

A PLEA FOR CASSIUS.

CAREFUL reading of *Julius Cæsar*, comparing it with Plutarch, ought to convince the most sceptical that Shakespeare never intended Cassius to be quite the villain so many persist in thinking him. The real villains, as portrayed by the poet, sometimes teach, indirectly, a sublime code of ethics, but seldom or never put it to any practical use, as did Cassius. That he was not "the noblest Roman of them all" may be true, but Brutus called him "the last of the Romans," adding that it was impossible the City should ever again produce so great a spirit. Plutarch further says: "Cassius had a natural hatred and rancor against the whole race of tyrants;" moreover, he was a brave soldier, a patriotic citizen, and a true friend: three qualities incompatible with our idea of a man not actuated by noble impulses. A proof, however, of his worth may be found in the fact of his having many friends among "the choice and master spirits" of his age; among which were Messala, Decius, Titinius, Brutus, and others. This is the more remarkable when one considers that, though a disciple of Epicurus, he was the last man one would have selected as harboring Epicurean doctrines. Of a nature stern and unyielding, a disposition rash and irritable, "that carries anger as the flint bears fire, and straight is cold again," together with a plentiful lack of all those surface qualities that go to make up the man of the world, he was the direct antithesis of Pompey, "the pink of courtesy," who scratched his head with one finger, much to the disgust of the Roman populace, and of Antony, the brave, handsome "masker and reveller," who swayed the people in whatsoever manner he desired. There must have been some sterling qualities in the man whom a choice few loved and the many respected. It has always been a matter of regret that Shakespeare did not give us the speech of Cassius, that we might better judge touching his motives in the death of Cæsar. There is no doubt that, for the sake of dramatic effect, the real nobility of Cassius was

somewhat subordinated to make the "general honest thought" of Brutus more apparent; for he, not Cæsar, is the real hero of the tragedy, and as such received all those touches Shakespeare knew so well how to bestow. Our idea of Cassius has been mostly derived from the oft-quoted words of Cæsar, "Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look; he thinks too much," and "Let me have men about me that are fat." In reality those words were addressed to Brutus also. Mark Antony answered Cæsar by saying Cassius was "a Roman and well given;" and it is really absurd that he should be shorn of a moiety of his good name because the "mighty Julius" sighed "Would he were fatter." In truth it was not Cassius' "lean and hungry" looks that made Cæsar deem him dangerous; but he knew Cassius as a "great observer," one who could look "quite through the deeds of men," and was properly conscious of having given him grounds for discontent. The sight of the two friends together, doubtless, suggested to his mind that little episode of the lions at Malgara, and the shabby trick he had played him about the prætorship, when his fondness for Brutus got the better of his judgment. "At this time," says Plutarch, "Brutus had only the reputation of his honor and virtue to oppose to the many and gallant actions performed by Cassius against the Parthians," and Cæsar himself adds: "Cassius has the stronger plea, but we must let Brutus be first prætor." Yet Brutus says in *Julius Cæsar*, "To speak truth of Cæsar, I have not known when his affections sway'd more than his reason." Cassius had befriended Cæsar more than once, and doubtless felt keenly the injustice of having a younger and less experienced man preferred to himself. He may have been, therefore, somewhat biased by personal feelings, though we find this in "*Antony and Cleopatra*":

"What was it
That moved pale Cassius to conspire? And what
Made the all honour'd honest, Roman Brutus,
With the arm'd rest, courtiers of beauteous freedom,
To drench the Capitol, but that they would
Have one man but a man!"

Observe here that the motives of Brutus and Cassius are identical. Cassius dwells upon the same idea in speaking of Brutus :

“ When could they say till now that talked of Rome,
That her wide walls encompass'd but *one man* ! ”

He also says he was “ born free as Cæsar,” and “ That part of tyranny that I do bear I can shake off at pleasure,” and “ Cassius from bondage will deliver Cassius,” and “ I had as lief not be, as live to be in awe of such a thing as I myself ” : that is, afraid to utter my own sentiments, bound like a madman is, to walk under the huge legs of this colossus that bestrides the world, and “ peep about to find dishonorable graves.” The basal thought of his mind was Freedom. . He called the conspiracy an enterprise of “ honorable dangerous consequences.” He did not enter into it for mere personal aggrandizement, but to escape from a bondage his spirit could ill brook. His first words after the assassination were “ Liberty, freedom, and enfranchisement,” and this lofty sentiment was echoed by Brutus in his cry of “ Peace, freedom, and liberty.” He also believed that “ men at some time are masters of their fates,” and being, as Cæsar said, a reader, a thinker, and a great observer, it followed, as a natural sequence, that the present struck him as the proper time to rid Rome of a tyrant. In personal action he was not below Cæsar, and with his bravery combined much shrewdness and tact—two things in which Brutus was sadly deficient—though, as found later on, rather than appear stubborn, but against his better judgment, he yielded to Brutus. “ I think it not meet,” says this wise soldier, that “ Mark Antony should outlive Cæsar.” But Brutus’ heart prevailed and Antony was spared ; his voice was raised in opposition to Antony speaking at Cæsar’s funeral, knowing the power of his eloquence on the people ; but again the blind faith of Brutus triumphed, and Antony incited a mob that drove the conspirators from Rome. On another occasion, when Brutus, speaking of Antony, says, “ I know we shall have him well to friend,” Cassius shrewdly replies, “ I wish we may, but yet I have a mind that fears him much,” and it is, doubtless, to counteract

the credulity of Brutus, that he appeals to Antony's well-known love for power, and promises him: "Your voice shall be as strong as any man's in the disposing of new dignities." In fact, "the whole design to liberate their country fails from the generous temper and overweening confidence of Brutus in the goodness of their cause and the assistance of others." Cassius, finding that Brutus would not subscribe to his policy, did the next best thing his judgment dictated. Surmising that Antony was "A trout to be caught by tickling," he baited the hook accordingly. Unfortunately his bait proved less attractive than that offered by Octavius Cæsar. Any one of us can appreciate the bitter satisfaction Cassius must have felt some time later, when he made the first and only allusion to these circumstances; on the day of the battle, when in their conference, Antony's tongue wagged in noise so rude against them, Cassius (stung to the quick by the words of this "limb of Cæsar," whom Brutus had declared "could do no more than Cæsar's arm when Cæsar's head is off") cries to his brother:

"Now, Brutus, thank yourself.
This tongue had not offended so to-day,
If Cassius might have ruled."

The "itching palm," of which Brutus complained, is, after all, the fine scorn that an ultra-generous nature often feels for one possessing more thrift. Cassius had divided his money more than once with his brother; who, it must be confessed, was somewhat of a prodigal; but, at Brutus' demands, gave him a third of what he had raised for the needs of his own soldiers. Indeed, in this case, Cassius was something of a catspaw, gaining a not enviable reputation for cruelty and parsimony in order to satisfy his own legions, while Brutus, on the other hand, scorning the sometimes harsh measures necessary in times of war to sustain an army, was not averse to receiving the "rascal counters" thus obtained from his more practical brother. In reading the tragedies of *Julius Cæsar* and *Marcus Brutus* by John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham, it is evident that he felt Cassius had not received his meed of praise. These tragedies, of no intrinsic value, are interesting viewed in this light,

and the nobility of Cassius in *Marcus Brutus* is particularly accentuated. The last scene of all in the history of these two men stamps Cassius the "noble Roman" Brutus loved to call him. In all of Shakespeare there is no sadder scene than the "everlasting farewell" of these two mistaken patriots. A parting, to them in their ignorance of Christianity, "past hope, past cure." Can anything be sadder than the words of Brutus?

"Forever, and forever, farewell Cassius!
If we do meet again, why, we shall smile;
If not, why then, this parting was well made."

And their echo by Cassius:

"Forever, and forever, farewell Brutus!
If we do meet again we'll smile indeed;
If not, 'tis true this parting was well made."

Just before the battle, Brutus says, "For I have already given my life to my country on the 'Ides of March,' and have lived since then a second life for her sake with liberty and honor." At these words Cassius smiled, and, embracing Brutus, said, "With these resolutions let us go upon the enemy, for either we ourselves shall conquer, or have no cause to fear those that do." The result of the battle at Philippi again justified his fears. It was fought on Cassius' birthday. His judgment warned him against going to meet the enemy, but Brutus again prevailed; he asked for the command of the right wing: this too was denied him. What the result might have been, had he been in command, is a matter of conjecture; but, history tells us, Brutus' army, carried away by success, stopped to plunder and left the other unprotected, and Cassius, supposing his brother overcome, withdrew and sent Titinius for news of the battle. Titinius found his friends, who surrounded him, shouting; but Cassius, at this point in his career, made a mistake common to people of his impetuous nature: he mistook the shouts for those of the enemy, and at once concluded his messenger was taken. Then it is he cries, "Through too much fondness of life I have lived to endure the sight of my friend taken by the enemy before my face." Shakespeare uses this

incident with beautiful and pathetic effect: "Oh, coward that I am, to live so long to see my best friend ta'en before my face!" With these words Cassius seized the sword "that ran through Cæsar's bowels" and finished his mortal act. Cassius was particularly happy in having two such friends as Titinius and Brutus, both of whom survived him long enough to report him aright to the unsatisfied. Titinius says:

"Brutus, come apace,
And see how I regarded Caius Cassius.
By your leave, gods:—this is a Roman part:
Come, Cassius' sword, and find Titinius' heart."

But in the words of Brutus, "whose love is a patent which establishes a man's nobility," may be found Cassius' most fitting eulogy:

"The last of all the Romans, fare thee well!
It is impossible that ever Rome
Should breed thy fellow."

KATE L. GALLAGHER.

Miscellany.

QUOTING from the paper on Halliwell-Phillipps in our February issue, *The Nation* says:

"The most memorable work of Mr. Halliwell-Phillipps is his 'Outlines.' This opinion expresses the feeling of every true Shakespearian. When outsiders ask, 'Why do we know so little about Shakespeare?' the best answer is, 'Because you have not read, or certainly have not marked and inwardly digested, Phillipps's "Outlines," especially the seventh edition.' Seeing how all the world has been taxed for elaborating this monumental work, we are at once constrained to echo the saying, 'It is not likely that any scraps of knowledge will be added to what is contained in these volumes.' What shall the man do who cometh after the king? But had Phillipps lived a year longer, he would have added a good many such scraps. Witness the growth of the 'Outlines' year by year, even up to