

CHAPTER XIII.

ASSASSINATION OF CÆSAR.

FROM 44 B. C. TO 42 B. C.

BRUTUS AND CASSIUS.—THE CONSPIRACY.—THE SCENE OF ASSASSINATION.—CONDUCT OF THE CONSPIRATORS.—INDIGNATION OF THE PEOPLE.—FLIGHT OF THE CONSPIRATORS FROM ROME.—MEASURES OF MARC ANTONY.—CAIUS OCTAVIUS.—INTERVIEW WITH CICERO.—COLLISION WITH ANTONY.—RALLYING OF THE ARISTOCRATS.—CIVIL WAR.—FALSE POSITION OF OCTAVIUS.—PHILIPPICS OF CICERO.—DEFEAT OF ANTONY.—ESCAPE BEYOND THE ALPS.—OCTAVIUS CÆSAR'S MARCH UPON ROME.—TRIUMPH OF THE PLEBEIAN CAUSE.—THE NATURE OF THE CONFLICT.

THERE was at this time in Rome a man of much distinction, both in rank and achievements, named Marcus Junius Brutus. He was a nephew of Cato, and had been a warm partisan of Pompey, fighting in his ranks at Pharsalia. In that disastrous battle he was taken prisoner, and receiving his life from the clemency of Cæsar, entered into his service. The government of Cisalpine Gaul was conferred upon him, and he administered the affairs of the province, under the direction of Cæsar, with so much wisdom and justice, notwithstanding many great blemishes in his personal character, as to reflect much honor upon Cæsar's government. The mother of Brutus, who was Cato's sister, is said to have been once the object of Cæsar's most tender affection, and hence Cæsar was disposed to confer upon Brutus, her son, every favor. Wantonly, Brutus had divorced his first wife Appia, and married Porcia, Cato's daughter, and his own cousin. This Brutus conceived the plan of striking a dagger into the heart of the benefactor who had spared his life, and who was still loading him with benefits.

Caius Cassius was another of Pompey's generals, who

after the battle of Pharsalia had surrendered to Cæsar, and had been generously received into his service. From a boy he had been remarkable for the impetuosity of his character and the violence of his temper. Cicero says that, even at the moment of his surrender to Cæsar, he intended to assassinate his benefactor, and would have done so had not an accident prevented. Cæsar had constituted this treacherous man one of his lieutenants. Cassius was the intimate friend of Brutus, having married his sister.

The conspiracy, for the assassination of Cæsar, originated in the bosom of Cassius. He enlisted the coöperation of Brutus, and a large number of others were soon involved in the plot. Cassius, who was an earnest republican, probably hoped to introduce democratic sway. But Brutus, with strong patrician prejudices, hoped to bring the aristocracy again into power. The death of Cæsar was essential to either of these plans. Not a word of extenuation can be offered in favor of Brutus and Cassius, both of whom had accepted honors and office from him whom they were conspiring to assassinate. The whole number of the conspirators is said to have amounted to sixty. Their first intention was, to strike Cæsar down when passing unguarded through the streets, or to inflict the blow, when presiding in the Campus Martius over the elections of magistrates.

Cæsar, having issued an order for the senate to convene on the fifteenth of March, then called the Ides of March, and there being a rumor that on this day the title of king was to be conferred on him by his partisans in the senate, the conspirators, many of whom were senators, fixed upon that occasion as the hour for the accomplishment of their plan. On the evening of the fourteenth, Cæsar supped with Lepidus, his master of horse. The conversation, at the table, was turned to the question, "What kind of death is the most to be desired." Cæsar, who was writing at the time, had his attention arrested by it, and exclaimed, looking up from his

paper, "The most sudden death is the most desirable." It is said that he had received frequent warnings to beware of the Ides of March. Various incidents had so wrought upon the mind of his wife, exciting her alarm, that she passed the night preceding his assassination in feverish dreams, which so excited her imagination, that in the morning she entreated her husband not to leave the house that day. Cæsar himself was not well that morning, and, yielding to the fears of his wife Calpurnia, he remained at home until the senate was assembled.

One of the conspirators, Decimus Brutus, apprehensive, from the delay, that Cæsar had received some intimation of the plot, and might not attend the meeting of the senate, visited him and urged his attendance. At eleven o'clock in the morning, Cæsar, accompanied by Decimus Brutus, and others of the conspirators, set out for the senate-house. On his way, a friend, whose suspicions had been aroused, approached him, and placed in his hands a paper, containing a written statement of his suspicions, which he begged him to read immediately. Cæsar, holding the paper in his hand, and pressed by the crowd, passed along, in conversation with his friends, until he entered the senate-house. Marc Antony, the devoted friend of Cæsar, and his colleague in the consulship, was detained at the door by Trebonius, one of the conspirators, that he might not render Cæsar any aid. Some of the conspirators had wished that Antony should be slain also, but Junius Brutus objected to it as needless.

All the senators rose to greet Cæsar when he entered the senatorial chamber. As he ascended to his magnificent chair of state, the conspirators contrived to gather around him as his immediate train. The chair was placed near the pedestal of a statue of Pompey the Great, which Cæsar had characteristically permitted to remain as the chief ornament of the senate-chamber—a building which Pompey had reared. It was observed that Cassius looked imploringly to that statue as

if invoking the spirit of Pompey to aid him in his murderous deed.

As Cæsar took his seat, surrounded by the conspirators, one of them, L. Cimber, approached as if to offer him a petition. His accomplices pressed near as if to support him in his request. Cimber suddenly seized Cæsar by his robe. It was the signal for the attack. Many daggers were instantly gleaming in the air, and Cæsar was pierced by many wounds. The victim made frantic endeavors to brush his assailants away, and the confusion was so great that many of the assassins were wounded by each other's daggers. Cæsar, seeing Brutus among his murderers, seemed to surrender himself to despair, as he exclaimed, "And you too, Brutus!" Then, with dignity, covering his face with his mantle, he fell, pierced by twenty-three wounds. It seemed that each one of the conspirators wished to avoid striking the *fatal* blow, for of the twenty-three wounds he received, but one was mortal.

The scene of consternation and confusion in the senate can not be described, as that numerous and august body witnessed this murderous act. The deed was so rapid in its accomplishment that there could be no rescue. Brutus, brandishing his dagger, dripping with blood, in the air, called upon Cicero, congratulating him that his country was delivered from a tyrant. The senate immediately dispersed in terror, the friends of Cæsar flying for their lives, expecting that they also were marked out for death. The conspirators, keeping in a body for mutual protection, repaired to the forum, where they addressed the crowd who gathered around them, and in earnest harangues endeavored to defend their deed. Protected by a band of gladiators, they then went into the capitol, where they took refuge for the night, accompanied and sustained by a number of the nobles.

The dismay throughout all Rome was such, that the body of Cæsar remained for several hours in the spot where it fell

At length three of his slaves placed the body on a litter and carried it to his home. They were so agitated that, as they bore the mutilated corpse through the streets, the arm of Cæsar, blood-stained, hung down, the hand at times sweeping the pavement; a piteous and revolting spectacle.

The morning of the sixteenth of March found Brutus and Cassius, with their accomplices, in the capitol, which was a citadel on the Capitoline hill. Many of the aristocratic party had joined them, with their sympathy or their congratulations, and among the rest was Cicero. The aristocracy expected the immediate restoration of the old regime, which had been crushed with Pompey at Pharsalia, which was to the ancient nobility of Rome what Waterloo was subsequently to the popular party in France. Dolabella, who had been in high authority under Cæsar, seems to have hoped to place himself at the head of the radical democratic party—the mob—and sustained by them to grasp the supreme power. He immediately assumed the consular dignity, inveighed bitterly against his murdered benefactor as a tyrant, and attempted to conciliate the assassins by visiting them in a friendly way in their retreat. But Antony and Lepidus rallied the more conservative masses of the people, who had ever regarded Cæsar as their peculiar representative.

The veteran soldiers of Cæsar, many of whom were then in Rome; most of the magistrates who had been appointed by Cæsar; the foreigners who had been admitted to the rights of citizenship, and a large part of the industrial and moneyed classes, were all disposed to support the government as organized by Cæsar. Cicero, we regret to say, must be regarded as a participator in the crime of Cæsar's assassination; for he joined the murderers that very night, and counseled them as to the steps next to be pursued. The assassination of Cæsar was regarded as securing the "restoration" of the Roman "Bourbons."

Marc Antony and Lepidus, as soon as they had recovered

from their consternation, rallied the friends of Cæsar, to wage determined warfare against the reëstablishment "of that exclusive and insulting system which was upheld by the friends of the old aristocracy."* It now seemed that the murder could only introduce a civil war, from which there could be no refuge but in another dictator. Cicero urged the leaders of the assassins, Cassius and Brutus, immediately to summon the senate, and grasp all the reins of government while the people were bewildered by the panic. But Marc Antony anticipated them, and, in his character of consul, legally convened the senate on the seventeenth of March. Cæsar's veteran soldiers sprang to arms and surrounded the capitol where the conspirators were assembled, menacing them with death should they emerge from their retreat. Cæsar's widow, Calpurnia, placed, in the hands of Antony, Cæsar's will. Its contents were immediately announced to the people, and its generous provisions roused their enthusiasm to the highest pitch.

By this will, Caius Octavius, then a young man of eighteen, was declared the heir of Cæsar's property, and was adopted into his family to assume his name. Several of the conspirators were appointed his guardians while he should remain under age, so little did Cæsar suspect their treachery. He bequeathed his beautiful gardens upon the Tiber to the Roman people; and to every citizen a sum of money amounting to about twelve dollars. The vast population of Rome, roused by this remarkable proof of the attachment of their illustrious advocate, burned with the desire to avenge his death. All opposition to the good name of Cæsar, was swept away by the breath of their indignation.

His friends in the senate were animated by the public tide flowing so strongly in his favor. They immediately voted him the most imposing funeral honors at the public expense. Marc

* Thomas Arnold.

Antony was appointed to deliver his eulogy. All his administrative acts were confirmed, his appointments to office were declared to be valid, and all the grants of land he had made were pronounced inviolable. The assassins were, however, so powerful in rank and influence, and the peril of civil war so great, and its issue so uncertain, and yet so indubitably promotive of national ruin and woe in its progress, that the two parties agreed to a truce, which was effected by the advice and through the influence of Cicero.

The conspirators assented to the continued ascendancy of the popular party, and that party decreed to consign to everlasting oblivion the crime of the Ides of March, and promised never to call any of the participators in it to account for their conduct. This adjustment was considered so satisfactory that we are informed, Brutus and Cassius on that same evening, supped with Marc Antony and his friends.

The funeral of Cæsar was conducted on a scale of magnificence such as had, perhaps, never been witnessed before. The body was conveyed through the streets on a bier of ivory, decorated with scarlet and gold. At the head of the procession was borne the dress in which Cæsar was assassinated. The funeral pile, upon which the body was to be consumed, was reared in the Campus Martius, and a model of the temple of Venus was constructed to hold the remains while the funeral oration was delivered. The oration of Antony was brief, but very effective. The decrees, with which the senate had awarded to Cæsar extraordinary honors and powers in requital for his extraordinary services, were publicly read, and also the oath which the senate, including the assassins, had taken to defend his person. The few words which Antony added, so vividly recalled the brilliant achievements of Cæsar and his devotion to the popular cause, that the ardor of the people in favor of Cæsar, and their indignation against the assassins, was roused beyond all bounds.

A clamor arose as to the place where the body should be

burned, all being anxious to name the most honorable locality in the city. Some named the senate-house, others the temple of Jupiter. In the midst of the confusion, two of the veteran soldiers of Cæsar stepped forward and set fire to the bier upon which the body lay enwrapped in thick and gorgeous drapery. An unparalleled scene of enthusiasm then ensued. The ladies rushed forward and threw upon the flames their scarfs and mantles. The soldiers crowded to the bier and cast upon the pile their javelins and war clubs. The populace broke into the neighboring houses and temples, smashed chairs, tables, altars, and heaped the fragments upon the pyre. Dense volumes of smoke arose as from a volcano, and the crackling of the flames drowned the murmurs of the multitude.

The passions of the populace were now roused, and notwithstanding the decree of amnesty passed by the senate, they demanded vengeance upon the murderers of Cæsar. Earth has never heard a sound more appalling than the roar of an infuriate mob sweeping the streets. With the rush of the tornado the frenzied masses, raising cries which sent terror to all hearts, assailed the dwellings of Brutus and Cassius, but the senate had adopted the precaution of placing troops in defense of these dwellings, and the unarmed mob were repelled. Turning away they encountered an innocent man, whom they mistook for Cinna, one of the enemies of Cæsar. His doom was sealed. As well might one appeal to the reason of famished wolves, as to the passions of an infuriated mob. They fell upon the innocent, helpless stranger, beat him to the ground with their clubs, cut off his head, and paraded it through the streets on a pike.

For many days these tumults continued. The populace erected to the memory of their benefactor a marble statue, in the forum, twenty feet high, and upon it inscribed the words, "To the Father of his Country." An altar was reared by the side of this statue, on which, for a long time, sacrifices were offered to Cæsar as if he were a god. Every day tumultuous

groups assembled around this column, until at length, by the strong arm of the law, these acts of violence were quelled.

A man by the name of Amatius, who was to Rome what Marat was subsequently to Paris, placed himself at the head of the mob, and formed a conspiracy for the assassination of all the principal senators of the aristocratical party. But Antony, the consul, was by no means disposed to tolerate the reign of the mob. Amatius was arrested, tried, condemned, executed, and his body was ignominiously dragged by a hook through the streets of Rome, and thrown into the Tiber. Still the hearts of the people burned to avenge the murder of Cæsar. There was an instinct of justice which declared that such a crime must not go unpunished. These indications so alarmed the conspirators and rendered their residence in Rome so uncomfortable, that they deemed it expedient to retire, for a time, from the city.

They all left Rome, some seeking refuge in their country-seats, and others in distant provinces. Marc Antony was thus enabled gradually to assume dictatorial power. Having Cæsar's will in his possession, and being regarded by the people as his successor and the representative of his political views, he had but to announce a decree as recommended in Cæsar's will, to secure its immediate enforcement. Cicero says that Antony forged grants to states and individuals, which he pretended to have found among the papers of Cæsar, and which he sold to such advantage, that he raised in less than a fortnight, a sum of money exceeding a million and a half of dollars. He took a tour of the neighboring states, and bound to his service by oath Cæsar's veteran generals.

The young Octavius was at this time in Apollonia, in Greece, pursuing his studies. He had long been regarded as Cæsar's probable heir, and had consequently received very flattering attentions. As soon as the tidings reached Apollonia, on the assassination of Cæsar, the military officers in the vicinity crowded around him, and urged him to avenge the

murder of his uncle, assuring him of the coöperation of all the troops under their command. Octavius, not knowing the strength of the foes he might have to encounter, deemed it expedient to move with caution, and consequently hastened privately to Rome. He did not ascertain the particulars of the assassination until he reached Brundisium; where he was also informed that he was declared Cæsar's heir and his adopted son.

Octavius immediately assumed the name of Cæsar; and, as he advanced from Brundisium to Rome, his partisans rallied, from all quarters, around him. On his way he stopped at Puteoli to visit his father and mother. Cicero's villa was at this place, and Octavius, anxious to secure the support of the illustrious orator called to see him. Cicero received him with great politeness, but studiously refrained from calling him *Cæsar*. Octavius hastened to the capital, and at once sought an interview with Antony. But Antony, now in the height of his power, as the executor of Cæsar's will, was not at all disposed to resign the scepter to Octavius. Indignant at the repulse he encountered from Antony, who had very artfully ingratiated himself into the popular favor and felt secure of the people's support, he turned to the aristocratic party, seeking to court their favor in the strife against Antony, in which it was evident that he must now engage.

Indeed, the aristocratic party was at this time gaining ground. Decimus Brutus, one of the assassins, had been appointed by Cæsar, in his unsuspecting confidence, to the command of Cisalpine Gaul. He was now there, rapidly organizing an army; and by the plunder of neighboring tribes, he was obtaining wealth, which he lavished upon his soldiers, to secure their support. Sextus, the youngest son of Pompey, whom we have before mentioned as having secured an unmolested retreat among the fastnesses of the Pyrenees, was gathering the fragments of the old aristocratical party in Spain, that with these forces he might join Decimus Brutus.

Junius Brutus and Cassius, exiles from Rome through fear

of popular violence, were secretly plotting with the members of the aristocratic party to cooperate with the generals in Gaul and Spain to reestablish patrician ascendancy. In Asia, in Syria, and in Galatia movements were already on foot for the accomplishment of this end. It was the old struggle between the *outs* and the *ins*. Antony and Dolabella, Cicero's son-in-law, were now at the head of affairs at Rome. A meeting of the senate was convened in June. Cicero says that Antony stationed soldiers along all the avenues leading to the forum, who prevented any senators from attending the meeting but those who would act in accordance with his wishes. Three laws were passed which were very popular. The aristocracy condemned these laws severely, and said that they were enacted merely to court favor with the mob. By one of these laws the lands belonging to the national domain were to be distributed to settlers. Another decree admitted even plebeians, who had attained the rank of centurions, to be eligible to the judicial power—a law exceedingly offensive to the nobles, but which modern civilization will certainly commend. "The third and worst" measure, in the judgment of aristocratic privilege, was a decree which allowed men, condemned for any state offense, to appeal to the people.

By the verdict of republicanism, these decrees would all probably be pronounced salutary measures of reform. The patricians made such endeavors to embarrass the execution of these laws, that Antony entered the senate escorted by an armed force, that he might repel any violence which should be attempted. Antony was now all powerful in the senate and in Rome, and the conspirators did not dare to leave their retirement and show themselves in the capital. Brutus and Cassius were untiring in their plots to regain that power for which they had imbrued their hands in the blood of assassination. They were preparing to leave Italy and to rally around them provincial armies, with which they hoped to march triumphantly upon Rome.

Elated with their prospects, they issued a proclamation, which Marc Antony professed to regard as a declaration of war. Cicero, with his characteristic vacillation, was in communication with both parties, though he did not cordially espouse the cause of either. While affairs were in this menacing attitude, and the cloud of civil war was gathering blackness, the young Octavius Cæsar, almost unobserved, was creating and concentrating powerful influences of support. Some victories of Sextus Pompey in Spain so animated Cicero, that he at length consented to allow himself to be placed at the head of the aristocratic party, and to consecrate all his energies to the restoration of the old patrician regime. With this object in view he repaired to Rome, where he arrived on the thirty-first of August. Cicero himself has given an account of this enterprise.

The day after his arrival he attended a meeting of the senate. Antony chanced to be absent. Cicero, perhaps emboldened by the absence of Antony, pronounced his well-known oration called his First Philippic. Cautiously, in temperate phrase, but very sagaciously and powerfully, he assailed the measures of Antony's administration. Antony was much exasperated, and soon replied in a speech in which he accused Cicero of being an accomplice in the assassination of Cæsar. This charge Cicero could not successfully repel. He was, indeed, afraid to attend the meeting of the senate when Antony replied, lest that reply should rouse the senate to acts of personal violence upon himself.

Cicero prepared a reply, called the Second Philippic, which is read to the present day with admiration, but which he feared to enter the senate to deliver. The speech was written, not spoken. Cicero sent it at first to his friend Atticus, with the earnest injunction that he should not let it be seen by any of the friends of Antony. This visit discouraged Cicero, and he retired again, the weak, eloquent, scholarly man, to the shrubbery and flowers of his villa.