> Death makes no conquest of this conqueror. [III, 1, 84–87.]

In fact, we need not go beyond Shakespeare to gather that Julius Cæsar's was the deepest, the most versatile, and the most multitudinous head that ever figured in the political affairs of mankind.

Indeed, it is clear from this play itself that Shakespeare did not proceed at all from ignorance or misconception of the man. For it is remarkable that, though Cæsar delivers himself so out of character, yet others, both foes and friends, deliver him much nearer the truth; so that, while we see almost nothing of him directly, we nevertheless get, upon the whole, a just reflection of him. Especially in the marvelous speeches of Antony and in the later events of the drama, both his inward greatness and his right of mastership over the Roman world are fully vindicated. For in the play as in the history, Cæsar's blood hastens and cements the empire which the conspirators thought to prevent. They soon find that in the popular sympathies, and even in their own dumb remorses, he has "left behind powers that will work for him." He proves, indeed, far mightier in death than in life; as if his spirit were become at once the guardian angel of his cause and an avenging angel to his foes.

And so it was in fact. Nothing did so much to set the people in love with royalty, both name and thing, as the reflection that their beloved Cæsar, the greatest of their national heroes, the crown and consummation of Roman genius and character, had been murdered for aspiring to it. Thus their hereditary aversion to kingship was all subdued by the remembrance of how and why their Cæsar fell; and they who, before, would have plucked out his heart rather than he should wear a crown, would now have plucked out

their own, to set a crown upon his head. Such is the natural result, when the intensities of admiration and compassion meet together in the human breast.

From all which it may well be thought that Cæsar was too great for the hero of a drama, since his greatness, if brought forward in full measure, would leave no room for anything else, at least would preclude any proper dramatic balance and equipoise. It was only as a sort of underlying potency, or a force withdrawn into the background, that his presence was compatible with that harmony and reciprocity of several characters which a well-ordered drama requires. At all events, it is pretty clear that, where he was, such figures as Brutus and Cassius could never be very considerable, save as his assassins. They would not have been heard of in after times, if they had not "struck the foremost man of all this world"; in other words, the great sun of Rome had to be shorn of his beams, else so ineffectual a fire as Brutus could nowise catch the eye.

Be this as it may, there is no doubt that Shakespeare knew the whole height and compass of Cæsar's vast and varied capacity. It may be regretted that he did not render him as he evidently saw him, inasmuch as he alone, perhaps, of all the men who ever wrote could have given an adequate expression of that colossal man.

It is possible that the policy of the drama may have been to represent Cæsar not as he was indeed, but as he must have appeared to the conspirators; to make us see him as they saw him, in order that they too might have fair and equal judgment at our hands. For Cæsar was literally too great to be seen by them, save as children often see bugbears by moonlight, when their inexperienced eyes are

mocked with air. And Shakespeare may well have judged that the best way to set us right towards them was by identifying us more or less with them in mental position, and making us share somewhat in their delusion. For there is scarce anything wherein we are so apt to err as in reference to the characters of men, when time has settled and cleared up the questions in which they lost their way: we blame them for not having seen as we see; while in truth the things that are so bathed in light to us were full of darkness to them, and we should have understood them better, had we been in the dark along with them.

Cæsar, indeed, was not bewildered by the political questions of his time; but all the rest were, and therefore he seemed so to them; and while their own heads were swimming they naturally ascribed his seeming bewilderment to a dangerous intoxication. As for his marvelous career of success, they attributed this mainly to his good luck, such being the common refuge of inferior minds when they would escape the sense of their inferiority. Hence, as generally happens with the highest order of men, his greatness had to wait the approval of later events. He indeed, far beyond any other man of his age, "looked into the seeds of time"; but this was not, and could not be known, till time had developed those seeds into their fruits. Why then may not Shakespeare's idea have been so to order things that the full strength of the man should not appear in the play, as it did not in fact, till after his fall? This view will both explain and justify the strange disguise — a sort of falsetto greatness — under which Cæsar exhibits himself.

Now the seeming contradiction between Cæsar as known and Cæsar as rendered by Shakespeare is what, more than

anything else, perplexes. But a very refined, subtile, and peculiar irony pervades this, more than any other of Shakespeare's plays; not intended as such, indeed, by the speakers, but a sort of historic irony, — the irony of Providence, so to speak, or, if you please, of Fate; much the same as is implied in the proverb, "A haughty spirit goeth before a fall." This irony crops out in many places. Thus we have Cæsar most blown with arrogance and godding it in the loftiest style when the daggers of the assassins are on the very point of leaping at him. So too, all along, we find Brutus most confident in those very things where he is most at fault, or acting like a man "most ignorant of what he 's most assured"; as when he says that "Antony can do no more than Cæsar's arm when Cæsar's head is off." This, to be sure, is not meant ironically by him, but it is turned into irony by the fact that Antony soon tears the cause of the conspirators all to pieces with his tongue. But, indeed, this sort of honest guile runs all through the piece as a perfusive and permeating efficacy. A still better instance of it occurs just after the murder, when the chiefs of the conspiracy are exulting in the transcendent virtue and beneficence of their deed, and in its future stage celebrity; and Cassius says, —

> So often shall the knot of us be call'd
> The men that gave their country liberty. [III, i, 118–119.]

and again, a little later, when Brutus says of Antony, "I know that we shall have him well to friend." Not indeed that the men themselves thought any irony in those speeches: it was natural, no doubt, that they should utter such things in all seriousness; but what they say is interpreted into irony by

the subsequent events. And when such a shallow idealist as Brutus is made to overtop and outshine the greatest practical genius the world ever saw, what is it but a refined and subtile irony at work on a much larger scale, and diffusing itself, secretly, it may be, but not the less vitally, into the texture? It was not the frog that thought irony, when he tried to make himself as big as the ox; but there was a pretty decided spice of irony in the mind that conceived the fable.

It is to be noted further that Brutus uniformly speaks of Cæsar with respect, almost indeed with admiration. It is his ambition, not his greatness, that Brutus resents; the thought that his own consequence is impaired by Cæsar's elevation having no influence with him. With Cassius, on the contrary, impatience of his superiority is the ruling motive: he is all the while thinking of the disparagement he suffers by Cæsar's exaltation.

> This man
> Is now become a god, and Cassius is
> A wretched creature, and must bend his body
> If Cæsar carelessly but nod on him. [I, ii, 115–118.]

> Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
> Like a Colossus, and we petty men
> Walk under his huge legs. [I, ii, 135–137.]

Thus he overflows with mocking comparisons, and finds his pastime in flouting at Cæsar as having managed by a sham heroism to hoodwink the world.

And yet Shakespeare makes Cæsar characterize himself very much as Cassius, in his splenetic temper, describes him. Cæsar gods it in his talk, as if on purpose to approve the style in which Cassius mockingly gods him. This, taken

by itself, would look as if the dramatist sided with Cassius; yet one can hardly help feeling that he sympathized rather in Antony's great oration. And the sequel, as we have seen, justifies Antony's opinion of Cæsar. The subsequent course of things has the effect of inverting the mockery of Cassius against himself.

The final issue of the conspiracy, as represented by Shakespeare, is a pretty conclusive argument of the blunder, not to say the crime, of its authors. Cæsar, dead, tears them and their cause all to pieces. In effect, they did but stab him into a mightier life; so that Brutus might well say, as indeed he does at last,—

> O Julius Cæsar, thou art mighty yet!
> Thy spirit walks abroad, and turns our swords
> In our own proper entrails. [V, iii, 94–96.]

The Nemesis which asserts itself so sternly in the latter part of the play may be regarded as a reflex of irony on some of the earlier scenes. This view infers the disguise of Cæsar to be an instance of the profound guile with which Shakespeare sometimes plays upon his characters, humoring their bent, and then leaving them to the discipline of events.

Brutus

Coleridge has a shrewd doubt as to what sort of a character Shakespeare meant his Brutus to be. For, in his thinking aloud just after the breaking of the conspiracy to him, Brutus avowedly grounds his purpose, not on anything Cæsar has done, nor on what he is, but simply on what he *may become* when crowned. He "knows no personal cause to spurn at him"; nor has he "known when his affections sway'd

more than his reason"; but "he would be crown'd: how that might change his nature, there's the question"; and,

> Since the quarrel
> Will bear no colour for the thing he is,
> Fashion it thus; that what he is, augmented,
> Would run to these and these extremities;
> And therefore think him as a serpent's egg
> Which, hatch'd, would, as his kind, grow mischievous,
> And kill him in the shell. [II, i, 28–34.]

So then Brutus heads a plot to assassinate the man who, besides being clothed with the sanctions of law as the highest representative of the state, has been his personal friend and benefactor; all this, too, not on any ground of fact, but on an assumed probability that the crown will prove a sacrament of evil, and transform him into quite another man. A strange piece of casuistry indeed! but nowise unsuited to the spirit of a man who was to commit the gravest of crimes, purely from a misplaced virtue.

And yet the character of Brutus is full of beauty and sweetness. In all the relations of life he is upright, gentle, and pure; of a sensitiveness and delicacy of principle that cannot bosom the slightest stain; his mind enriched and fortified with the best extractions of philosophy; a man adorned with all the virtues which, in public and private, at home and in the circle of friends, win respect and charm the heart.

Being such a man, of course he could only do what he did under some sort of delusion. And so indeed it is. Yet this very delusion serves, apparently, to ennoble and beautify him, as it takes him and works upon him through his virtues. At heart he is a real patriot, every inch of him. But his

patriotism, besides being somewhat hidebound with patrician pride, is of the speculative kind, and dwells, where his whole character has been chiefly formed, in a world of poetical and philosophic ideals. He is an enthusiastic student of books. Plato is his favorite teacher; and he has studiously framed his life and tuned his thoughts to the grand and pure conceptions won from that all but divine source: Plato's genius walks with him in the Senate, sits with him at the fireside, goes with him to the wars, and still hovers about his tent.

His great fault, then, lies in supposing it his duty to be meddling with things that he does not understand. Conscious of high thoughts and just desires, but with no gift of practical insight, he is ill fitted to "grind among the iron facts of life." In truth, he does not really see where he is; the actual circumstances and tendencies amidst which he lives are as a book written in a language he cannot read. The characters of those who act with him are too far below the region of his principles and habitual thinkings for him to take the true cast of them. Himself incapable of such motives as govern them, he just projects and suspends his ideals in them, and then misreckons upon them as realizing the men of his own brain. So also he clings to the idea of the great and free republic of his fathers, the old Rome that has ever stood to his feelings touched with the consecrations of time and glorified with the high virtues that have grown up under her cherishing. But, in the long reign of tearing faction and civil butchery, that which he worships has been substantially changed, the reality lost. Cæsar, already clothed with the title and the power of Imperator for life, would change the form so as to agree with the substance, the name so as to fit the thing. But Brutus is so filled with the idea

of that which has thus passed away never to return that he thinks to save or recover the whole by preventing such formal and nominal change.

And so his whole course is that of one acting on his own ideas, not on the facts that are before and around him. Indeed, he does not *see* them; he merely dreams his own meaning into them. He is swift to do that by which he thinks his country *ought to be benefited*. As the killing of Cæsar stands in his purpose, he and his associates are to be "sacrificers, not butchers." But that the deed may have the effect he hopes for, his countrymen generally must regard it in the same light as he does. That they will do this is the very thing which he has *in fact* no reason to conclude; notwithstanding, because it is so *in his idea*, therefore he trusts that the conspirators will "be called purgers, not murderers." Meanwhile, the plain truth is, that if his countrymen had been capable of regarding the deed as a sacrifice, they would not have made nor permitted any occasion for it. It is certain that, unless so construed, the act must prove fruitful of evil; all Rome is full of things proving that it cannot be so construed; but this is what Brutus has no eye to see.

So too, in his oration "to show the *reason* of our Cæsar's death," he speaks, in calm and dispassionate manner, just those things which he thinks ought to set the people right and himself right in their eyes, forgetting all the while that the deed cannot fail to make the people mad, and that popular madness is not a thing to be reasoned with. And for the same cause he insists on sparing Antony, and on permitting him to speak in Cæsar's funeral. To do otherwise would be unjust, and so would overthrow the whole nature

of the enterprise as it lives in his mind. And because in his idea it ought so to be, he trusts that Antony will make Cæsar's death the occasion of strengthening those who killed him, not perceiving the strong likelihood, which soon passes into a fact, that in cutting off Cæsar they have taken away the only check on Antony's ambition. He ought to have foreseen that Antony, instead of being drawn to their side, would rather make love to Cæsar's place at their expense.

Thus the course of Brutus serves no end but to set on foot another civil war, which naturally hastens and assures the very thing he sought to prevent. He confides in the goodness of his cause, not considering that the better the cause, the worse its chance with bad men. He thinks it safe to trust others because he knows they can safely trust him; the singleness of his own eye causing him to believe that others will see as he sees, the purity of his own heart, that others will feel as he feels.

Here then we have a strong instance of a very good man doing a very bad thing; and, withal, of a wise man acting most unwisely because his wisdom knew not its place; a right noble, just, heroic spirit bearing directly athwart the virtues he worships. On the whole, it is not wonderful that Brutus should have exclaimed, as he is said to have done, that he had worshiped virtue and found her at last but a shade. So worshiped, she may well prove a shade indeed! Admiration of the man's character, reprobation of his proceedings, — which of these is the stronger with us? And there is much the same irony in the representation of Brutus as in that of Cæsar; only the order of it is here reversed. As if one should say, "O yes, yes! in the practical affairs of mankind your charming wisdom of the closet

will doubtless put to shame the workings of mere practical insight and sagacity."

Shakespeare's exactness in the minutest details of character is well shown in the speech already referred to; which is the utterance of a man philosophizing most unphilosophically; as if the Academy should betake itself to the stump, and this too without any sense of the incongruity. Plutarch has a short passage which served as a hint, not indeed for the matter, but for the style of that speech. "They do note," says he, "in some of his epistles that he counterfeited that brief compendious manner of speech of the Lacedæmonians. As, when the war was begun, he wrote unto the Pergamenians in this sort: 'I understand you have given Dolabella money: if you have done it willingly, you confess you have offended me; if against your wills, show it then by giving me willingly.' . . . These were Brutus' manner of letters, which were honoured for their briefness." The speech in question is far enough indeed from being a model of style either for oratory or anything else, but it is finely characteristic; while its studied primness and epigrammatic finish contrast most unfavorably with the frank-hearted yet artful eloquence of Antony.

And what a rare significance attaches to the brief scene of Brutus and his drowsy boy Lucius in camp a little before the catastrophe! There, in the deep of the night, long after all the rest have lost themselves in sleep, and when the anxieties of the issue are crowding upon him, — there we have the earnest, thoughtful Brutus hungering intensely for the repasts of treasured thought.

> Look, Lucius, here 's the book I sought for so;
> I put it in the pocket of my gown. [IV, iii, 252, 253.]

What the man is, and where he ought to be, is all signified in these two lines. And do we not taste a dash of benignant irony in the implied repugnance between the spirit of the man and the stuff of his present undertaking? The idea of a bookworm riding the whirlwind of war! The thing is most like Brutus; but how out of his element, how unsphered from his right place, it shows him! There is a touch of drollery in the contrast, which the richest steeping of poetry does not disguise. And the irony is all the more delectable for being so remote and unpronounced; like one of those choice arrangements in the background of a painting, which, without attracting conscious notice, give a zest and relish to what stands in front. The scene, whether for charm of sentiment or felicity of conception, is one of the finest in Shakespeare.

Brutus and Cassius

The characters of Brutus and Cassius are nicely discriminated, scarce a word falling from either but what smacks of the man. Cassius is much the better conspirator, but much the worse man; and the better in that because the worse in this. For Brutus engages in the conspiracy on grounds of abstract and ideal justice; while Cassius holds it both a wrong and a blunder to go about such a thing without making success his first care. This, accordingly, is what he works for, being reckless of all other considerations in his choice and use of means. Withal he is more impulsive and quick than Brutus, because less under the self-discipline of moral principle. His motives, too, are of a much more mixed and various quality, because his habits of thinking and acting have grown by the measures of experience; he

studies to understand men as they are ; Brutus, as he thinks they ought to be. Hence, in every case where Brutus crosses him, Brutus is wrong, and he is right, — right, that is, if success be their aim. Cassius judges, and surely rightly, that the end should give law to the means ; and that "the honorable men whose daggers have stabb'd Cæsar" should not be hampered much with conscientious scruples.

Still Brutus overawes him by his moral energy and elevation of character, and by the open-faced rectitude and purity of his principles. Brutus has no thoughts or aims that he is afraid or ashamed to avow ; Cassius has many which he would fain hide even from himself. And he catches a sort of inspiration and is raised above himself by contact with Brutus. And Cassius, moreover, acts very much from personal hatred of Cæsar, as remembering how, not long before, he and Brutus had stood for the chief prætorship of the city, and Brutus through Cæsar's favor had got the election. And so Shakespeare read in Plutarch that "Cassius, being a choleric man, and hating Cæsar privately more than he did the tyranny openly, incensed Brutus against him." The effect of this is finely worked out by the dramatist in the man's affected scorn of Cæsar, and in the scoffing humor in which he loves to speak of him. For such is the natural language of a masked revenge.

The tone of Cassius is further indicated, and with exquisite art, in his soliloquy where, after tempering Brutus to his purpose, and finding how his "honorable metal may be wrought," he gently slurs him for being practicable to flatteries, and then proceeds to ruminate the scheme for working upon his vanity, and thereby drawing him into the conspiracy ; thus spilling the significant fact, that his own

honor does not stick to practice the arts by which he thinks it is a shame to be seduced.

It is a noteworthy point also that Cassius is too practical and too much of a politician to see any ghosts. Acting on far lower principles than his leader, and such as that leader would spurn as both wicked and base, he therefore does no violence to his heart in screwing it to the work he takes in hand ; his heart is even more at home in the work than his head ; whereas Brutus, from the wrenching his heart has suffered, keeps reverting to the moral complexion of his first step. The remembrance of this is a thorn in his side ; while Cassius has no sensibilities of nature for such compunctions to stick upon. Brutus is never thoroughly himself after the assassination ; that his heart is ill at ease is shown in a certain dogged tenacity of honor and overstraining of rectitude, as if he were struggling to make atonement with his conscience. The stab he gave Cæsar planted in his own upright and gentle nature a germ of remorse, which, gathering strength from every subsequent adversity, came to embody itself in imaginary sights and sounds ; the spirit of justice, made an ill angel to him by his own sense of wrong, hovering in the background of his after life, and haunting his solitary moments in the shape of Cæsar's ghost. And so it is well done, that he is made to see the "monstrous apparition" just after his heart has been pierced through with many sorrows at hearing of Portia's shocking death.

Portia

The delineation of Portia is completed in a few brief masterly strokes. Once seen, the portrait ever after lives an old and dear acquaintance of the reader's inner man.

Portia has strength enough to do and suffer for others, but very little for herself. As the daughter of Cato and the wife of Brutus, she has set in her eye a pattern of how she ought to think and act, being "so father'd and so husbanded"; but still her head floats merged over the ears in her heart; and it is only when affection speaks that her spirit is hushed into the listening which she would fain yield only to the speech of reason. She has a clear idea of the stoical calmness and fortitude which appears so noble and so graceful in her Brutus; it all lies faithfully reproduced in her mind; she knows well how to honor and admire it; yet she cannot work it into the texture of her character; she can talk it like a book, but she tries in vain to live it.

Plutarch gives one most touching incident respecting her which Shakespeare did not use, though he transfused the sense of it into his work. It occurred some time after Cæsar's death, and when the civil war was growing to a head: "Brutus, seeing the state of Rome would be utterly overthrown, went . . . unto the city of Elea standing by the sea. There Portia, being ready to depart from her husband Brutus and to return to Rome, did what she could to dissemble the grief and sorrow she felt at her heart. But a certain painted table (picture) bewrayed her in the end. . . . The device was taken out of the Greek stories, how Andromache accompanied her husband Hector when he went out of the city of Troy to go to the wars, and how Hector delivered her his little son, and how her eyes were never off him. Portia, seeing this picture, and likening herself to be in the same case, she fell a-weeping; and coming thither oftentimes in a day to see it, she wept still." The force of this incident is reproduced in the Portia of the play; we

have its full effect in the matter about her self-inflicted wound as compared with her subsequent demeanor.

Portia gives herself that gash without flinching, and bears it without a murmur, as an exercise and proof of fortitude; and she translates her pains into smiles, all to comfort and support her husband. So long as this purpose lends her strength, she is fully equal to her thought, because here her heart keeps touch perfectly with her head. But, this motive gone, the weakness, if it be not rather the strength, of her woman's nature rushes full upon her; her feelings rise into an uncontrollable flutter, and run out at every joint and motion of her body; and nothing can arrest the inward mutiny till affection again whispers her into composure, lest she say something that may hurt or endanger her Brutus.

Antony

Shakespeare's completed characterization of Antony is in *Antony and Cleopatra*. In the later play Antony is delineated with his native aptitudes for vice warmed into full development by the great Egyptian sorceress. In *Julius Cæsar* Shakespeare emphasizes as one of Antony's characteristic traits his unreserved adulation of Cæsar, shown in reckless purveying to his dangerous weakness, — the desire to be called a king. Already Cæsar had more than kingly power, and it was the obvious part of a friend to warn him against this ambition. Here and there are apt indications of his proneness to those vicious levities and debasing luxuries which afterwards ripened into such a gigantic profligacy. He has not yet attained to that rank and full-blown combination of cruelty, perfidy, and voluptuousness, which the world associates with his name, but he is plainly on the

way to it. His profound and wily dissimulation, while knitting up the hollow truce with the assassins on the very spot where "great Cæsar fell," is managed with admirable skill; his deep spasms of grief being worked out in just the right way to quench their suspicions, and make them run into the toils, when he calls on them to render him their bloody hands. Nor have they any right to complain, for he is but paying them in their own coin; and we think none the worse of him that he fairly outdoes them at their own practice.

But Antony's worst parts as here delivered are his exultant treachery in proposing to use his colleague Lepidus as at once the pack-horse and the scape-goat of the Triumvirate, and his remorseless savagery in arranging for the slaughter of all that was most illustrious in Rome, bartering away his own uncle, to glut his revenge with the blood of Cicero; though even here his revenge was less hideous than the cold-blooded policy of young Octavius. Yet Antony has in the play, as he had in fact, some right noble streaks in him; for his character was a very mixed one; and there was to the last a fierce war of good and evil within him. Especially he had an eye to see, a heart to feel, and a soul to honor the superb structure of manhood which Rome possessed in Julius Cæsar, who stood to him, indeed, as a kind of superior nature, to raise him above himself. He "fear'd Cæsar, honour'd him, and lov'd him"; and with the murdered Cæsar for his theme, he was for once inspired and kindled to a rapture of the truest, noblest, most overwhelming eloquence. Noteworthy also is the grateful remembrance at last of his obligations to Brutus for having saved him from the daggers of the conspirators.

The People

That many-headed, but withal big-souled creature, the multitude, is charmingly characterized in *Julius Cæsar*. The common people, it is true, are rather easily swayed hither and thither by the contagion of sympathy and of persuasive speech; yet their feelings are in the main right, and even their judgment in the long run is better than that of the pampered Roman aristocracy, inasmuch as it proceeds more from the instincts of manhood. Shakespeare evidently loved to play with the natural, unsophisticated, though somewhat childish heart of the people; but his playing is always genial and human-hearted, with a certain angelic humor in it that seldom fails to warm us towards the subject. On the whole, he understood the people well, and they have well repaid him in understanding him better than the critics have often done. The cobbler's droll humor, at the opening of this play, followed as it is by a strain of the loftiest poetry, is aptly noted by Campbell as showing that the dramatist, "even in dealing with classical subjects, laughed at the classic fear of putting the ludicrous and sublime into juxtaposition."

IX. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

As a whole, *Julius Cæsar* is inferior to *Coriolanus*, but it abounds in scenes and passages fraught with the highest virtue of Shakespeare's genius. Among these may be specially mentioned the second scene of the first act, where Cassius sows the seed of the conspiracy in Brutus's mind, warmed with such a wrappage of instigation as to assure its effective germination; also the first scene of the second

act, unfolding the birth of the conspiracy, and winding up with the interview, so charged with domestic glory, of Brutus and Portia. The oration of Antony in Cæsar's funeral is such an interfusion of art and passion as realizes the very perfection of its kind. Adapted at once to the comprehension of the lowest mind and to the delectation of the highest, and running its pathos into the very quick of them that hear it, it tells with terrible effect on the people; and when it is done we feel that Cæsar's bleeding wounds are mightier than ever his genius and fortune were. The quarrel of Brutus and Cassius is deservedly celebrated. Dr. Johnson thought it "somewhat cold and unaffecting." Coleridge thought otherwise. See note, p. 123. But there is nothing in the play that is more divinely touched than the brief scene, already noticed, of Brutus and his boy Lucius — so gentle, so dutiful, so loving, so thoughtful and careful for his master, and yet himself no more conscious of his virtue than a flower of its fragrance. There is no more exquisite passage in all Shakespeare than that which tells of the boy's falling asleep in the midst of his song and exclaiming on being aroused, "The strings, my lord, are false."

AUTHORITIES

(With the more important abbreviations used in the notes)

F_1 = First Folio, 1623.
F_2 = Second Folio, 1632.
F_3 = Third Folio, 1664.
F_4 = Fourth Folio, 1685.
Ff = all the seventeenth century Folios.
Rowe = Rowe's editions, 1709, 1714.
Pope = Pope's editions, 1723, 1728.
Theobald = Theobald's editions, 1733, 1740.
Johnson = Johnson's edition, 1765.
Capell = Capell's edition, 1768.
Malone = Malone's edition, 1790.
Steevens = Steevens's edition, 1793.
Globe = Globe edition (Clark and Wright), 1864.
Clar = Clarendon Press edition (W. A. Wright), 1869.
Dyce = Dyce's (third) edition, 1875.
Delius = Delius's (fifth) edition, 1882.
Camb = Cambridge (third) edition (W. A. Wright), 1891.
Abbott = E. A. Abbott's *A Shakespearian Grammar*.
Schmidt = Schmidt's *Shakespeare Lexicon*.
Skeat = Skeat's *An Etymological Dictionary*.
Murray = *A New English Dictionary* (*The Oxford Dictionary*).
Century = *The Century Dictionary*.
Plutarch = North's *Plutarch*, 1579.