

THE TRAGEDY OF JULIUS CAESAR

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The tragedy of Julius Caesar by Michael MacMillan

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MICHAEL MACMILLAN

**THE TRAGEDY OF
JULIUS CAESAR**

THE TRAGEDY

OF

JULIUS CÆSAR

THE WORKS
OF
SHAKESPEARE
THE TRAGEDY OF JULIUS CÆSAR

EDITED BY
MICHAEL MACMILLAN



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PREFACE

IN preparing this edition of *Julius Cæsar* I have derived great assistance from the Elizabethan lore of Mr. W. J. Craig, the editor of *Lear*, in the same series. I have consulted almost all the recent editions of *Julius Cæsar*, especially the very exhaustive and able edition prepared for Indian Colleges by Mr. Mark Hunter, Principal of the Government College, Mangalore. Mr. Moulton's book on Shakespeare's dramatic art has also been of great use to me. My obligation to Dr. Abbott is sufficiently indicated by the frequent references to his *Shakespearian Grammar* in the notes. The extracts from Plutarch are taken from Skeat's *Shakespeare's Plutarch*. The references to Shakespeare's plays other than *Julius Cæsar* are in accordance with the numbering of the lines in the Globe edition. I have not had the temerity to suggest many new readings. For some time I flattered myself that I had improved v. i. 35 by the conversion of a full stop into a note of interrogation, but it afterwards turned out that the emendation had been anticipated by Delius. I cannot find that any previous commentator has thought of making the return to the reading of all the Folios advocated in my note on III. i.

171, or the dash that I have put at the end of IV. iii. 5. Other alterations in the generally accepted text, that I have pointed out as possible, but not ventured to introduce into the text of this edition, will be found suggested in the notes on I. iii. 65, II. i. 83, ii. 46, iv. 18, III. i. 39, ii. 118, and IV. iii. 240. The only passage, as far as I know, to which, without departing from the usual reading, I have given an entirely new interpretation is III. i. 174, 175. Few notes on the scansion of particular lines will be found in the following pages. Shakespeare's metre is a large subject, which requires general treatment with reference to all the plays. The commentary on any individual play would be overburdened, if an attempt were made to examine all the metrical irregularities that occur in it. The notes in this edition are mostly explanatory, and even with this restriction it has been found difficult to keep the commentary within due bounds.

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INTRODUCTION

Synopsis of Introduction.—Determination of date of play. Compared with the *Ajax* of Sophocles as a play with the climax in the middle. How far the interest is sustained after the climax. Symmetry and unity due to the chain of Nemesis. How unity is maintained in spite of the death of Cæsar in the middle of the play. Neither Cæsar nor Brutus the hero. It is a drama without a hero, but with several heroic characters. The representation of Cæsar seems at first almost a travesty. Not, however, devoid of noble characteristics, when the whole play is regarded. Why Shakespeare did not adequately represent Cæsar's greatness. From a historical point of view the picture given is rather one-sided than untrue, and this one-sided representation is justifiable on dramatic grounds. Brutus resembles Hamlet in being called upon to undertake a task which he was ill fitted to perform. Though politically a failure, from a moral point of view he deserves all honour. Though morally admirable, his great deed was wrong. How then was this morally excellent man induced to commit such a crime? His soliloquy shows that he did it for the general good, though his reasoning is inconclusive. The virtue of Brutus, consisting in the cultivation of his own honour, which was the great object of his life, would deprive him of our sympathy, were it not tempered by gentler and more engaging characteristics. Contrast between Brutus and Cassius in Plutarch and Shakespeare. Cassius superior to Brutus in practical foresight, but weaker in will-power and less calm at the moment of action. Cassius, though morally inferior to Brutus, far from a villain and not entirely actuated by selfish motives. Contrast