

JULIUS CÆSAR  
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## JULIUS CÆSAR

IT was a bright March morning in Rome, and the whole city was alive with excitement, not only because it was the day of the Lupercalia, but because Cæsar was approaching, and might re-enter the city at any moment for his triumph after the defeat of Sextus Pompeius. But amid the common joy there were misgivings and reluctances. The victory had been gained, not over a foreign foe, but over a Roman general whose father in his time had deserved as well of the republic and been as dear an idol of the people as Cæsar now; and, moreover, with all his rivals shattered, to what heights of domination might Cæsar not aspire, threatening the cherished liberties of the State? Two of the Tribunes, who were of this mind, were driving the thoughtless holiday crowds off the streets, and tearing down the wreaths from the images of the Gods.

But Cæsar came, and conquered. Not a voice was raised against him as he passed through the cheering multitudes, with his wife Calpurnia and his two dearest friends, Mark Antony, the hand-

some, high-spirited man of fashion and dissipation, and Brutus, the model Roman, lofty-minded, civic, abstemious—so wide was the range of Cæsar's sympathies and appreciations. Antony was stripped for the Lupercal Race, the runners in which were supposed to have the power of making barren women fruitful by their touch; and Cæsar, who needed an heir, enjoined him to touch Calpurnia as he ran. He darted off, and as the trumpets blared an ominous voice was heard amidst the din, *Beware the Ides of March!*

The music was stopped, and the speaker summoned. He was a Soothsayer, and in the silence, looking Cæsar in the face, he repeated the warning. "He is a dreamer," said Cæsar; "let us leave him"; and the procession moved on.

Brutus lagged behind, and his friend Cassius stayed with him to seek his confidence. These two men were alike, but with a difference. Both were patricians, and to both it was the necessary law of Nature, and their prime instinct and tenet, that a Roman noble was the crown and flower of the earth; to both it was abhorrent and abominable that one of their number should climb above the rest and make them subject. But Cassius, with an observant and penetrating mind, was a bundle of nerves, without poise or self-control;

capable of generosity, but self-centred ; his pride of class was jealous, a matter of *amour propre*. Brutus, less quick-sighted, was saner and more stolid : he too had pride, in the form of an insistent sense of personal honour : he had more breadth and bigness of nature, and a vigilant concern for the general interest ; the dignity of his comparative disinterestedness gave him an ascendancy over his fellows. Both had brooded in secret over Cæsar's rise to power, and now Cassius came out into the open, and tried to drag Brutus along with him.

Cæsar, he said, was no demigod, no superman ; his armour was all joints. He had challenged Cassius to swim an icy river in winter, and half-way across had given over and cried for help. It was intolerable that a being so weak, so flawed, should bestride the world like a Colossus, while Brutus and Cassius and their peers crept about under his huge legs in awe.

Brutus maintained his reserve. He was deeply moved—so much was plain ; but he would not commit himself, and it was only at the end that he owned, with an outburst of feeling, that he would rather be a peasant than a son of Rome under the conditions that the future seemed to threaten.

Three times their colloquy was punctuated by

the sound of shouting from the unseen multitude surrounding Cæsar. What did it portend? . . .

But now the procession reappeared, Cæsar with a red spot of anger on his cheek, Calpurnia pale and anxious, their followers with a look of hang-dog embarrassment. Cæsar's eye fell on Cassius, and he whispered to Antony his dislike of that lean body and hungry face, betokening a discontented and aggressive nature. "Let me have fat men about me," he said, "and such as sleep o' nights." Then he passed on.

Brutus and Cassius signed to their friend Casca to stay and tell them what had happened. He too was a malcontent, and a shrewd and bold one; but he had made himself a mask of bluff simplicity and shallowness, turning everything to jest. He now gave a comic description of the scene which had just taken place, how Antony had thrice offered Cæsar a sort of crown, or was it a coronet? how Cæsar, looking as if he would like to take it, waved it aside, and the mob shouted their approval; how the more he seemed to covet it, the more delight they showed when he refused it, till in the end he fell to the ground in a faint, as if poisoned by the stench of their huzzas. When he came to, he made a melodramatic speech, excusing his infirmity and offering his bare throat to any who thought he deserved to die—if Casca hadn't

been a gentleman he would have taken him at his word ! Then he had departed in his chagrin, amid an ovation. The story told, the three friends went their ways.

That night there was a prodigious thunder-storm, and earth and air were filled with portents of disaster, flame dropping from the sky, men all on fire, gliding ghosts, and lions glaring through the streets. Cassius and Casca met under the lightning and the rain, and in strange excitement discussed the meaning of these signs and wonders. Casca had heard that the Senate were resolved next day to offer Cæsar a crown.

As Cassius was opening to Casca his plot for murdering Cæsar, they were joined by a fellow-noble, Cinna, who was already in the conspiracy, and all three agreed on the prime necessity of securing the leadership of Brutus, whose high and unique repute could alone set the seal of patriotism and virtue on assassination. Cassius spoke of his hopes in this respect, and the trio set off for a midnight meeting of the band.

Meantime, Brutus had shut himself up for meditation, and his thoughts had travelled fast and far. His instinct told him that Rome must be rid of Cæsar ; but instinct was not enough, it must be backed by reasons ; and reasons were to seek. Cæsar was his dearest friend, and had

given him no cause for personal resentment ; and even if he gained supreme power, what proof was there that he would abuse it ? . . . But if arguments for the course Brutus was inwardly bent on did not exist, they must be forged ; he gave his mind a violent twist. Ambition, he told himself, inevitably grew with what it fed on ; Cæsar must not be allowed even the chance of going wrong, the seed of potential tyranny must be killed outright, like a serpent in the egg. One could hear the sigh of relief and release with which he finally persuaded himself to acquiesce in this sophistry.

Just then his page-boy, Lucius, entered with a paper that had been thrown in at the window. *Brutus*, it read, *thou sleep'st ; awake !* Well, he was awake now. His ancestors had driven Tarquin from Rome, and he would be worthy of them.

There was a knock on the door, Cassius was without, with five others, their faces muffled, their hoods shrouding their eyes. Brutus felt a momentary revulsion from these methods of secrecy and darkness, but he put it aside. Cassius presented his followers, Casca, Cinna, Decius Brutus, Metellus Cimber, Trebonius.

Then Cassius broached the question of Antony ; should he not also be made away with ? For

Cassius had taken his measure, and divined the resolution, the capacity, the resource which lurked in his pleasure-addicted nature. But Brutus brushed the suggestion aside; they were sacrificers, not butchers, and must be delicate in their violence; besides, Antony was negligible, a trifler, a butterfly; there was nothing to be feared from him. And what Brutus said ruled; Cassius drew in his horns. But his questing mind had collected another doubt; Cæsar had lately grown superstitious, and what with the storm and the portents of that night there was plenty to be superstitious about. What if he would not go to the Capitol at all? But here Decius Brutus was resssuring; he knew the great man's foibles and how to play upon them—he would bring him to the Capitol, never fear. So they made their rendezvous for the eighth hour at Cæsar's house, and Brutus was left once more alone.

His wife Portia had been waiting for her opportunity. Brutus had suddenly become unlike himself, nervous, irritable, impatient; what was it he had on his mind? She had a right to be told. Brutus hung back, and as she urged on him that she was no mere ordinary woman, but Cato's daughter and Brutus's wife, stronger than her sex—had she not, to prove her constancy, wounded herself in the thigh and not cried out?—



there was another knock at the door, and promising that by and by he would tell her everything, he sent her away and received the visitor. It was an aged senator, Ligarius, who had dragged himself from his sick-bed on getting wind of the conspiracy, and came with vigour renewed to offer his help.

The fateful Ides of March had dawned. Cæsar was making ready for the Capitol when Calpurnia came to him, imploring him to stay at home. She had heard of the strange events of the night, the lioness that had whelped in the streets, graves yielding up their dead, armies rushing to battle in the clouds; and the danger that these things foreboded pointed at Cæsar—no one else was worth such warning from heaven.

Cæsar maintained his magnificent calm. Cowards, he said, die many times before their deaths; and seeing that death was a necessary end, which would come when it would, he could never understand how men could fear. A servant came in with the report of the augurs—all the omens were as bad as could be. Cæsar was still unmoved, but Calpurnia's entreaties became so passionate and so touching that he had just promised for her sake not to go, when Decius Brutus entered, and in fulfilment of his assurance

to Cassius, played so skilfully on his vanity and fear of ridicule that in a few moments Cæsar was putting on his robe. Now the rest of the band appeared, followed by Antony; and with this grim escort of eight betrayers and one faithful friend, without word to the unhappy Calpurnia, Julius Cæsar set forth on his last journey to the Capitol of Rome.

Meanwhile, Portia, left at home, was driven nearly mad with apprehension. Brutus had told her everything, and the secret was almost more than she could hold. At all costs she must keep her self-control. Was there nothing that she could do? She could send the boy Lucius to the Capitol. What was he to do when he got there? Nothing—only see how Brutus looked, and come back to tell her. She paced up and down in terror and anguish; and all the while Cæsar was marching to his fate.

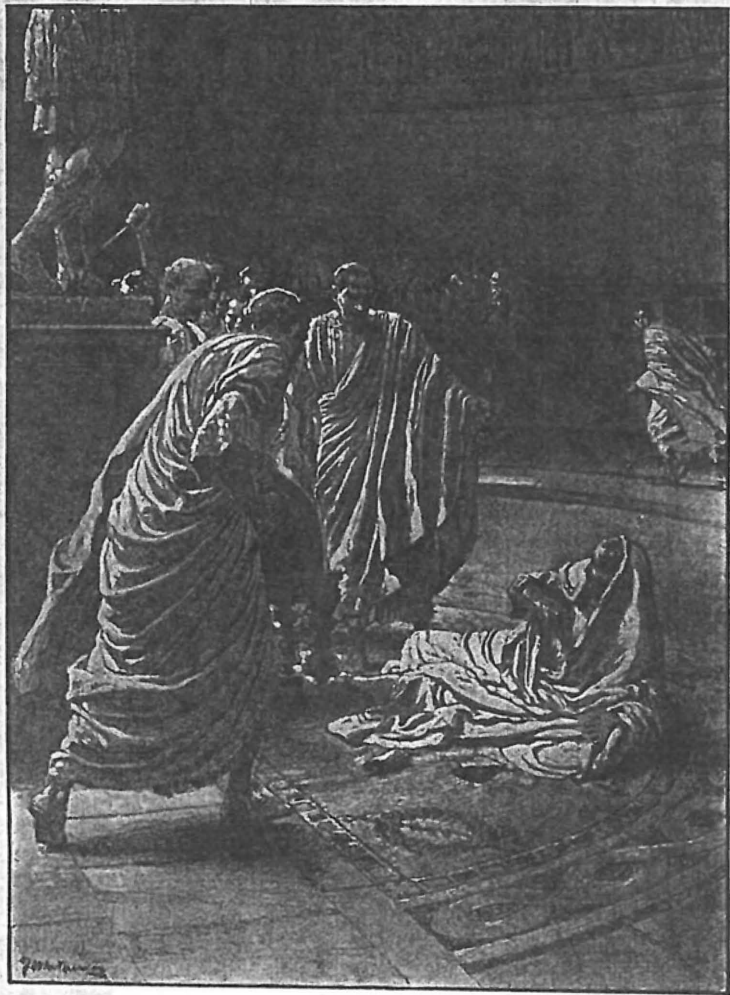
He was to have two more warnings. A Greek sophist, Artemidorus by name, who had by some means learnt the names of the plotters and their intentions, thrust a paper into his hand on the very steps of the Senate House, imploring him to read it on the instant; but the adroit Decius smothered it with another petition, and the sophist's paper went unread. And as he passed through the door Cæsar's eye fell on the

Soothsayer of the Lupercalia. "The Ides of March are come," he said. "Ay, Cæsar, but not gone," was the reply.

The master of the world took his place under the statue of his old friend and enemy and victim, Pompey, surrounded by the main body of Senators, while the little company of conspirators, full of fears and misgivings, but resolute, formed a cluster before his seat. Trebonius had made an excuse to lead Antony away, and now all was ready. The first step had been assigned to Metellus Cimber, who knelt at Cæsar's feet and asked for the recall of his brother Publius from banishment. Cæsar would not hear. The sentence was merited, and unless he were satisfied that it was not, neither for fear nor favour would he rescind it.

One by one the others fell on their knees to implore pardon for the exile, but Cæsar was inexorable.

" . . . But I am constant as the northern star,  
Of whose true-fix'd and resting quality  
There is no fellow in the firmament.  
The skies are painted with unnumber'd sparks,  
They are all fire and every one doth shine,  
But there's but one in all doth hold his place:  
So, in the world; 'tis furnished well with men,  
And men are flesh and blood, and apprehensive;  
Yet in the number I do know but one



That unassailable holds on his rank,  
Unshak'd of motion; and that I am he,  
Let me a little show it, even in this,  
That I was constant Cimber should be banish'd  
And constant do remain to keep him so. . . ."

This was his death-chant. And as he spoke his last words of magnificent self-assertion, Casca struck the first blow. The others followed in turn, Brutus last of all: then the great spirit broke. "Thou, too, Brutus!" he cried. "Then fall, Cæsar!" and so saying he died.

The murderers raised a great shout of "Liberty!" and as Brutus essayed to calm the stunned and terrified Senators, Trebonius rushed back with reports from without. Antony had fled to his house, the city was in amazement and turmoil, men, women, and children staring witlessly, or running about and crying aloud as though Doomsday had come. It was no time for consultation—Brutus summoned his men to smear their swords and dip their arms up to the elbows in Cæsar's blood, and thus adorned to go among the people proclaiming Peace and Freedom. If the fastidious Brutus was carried to these excesses, what of the unbalanced and exalted Cassius? Bathing his hands in the wounds, he gloated on the fame that would glorify their deed through all

the centuries, "in states unborn, and accents yet unknown."

As they thronged to the door, a servant of Antony's appeared with his master's compliments and congratulations, and offers of service and allegiance. Brutus, in his now convinced and unassailable self-satisfaction, conceived that nothing could be more natural and proper, and returned a bland message of appreciation; but Cassius, whose shrewdness had not entirely deserted him, had his doubts. But now, hot on his messenger's heels, came Antony himself.

There was a change in him, for under the traces of dissipation in his face a new seriousness and dignity were visible. At the shock of seeing the dead body he forgot his part for a moment, and his first words were a rush of pity and horror; but he mastered himself at once, and turned to Brutus and the others with an excuse for his natural emotion in which a tinge of irony was nicely hidden. If he too was to die, no time was fitter than Cæsar's death-hour, and from no hands could death be so acceptable as from those of the choice and master spirits of the age who had just enriched their swords with the noblest blood in the world.

Brutus was all deprecation. Kill Antony, indeed! Nothing was further from their minds.

It would be the work of a moment to convince him of their excellent motives and intentions, and then he should be received into their brotherhood with all love and regard. Cassius chimed in characteristically with the bribe of an equal part in the distribution of dignities. Complete accord was now established, and under the slight reserve that at the first leisure moment Brutus was to indoctrinate him in the justification of tyrannicide, Antony swore fellowship, and placed his hand in those blood-smeared hands, one by one. But as he did so his eye fell again on the dead body, and he was once more carried away in an outpouring of passionate tenderness. Cassius pulled him up: was he in earnest about the compact he had sworn? He was—indeed he was! And he had only one small request to make, for leave to speak to the people in the course of the funeral. Brutus at once consented, but Cassius's suspicions were all alive again, and in an urgent whisper he pointed out the danger. Brutus, "conscious of highest worth," pooh-poohed him. *He* would have spoken first, and made clear to the Romans beyond the possibility of misunderstanding, the necessity of Cæsar's death. After that, what harm could Antony do? No, no, let him speak by all means, provided, of course, he confined himself to praising Cæsar and cast no aspersions on his slayers.

Antony was left alone to take leave of his dead friend, and now there was no constraint upon him. "O! pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth. . . ." As he finished, there entered a servant of Cæsar's nephew Octavius, who was returning to Italy at his uncle's summons. He began to give his master's messages, when catching sight of the body he broke off, and wept. Antony felt his own tears rising, and was gentle with the boy. Octavius, it seemed, was seven leagues from Rome, and Antony's first thought was to send him a warning to come no nearer; but no—better let the messenger wait, and see what came of the funeral orations!

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Now the day was come, and crowds followed Brutus to the Forum to hear the speech which was to satisfy all consciences and start the new *régime* on its sober and salutary course.

It was an admirable statement, with Honour for its keynote. Cæsar was a great, a valiant, a fortunate man, and no one had loved him better than Brutus; but he had one fatal fault, Ambition; and for this, there were no two ways about it, he had to be destroyed. Was any man present who was so base that he would be a slave, so rude that he would not be a Roman, so vile that he would not love his country? If so, "let him speak;



for him I have offended." Brutus (the greatest of a long line of orators) "paused for a reply." But none came: his words had carried conviction.

Now Antony appeared, with Cæsar's body on a bier; and Brutus, silencing the applause for his own speech, generously commended him to a patient hearing. Antony had his full permission to praise Cæsar; and entreating that no one would leave till Antony had spoken, he departed with all the grace in the world, leaving a clear field to his subtle and dangerous rival. Amid the subsiding murmurs of assent to what Brutus had set forth, Antony began.

It can scarcely be necessary to remind the reader of what he said, for no speech in the history of the world is more famous, none better known. "Friends, Romans, countrymen"—"I come to bury Cæsar, not to praise him"—"The evil that men do lives after them"—the words are alive on every tongue, and custom cannot stale them. From point to point he leads his audience on, punctuating each with a tribute to Brutus's celebrated and indubitable "honour." From every campaign Cæsar had brought valuable captives whose ransoms swelled the revenue; Cæsar was the friend of the poor: thrice on the Lupercal Cæsar refused a crown. Were these the marks of Ambition? Brutus says so, and Brutus

is an honourable man. . . . After a while, on the plea that emotion has overcome him, he breaks off to allow his hearers time to persuade each other of their assent. When he resumes, he tells them that the parchment in his hand is Cæsar's will; he cannot read it, in fairness to the honourable Brutus; but if he did!—they would soon see what a friend they had lost. A clamour arises. "The will! The will! We will hear Cæsar's will!" Oh, no, he has gone too far in mentioning it at all—if he read it, they would go mad. "The will! The will!" Very well, then, if he must read it, let them make a ring round the body, that he may show them him who made the will. He comes down from the tribune, and lifts up Cæsar's mantle, the same that he first wore on the day of his victory over the Nervii. See the rents it bears, here Casca stabbed him, and here the well-beloved Brutus, his dearest friend. That was the blow of blows, the stroke that burst his mighty heart!

At this a passion of pity and rage combined sweeps over the mob. Antony has almost overshoot his mark, for he has not yet reached his climax, and he must calm them again for his last and finest stroke. He is no orator like Brutus, he says—just a plain, blunt man who loves his friend and speaks what is in his mind. If he had

Brutus's eloquence, to what fire of mutiny would he not kindle them? Mutiny! They take up the word: they will rush off to burn down Brutus's house. Antony has to remind them that they have not yet heard the will, which he had so scrupulously made a point of keeping from them. And now at last he reads it. Cæsar had left seventy-five drachmas to every Roman citizen and to the city in general all his orchards and pleasantries by the Tiber for their recreation. "Here was a Cæsar! When comes such another?" "Never, never!" and off they go to burn and ravage and kill. Antony draws a breath of satisfaction: he has done what he set out to do. And in a little while comes a messenger to tell him that Octavius has arrived in Rome, and Brutus and Cassius have ridden out through the gates like madmen, to escape the vengeance of the rabble.

That same night, an innocent but unlucky poet was torn to pieces because his name was Cinna.

The murder of the great statesman and soldier had not answered the expectations of its promoters. Rome was divided against herself: on the one hand Brutus and Cassius, on the other Antony and Octavius, with the stupid professional general, Lepidus, to complete the Triumvirate,

presumably as a concession to military orthodoxy, strove for the mastery of the world. The fortunes of the campaign had brought Brutus to Sardis, about to join forces with Cassius, while Antony and Octavius were marching upon them by way of Philippi. Now he stood outside his tent, awaiting Cassius.

Both men had worsened under the stresses of their position. Brutus, maintaining his integrity, his high ideals, and his self-esteem, had become arrogant and overbearing. Cassius had yielded to the temptations of avarice, and even of corruption; and his deep affection and admiration for Brutus were undermined by jealousy and resentment. The mine was laid between them, and only needed a spark.

Cassius stormed up to the tent, all on edge, and broke out at once: "Most noble brother, you have done me wrong." Brutus, too dignified to wrangle in public, drew him within, and Cassius produced his grievance. Brutus had condemned one Pella for taking bribes, although Cassius had written to plead for him as his friend. Brutus carried the war straight into his camp. Not only was it disgraceful to shield a guilty man, but Cassius's own hands were not clean; he had been selling commissions and appointments. Had they killed Cæsar in the cause of justice, only to tarnish

their own honour with base acquisition? Cassius's anger rose, but Brutus brushed it aside with cold and wounding scorn. He was a slight man, a madman: his rage, which might impress his slaves, was to Brutus merely ludicrous—henceforth he would keep him to amuse his lighter moments by comic displays of temper.

This was beyond all bearing; but when Cassius raved and spluttered, Brutus plied the lash still harder. Not only was he dishonest and ridiculous, he was a treacherous niggard who had refused Brutus money sorely needed to pay his legionaries. At this Cassius suddenly broke down: he saw himself as he was, degraded and dishonoured, shut out by his own unworthiness from the heart of the man whom he loved and esteemed above all others; and he humbled himself.

Brutus was touched. He owned he had been too harsh, too bitter; each must forgive the other, and the two men clasped hands, friends once more. Now they could speak freely, and Brutus revealed the dominant reason for his loss of self-control. News had come to him that day that Portia, pining in his absence, and distracted with fear of the growing power of the Triumvirs, had taken her own life. Cassius marvelled that with such a sorrow on his mind Brutus had withstood the provocation to kill him.

But now they must put personal feelings by, and decide on action. Cassius was for waiting at Sardis, that the enemy might exhaust his supplies and fatigue his troops on the march. His reasons were good, said Brutus, but they must yield to better. The inhabitants of the country between Sardis and Philippi were hostile, and would welcome and support the assailing force. Their own power was now at its height, all their resources were mustered, and would only diminish in delay. His old ascendancy prevailed, and the march on Philippi was ordered for the following day.

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It was deep night, and Brutus could not sleep. With a touch of the tenderness which underlay his arrogance, he sent his faithful page-boy Lucius to bed, and while he tried to read himself asleep the taper began to burn unsteadily, and a strange shape appeared before him. "What art thou?" "Thy evil spirit, Brutus." "Why com'st thou?" "To tell thee thou shalt see me at Philippi." Brutus, though his blood ran cold, accepted the challenge. "Well, I will see thee at Philippi, then"; and the apparition vanished. It was the Ghost of Cæsar.

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Both armies were assembled on the plains of

Philippi, and a short colloquy between Antony and Octavius showed how the older and more experienced man had met his match in the cold, crafty, and resolute youth. Antony had said the enemy would not fight, Octavius had said they would, and here they were. Antony had his plans for the battle, but Octavius set them aside. The opposing chiefs met in parley, and Antony and Cassius bandied hot words about the death of Cæsar; but Octavius silenced them, and exchanged a more dignified challenge with Brutus.

Brutus and Cassius, left alone, discussed the uncertain issue. If they lost the battle, what would Brutus do? His answer was ambiguous; he would not be led in triumph through the streets of Rome, yet neither would he take his own life, for it was cowardly and vile to anticipate the doomed hour of death. That day must end, one way or the other, the work which the Ides of March began.

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Battle was joined, and at first the issue was doubtful. Brutus gained an initial success over Octavius, but instead of pursuing his advantage to the finish, and turning his troops against Antony, he allowed them to spoil the enemy's camp. Cassius, from a point of vantage, surveyed the fight. He saw the tents on fire, but in

uncertainty whether the victorious force was his own or Antony's, he dispatched his lieutenant Titinius to make sure. His own sight was dim, and his faithful Parthian bondman Pindarus, whom he set to watch for him, misinterpreted what he saw. Titinius, in reality acclaimed by Cassius's victorious troops, seemed to him to be surrounded and taken captive by Antony's; and on his report Cassius ordered him to run him through the body. So when Titinius returned with his good news, Cassius was dead. Brutus came upon the scene, and recognized the triumph of Cæsar's spirit, mighty in death. All that remained for him was to sell his life dearly, and once more he led the charge against the enemy.

It failed, and gathering round him the remnants of his supporters, by a compromise with the philosophy which forbade him to take his own life, he entreated them one by one to kill him. Clitus, Dardanius, Volumnius, refused. The conquerors came nearer, and at last he found one follower devoted enough to hold out his sword for him to run upon. Antony and Octavius, approaching, found him dead; and the generous Antony, weighing good with ill, paid him magnanimous tribute:—

“This was the noblest Roman of them all:  
All the conspirators, save only he



Did that they did in envy of great Cæsar;  
He only, in a general honest thought  
And common good to all, made one of them.  
His life was gentle, and the elements  
So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up  
And say to all the world, ' This was a man! ' ”