

**SHAKESPEARE'S JULIUS CAESAR;
WITH INTRODUCTION, AND
NOTES EXPLANATORY AND
CRITICAL, FOR USE IN SCHOOLS
AND CLASSES**

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Shakespeare's Julius Caesar; With Introduction, and Notes Explanatory and Critical, for Use in Schools and Classes by Henry N. Hudson

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HENRY N. HUDSON

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BY THE
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INTRODUCTION.

History of the Play.

JULIUS CÆSAR was first printed in the folio of 1623. None of the plays in that inestimable volume have reached us with the text in a sounder and clearer state; there being few passages that give an editor any trouble, none that are very troublesome.

The Rev. Mr. Fleay, in his *Shakespeare Manual*, 1876, argues somewhat strenuously to the point that "this play, as we have it, is an abridgment of Shakespeare's play, made by Ben Jonson." In support of his theory he alleges, and truly, that Jonson did in fact exercise his hand more or less in altering and refitting other men's plays. He also points out the fact, — for such it is, — that the number of short lines or broken verses in *Julius Cæsar* is uncommonly large. And he cites several words and phrases, such as "quality and kind," "bear me hard," "chew upon this," &c., which do not occur elsewhere in Shakespeare; while the same words and phrases, or something very like them, are met with in Jonson's plays. Still more to the purpose, he adduces a passage in Act iii., scene 1, which is evidently referred to in Jonson's *Discoveries*, 1637, and which, in all probability, — as I think, — has been altered, perhaps by Jonson's hand, from what Shakespeare wrote. As the question is discussed

at some length in the Critical Notes, it need not be prosecuted further here.

Such are the main particulars urged by Mr. Fleay. His argument shows a good deal of learned diligence; still it does not, to my mind, carry any great force, certainly is far from being conclusive, and, as the Clarendon Editor observes, is "not such as the readers of Shakespeare have a right to demand." Nevertheless, as, on comparing the quarto and folio copies, we find that the folio has several other plays more or less abridged, some to the extent of whole scenes; so I think it nowise improbable that, after Shakespeare's retirement from the stage, perhaps after his death, *Julius Cæsar* may have been subjected to the same process, and for the same purpose, namely, to shorten the time of representation. If this was done, it is altogether credible that Jonson may have been the man who did it: but I fail to catch any taste of Jonson's style or any smack of his idiom in the play as it stands. So that, while conceding that he may have struck out more or less of Shakespeare's matter, still I am by no means prepared to admit that he put in any thing of his own; though, possibly enough, in a few places, as in that already specified, he may have slightly altered Shakespeare's language.

There were several other plays on the subject of Julius Cæsar, written some before, some after, the composition of Shakespeare's play; but, as no connection has been traced between any of these and Shakespeare's, it seems hardly worth the while to make any further notice of them.

Date of the Writing.

The time when *Julius Cæsar* was composed has been variously argued, some placing it in the middle period of

the Poet's labours, others among the latest; and, as no clear contemporary notice or allusion had been produced, the question could not be positively determined. It is indeed well known that the original *Hamlet* must have been written as early as 1602; and in iii. 2, of that play Polonius says, "I did enact Julius Cæsar: I was killed in the Capitol; Brutus killed me." As the play now in hand lays the scene of the stabbing in the Capitol, it is not improbable, to say the least, that the Poet had his own *Julius Cæsar* in mind when he wrote the passage in *Hamlet*. And that such was the case is made further credible by the fact, that Polonius speaks of himself as having enacted the part when he "play'd once in the University," and that in the title-page of the first edition of *Hamlet* we have the words, "As it hath been divers times acted by his Highness' Servants in the city of London; as also in the two Universities of Cambridge and Oxford." Still the point cannot be affirmed with certainty; for there were several earlier plays on the subject, and especially a Latin play on Cæsar's Death, which was performed at Oxford in 1582.

Mr. Collier argued that Shakespeare's play must have been on the stage before 1603, his reason being as follows. Drayton's *Mortimeriados* appeared in 1596. The poem was afterwards recast by the author, and published again in 1603 as *The Barons' Wars*. The recast has the following lines, which were not in the original form of the poem:—

Such one he was, of him we boldly say,
 In whose rich soul all sovereign powers did suit;
 In whom in peace the elements all lay
 So mix'd, as none could sovereignty impute:
 That 't seem'd when Heaven his model first began,
 In him it show'd perfection in a man.

Here we have a striking resemblance to what Antony says of Brutus in the play : —

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.*

Mr. Collier's theory is, that Drayton, before recasting his poem, had either seen the play in manuscript or heard it at the theatre, and so caught and copied the language of Shakespeare.

I confess there does not seem to me any great strength in this argument; for the idea and even the language of the resembling lines was so much a commonplace in the Poet's time, that no one could claim any special right of authorship in it. Nevertheless it is now pretty certain that the play was written as early as 1601, Mr. Halliwell having lately produced the following from Weever's *Mirror of Martyrs*, which was printed that year : —

The many-headed multitude were drawn
 By Brutus' speech, that Cæsar was ambitious;
 When eloquent Mark Antony had shown
 His virtues, who but Brutus then was vicious?

As there is nothing in the history that could have suggested this, we can only ascribe it to some acquaintance with the play; so that the passage may be justly regarded as decisive of the question.

The style alone of the drama led me to rest in about the same conclusion long ago. And I the rather make something of this matter, because it involves a good exercise of mind in discriminating the Poet's different styles; which is a very nice art indeed, and therefore apt to render the perceptions delicate and acute. It has been said that a true

taste for Shakespeare is like the creation of a special sense ; and this saying is nowhere better approved than in reference to his subtle variations of language and style. For he began with what may be described as a preponderance of the poetic element over the dramatic. As we trace his course onward, we may, I think, discover a gradual rising of the latter element into greater strength and prominence, until at last it had the former in complete subjection. Now, where positive external evidence is wanting, it is mainly from the relative strength of these elements that I argue the probable date of the writing. And it seems to me that in *Julius Caesar* the diction is more gliding and continuous, and the imagery more round and amplified, than in the dramas known to have been of the Poet's latest period.

But these distinctive notes are of a nature to be more easily felt than described ; and to make them felt examples will best serve. Take, then, a sentence from the soliloquy of Brutus just after he has pledged himself to the conspiracy : —

'Tis a common proof,
That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,
Whereto the climber-upward turns his face ;
But, when he once attains the utmost round,
He then unto the ladder turns his back,
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
By which he did ascend.

Here we have a full, rounded period in which all the elements seem to have been adjusted, and the whole expression set in order, before any part of it was written down. The beginning foresees the end, the end remembers the beginning, and the thought and image are evolved together in an even continuous flow. The thing is indeed perfect in its way, still it is not in Shakespeare's latest and highest