HISTORICAL TALES FROM SHAKESPEARE

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FROM

SHAKESPEARE

by

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TO

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

WHO WITH THE NEAREST CLAIM AMONG LIVING MEN

TO APPROACH SHAKESPEARE CONFIDENTLY

HAS WITH THE BEST RIGHT

SET THEM THE EXAMPLE OF REVERENT AND

HUMBLE STUDY

PREFACE

ALTHOUGH in the following pages I have chosen those plays, or most of them, which Charles and Mary Lamb omitted from their *Tales from Shakespeare*, and although I have taken a title very like theirs, my attempt has not been to round off or tag a conclusion to their inimitable work. They, as wise judges of what their book should be, found that a certain class of play lay outside their purpose. It is just these plays—the historical ones—which, with a different purpose, are here cast into narrative form.

It appeared to the friend who suggested this book, and to me, that nowhere, in spite of many inaccuracies, can historical pictures be found so vivid or in the main so just as in these historical plays of Shakespeare. We were thinking especially of the plays from English history. But our own experience seemed to show that many young readers fight shy of them, and so miss much which might quicken their interest in history and their early patriotism, being deterred perhaps by the dramatic form and partly by the sophisticated language. (For although even a very young reader may delight in Shakespeare, it takes a grown one and a wise one to understand his full meaning.) And we asked ourselves, 'Is it possible, by throwing the stories into plain narrative form and making the language more

ordinary, to represent these vivid pictures so that young readers may be attracted to them—yet reverently, and in the hope that from our pale, if simple, copies they may be led on and attracted to his rich and wonderful work?'

This, at any rate, was my task: not to extract pleasant and profitable stories, as one might (and as the Lambs did) from the masterpieces of Shakespeare's invention, but to follow him into his dealings with history, where things cannot be forced to happen so neatly as in a made-up tale, and to persuade my young audience that history (in spite of their natural distrust) is by no means a dull business when handled by one who marvellously understood the human heart and was able so to put life into the figures of men and women long passed away that they become real to us as we follow their thoughts and motions and watch them making love, making war, plotting, succeeding, or accepting reverses, playing once more the big drama which they played on earth.

For although 'history' means properly 'enquiry' or 'research,' and threatens nowadays to be a pursuit only enjoyable by a few grown-up persons, when taken in hand by such a poet—or 'maker'—it becomes again a story in the familiar sense, a moving tale which everyone can understand and enjoy, children no less than their elders. There had to be this difference, however, between the Lambs' stories and those which I set myself to repeat from Shakespeare — that whereas they had only to rehearse the plot of *The Merchant of Venice*, for instance, and the result was a pretty and, for their readers, a novel tale, if I contented myself with doing this to the historical plays I should be telling

children little more than they already knew from their text-books. It seemed necessary, therefore, to lay more stress on the *characters* in these plays, and on the many springs of action, often small and subtle ones, by uncovering which Shakespeare made history visible; to keep to the story indeed, but to make it a story of men's motives and feelings, as well as of the actual events they gave rise to or were derived from.

For the sake of the story in this sense I have often followed Shakespeare where he is inaccurate, though I have sometimes corrected without comment where a slight correction could do no harm. It seemed to me equally uncalled-for on the one hand to talk of *Decius* Brutus and on the other to omit the tremendous reappearance of Queen Margaret in *Richard the Third*; equally idle to tie myself to the stage-chronology of *King John* and to set it elaborately right; alike unnecessary to repeat Shakespeare's confusion of the two Edmund Mortimers in one play and officious to cut out Mortimer's farewell in another on the ground that it is untrue to fact. The tale's the thing; else what becomes of Faulconbridge, Falstaff, Fluellen? In general, therefore, I have made it my rule to follow Shakespeare so long as he tells his story with fairness and justice.

It would be a great pleasure to believe that Shakespeare was always fair and just; to be convinced (with the illustrious poet who allows me to dedicate my book to him) that Shakespeare had no hand in the slanderous portrait of Joan of Arc sent down to us under his name. But convinced or not, no writer with a conscience could repeat that portrait for the

children in whom are bound up our hopes of a better England than we shall see. Were he to do so, I believe that, thanks to such books as Green's *Short History of the English People*[1] and Mr. Andrew Lang's *A Monk of Fife*, our schoolboys would reject it with scornful disgust. It is enough to say that here they will not be given the chance; since to-day, if ever, it is necessary to insist that no patriotism can be true which gives to a boy no knightliness or to a girl no gentleness of heart.

Of true and fervent patriotism these plays are full. Indeed though they are, in Charles Lamb's words, 'strengtheners of virtue' in many ways, that remains their great lesson. It has been said that the real hero of Shakespeare's historical plays is England; and no one can read them and be deaf to the ringing, vibrating note of pride, of almost fierce joy to be an Englishman, to have inherited the liberties of so great a country and be a partaker in her glory. And this love of England is the sincerer for the courage with which he owns and grieves that she has been sometimes humiliated, sometimes untrue to herself. But as if this were not enough, he has left us—in Faulconbridge, in King Harry, in the two Talbots—lofty yet diverse examples of what patriotism can do; and again in Coriolanus and Marcus Brutus particular warnings of how even able men who love their country may, by a little unwisdom, injure her and wreck themselves. In short, and with the single exception named, these plays might almost serve as a

[1]To which, as to a classic, I have gone for what the play denies; even for some of its language, remembering the effect it had upon me as a boy.

handbook to patriotism, did that sacred passion need one. For nowhere surely in literature is it so confidently nourished and at the same time so wisely and anxiously directed.

And now, having excused my purpose, let me try to excuse my method also. I started, in my reverence for Charles and Mary Lamb, with some thought of tying myself by their rules of diction, and admitting no word which had not at least a warrant somewhere in Shakespeare. But I soon found (1) that the difference of design baulked my pen, and often in an irritating manner; and (2) that although I might hope to ape their example with success enough to deceive many, yet in my heart I was conscious how far short the attempt must fall of that natural easy grace which was theirs alike by genius and by years of loving familiarity with Shakespeare. Every man whose lot it is to write a great deal discovers his own manner, and does his best in that. So I resolved to use my own, and trust to telling the tales as simply and straightforwardly as I could. Now for my purpose it was necessary to be continually breaking up the rhythm of Shakespeare's majestic lines, and reducing them to ordinary prose; and there remains an apology to make to the critics who, with Shakespeare's lines in their memory, find this hard to tolerate. I ask them to remember that these stories are not intended for grown-up persons who know Shakespeare more or less by heart, but for children to whom their first reading of him is a pleasure to come.

A. T. QUILLER-COUCH.

CONTENTS

CORIOLANUS

FIVE HUNDRED years before the birth of Christ there lived in Rome a man of noble family named Caius Marcius. One of his ancestors, Ancus Marcius, had been King of Rome, and of the same house were afterwards descended the Marcius who was surnamed Censorinus, from having twice held the censorship, the most venerable office in the commonwealth, and Publius and Quintus Marcius, who together built the great aqueduct which supplied the city with pure water. So that altogether this house of Marcius was a very important one in Rome, and also a very proud one.

But of all its members none was ever so proud as this Caius Marcius, whose story we have to tell. His father died when he was quite a child, and thus his training fell into the hands of his widowed mother, the Lady Volumnia. In some respects it could not have fallen into better, for in those days the quality honoured above all others in Rome was manliness, and Volumnia, like a true Roman mother, set herself from the first to encourage her boy in all those manly pursuits to which she saw him inclined by nature. As a child he was taught to handle weapons, to exercise his body, and to endure hard living, so that he became swift in running,

dexterous in sword-play, and so strong in wrestling that no man could ever throw him. And when he was but sixteen she sent him off to the wars. "For," said she, "had I a dozen sons, and each one as dear to me as my Caius, I had rather have eleven die nobly for their country than one live at home in idle indulgence."

The war to which she sent Caius had been stirred up by Tarquin the Proud, the expelled King of Rome, in the hope of winning back his kingdom. The boy distinguished himself in his first battle, bestriding a Roman soldier who had been beaten to the ground beside him, and slaying the assailant with his own hands. For this feat, when the fight was over and the Roman side victorious, his general caused Caius Marcius to be crowned with a garland of oak-leaves, a coveted honour and only bestowed on one who saved the life of a fellow-Roman. Deep was Volumnia's joy when he returned to her with his brows thus bound; while, as for Caius, this first success so spurred his valour, that he soon became known as the bravest fighter in Rome, and though not yet one of her generals—by reason of his youth—yet the first of her warriors, and the swordsman on whom her armies doted and her generals depended.

To this his love and passionate pursuit of honour had led him. But what he and his mother forgot, or perhaps never saw clearly, was this—that the love and pursuit of honour may be so mixed up with pride as to become but a kind of selfishness; a very sublime kind of selfishness, no doubt, but none the less a disease. Caius Marcius was arrogantly proud, proud of his family, and, as time went on, insufferably proud on

his own account; and this self-esteem, while it taught him to scorn all mean actions and petty personal gain, made him churlish and uncivil of speech to all whom he looked upon as his inferiors.

Now the Romans at this time, and for long years after, were divided into two classes, the Patricians and the Plebeians. To the Patricians belonged the old governing families of Rome, descendants of the first founders of the city, a nobility keeping the chief power in their own hands, trained in war and looking upon war as the one occupation which became their dignity. The Plebeians, on the other hand, were an undisciplined and oppressed crowd of traders, handicraftsmen, labourers, and idlers, having this on their side, that they grew in numbers with the growth of the city, until the Patricians, though they still despised, could no longer ignore them.

The chief ground of the Plebeians' complaint, among many, lay in the usury practised upon them by their rich masters. The poor man, unable to pay the heavy interest charged, was not only deprived of his goods but taken and sold into bondage, notwithstanding the wounds and scars he showed which he had received in fighting for Rome; and this, they urged, was a violation of the pledge given in the late wars, when they had been persuaded to fight, and had, indeed, fought faithfully, under a promise of gentler treatment. But when the war was done this promise had not been kept. The common people, indeed, were very nearly starving, and the angrier because the city held great stores of corn, which they firmly believed were being kept by the Patricians for their own use.

Their discontent began to break out in tumults and street riots, and word of this soon came to the ears of the neighbouring states, which were jealous of Rome (with very good reason) and watching for an opportunity to do her a mischief. They believed this opportunity to be come, and prepared to invade her; and to meet them the Roman Senate made proclamation by sound of trumpet that all men who were of age to carry weapons should come and enter their names on the muster-roll. The Plebeians refused to come; they had been tricked once with promises (they said), and would not give their masters another chance.

In this fix it began to occur to some of the Senators that they had been too hard upon the poor Plebeians, and many were now for softening the law. But others held out against this, and none so stubbornly as Caius Marcius. In his proud opinion these Plebeians were vile dogs and the scum of the earth, and he never scrupled to tell them so to their faces. That he and this dirty, cowardly rabble were men of like flesh and blood was a thing past belief, and since he never opened his mouth to them but to call them curs and worse, it may be fancied how they hated him even while they admired him for a brave soldier.

The Senate consulted for many days, but thanks to Marcius and his party no good came of their discussions. The Plebeians, seeing no redress, took a bold step; they gathered themselves together and marched out of the city in a body, using no violence, but crying as they went that Rome had no place for them, and that therefore

they must go into wide Italy to find free air, water, and earth to bury them; and so passing out beyond the gates, they encamped on a hill beside the Tiber, called the Sacred Mount.

This stroke fairly disconcerted the Senators, who now sent out some of their number to treat with the malcontents, and among them one Menenius Agrippa, a friend of Caius Marcius. This Menenius was an old man, not over-wise, and certainly no great friend to the Plebeians; but having a blunt, hail-fellow way with him which the people liked. He could use his tongue roughly, but for all that he knew how to tackle a crowd in its own humour, and put in just the shrewd hits which folk of that class enjoy in a public speaker. He wasted no fine words on them, but went straight to the point with a homely proverb. "What is this? You say that while you sweat and starve, your rich masters eat and grow fat? Did you ever hear tell of the Belly and the Members? Once upon a time all the members of man's body rebelled against the belly, complaining that it alone remained in the midst of the body, eating all the food and doing nothing, while the rest of them toiled early and late for the body's maintenance—the eye seeing, the ear hearing, the legs walking, and so with the rest. But the belly smiled—by the way, you never heard of such a thing as a belly smiling, did you? Well, it did though; and it answered, 'That's true enough that I first receive and (so to speak) cupboard all the meats which nourish man's body; but afterwards, look you, I send out nourishment to all the other parts and limbs.' And just so, my friends, the Senate of Rome digests and

sends out that which benefits you and all members of the state."

Menenius told this old tale so aptly, singling out one who interrupted, and addressing him as the Great Toe, that he very soon had his audience laughing; and in this good humour they consented with the Senate to come back, on condition that there should be chosen every year five magistrates, called Tribunes, whose special business should be to protect the poor people from violence and oppression.

Caius Marcius was furious when he heard of this concession. He had scoffed at the people's stale complaints—that they were hungry, that even dogs must eat, that meat was made for mouths, and the gods did not send corn for rich men only. "The rabble," he declared, "should have pulled the roof off the city before I would have given way and granted them these five fellows to defend their vulgar wisdom."

His rage was diverted for the moment by the news that the Volscians, the chief enemies of Rome, had taken up arms and were in full march upon the city. They had a leader, too, Tullus Aufidius, whom Marcius longed to encounter. The two had met before this, and found each other worthy foes; and between them, apart from their countries' quarrel, there had grown up a fierce but generous rivalry. "He is a lion I am proud to hunt," said Marcius; and with his own big arrogance, "Were I anything but what I am, I would wish to be Tullus Aufidius." In the campaign for which he was now eager the chief command did not fall to Marcius. By Roman

rule this rested with the Consul for the year, Cominius, a gallant commander under whom he was proud to serve as Cominius was glad to have his services. But as Marcius, always courteous to his equals, begged Cominius to precede him and lead the way, he could not resist turning for a parting shot at the assembled rabble. "The Volscians have much corn. Shall we take these rats with us to gnaw their granaries?" But at the mention of fighting the crowd had begun to melt. "Worshipful mutineers, your valour comes forward bravely! *Pray* follow!"

So Marcius departed for the wars, followed by the sullen hatred of the poorer citizens and their newly-chosen Tribunes, and by the prayers of his own women-kind, sitting at home at their household work and waiting for news. But no two prayers could well have been more different in spirit than those offered up by Volumnia, his mother, and Virgilia, his gentle-hearted wife. The one rejoiced that her son had gone to win honour and prove his manhood once more, and her pictures of him as the two sat at their sewing terrified the softer Virgilia, who shuddered at the name of bloodshed, and besought Heaven to spare her husband from death. "The gods bless him from that fell Aufidius!" "Aufidius!" cried Volumnia; "he'll beat Aufidius' head lower than his knee, and then tread on his neck!" But Virgilia could not be quite comforted by this lively picture. She sat and quaked, and would not be tempted out of doors even when her gossiping acquaintances came with news of the campaign, which was now centred upon the Volscian town of Corioli.

Upon this important town the Consul Cominius had directed his march. But hearing that the rest of the Volscians were massing their forces to relieve it, he divided his army into two parts. To the one part, which included Marcius and was commanded by Titus Lartius, one of the bravest of the Roman generals, he entrusted the siege of Corioli; while with the other he himself marched out into the country to meet and grapple with the relieving forces.

The men of Corioli, disdaining the numbers of the division he left behind, were not slow in making a sortie, and at the first onset succeeded in beating back the Romans to their trenches. But Marcius, heaping curses on the runaways and calling on the stoutest fighters to rally and follow him, replied with a superb charge which drove the assailants back to their open gates, through which he hurled himself at their heels—almost alone, for the rain of arrows and javelins from the walls brought his followers to a halt. The Coriolans thereupon slammed to the city gates, shutting him inside, and Titus Lartius, arriving a little later, was fully persuaded he must have perished. But Marcius meanwhile had laid about him with incredible spirit, and actually hewed his way back to the gates; so that even while Titus lamented him, these flew open again and our hero appeared, covered with blood, but keeping his pursuers well at bay.

Now was the Romans' chance. They poured in to his rescue, and in a very short time the city was theirs. The baser soldiery then and there fell to sacking and plundering, though across the plain could be distinctly heard the noise of fighting where Cominius and his

division had fallen in with the relieving force under Tullus Aufidius, and was being hotly beset. Marcius abhorred this vulgar pillaging, and most of all at such a time when, for aught they knew, their general urgently needed help. The thought of his rival, too, and the chance of encountering him, spurred him to fresh exertions, and he begged Titus Lartius to retain only a force sufficient to hold the city, and dispatch him with the rest to Cominius' relief. To this the old commander readily assented, and Marcius flew on his errand.

His aid was needed. Cominius had been forced to give ground before Tullus Aufidius' attack, and was drawing his men off, albeit in good order, and with none of the violent scolding to which Marcius would have given way in a like reverse. Still the position was grave, and was not made more cheerful by the report of a messenger who had seen Titus Lartius and his men driven back on the trenches at the beginning of the fight, and knew nothing of their later success. But the well-known shout of Marcius as he dashed up to the rescue, and his brief tidings that Corioli had fallen, quickly dispelled this gloom and gave the men heart for a second attack. He demanded to be told of the Volscians' order of battle, and on which side they had placed their best fighting men; and learning that the flower of their warriors, the Antiates, were in the van and led by Aufidius, he besought leave to be set directly against these. This Cominius granted, and as the two armies advanced to their second encounter, Marcius outstripped his company, and so fiercely charged and cut a lane through the Antiates that the press of Romans

following into the gap cut the Volscian array in half, and broke it up. Even so he would not desist from fighting, but calling out that it was not for conquerors to faint, pressed forward until the defeat became a rout and the Volscians were chased off the field with great slaughter. In their last rally Marcius for a moment had the joy of finding himself face to face with Aufidius, and the two were exchanging blows when a knot of Volscians came to the succour of their commander and against his will bore him off, to nurse a fiercer longing than ever for revenge. Up to this his hatred of Marcius had been a soldierly one, but now, in the bitterness of defeat, he felt, for the moment at any rate, that he could stick at nothing to be even with the man who had met him already these five times, and always come off with the advantage. "Were he sick, asleep, naked, in sanctuary, nay, my own brother's guest, none of these protections," swore Aufidius, "should hinder me from washing my fierce hand in his heart!"

The next morning the Consul Cominius, having entered Corioli, mounted a chair of state, and in the presence of the whole army gave thanks to the gods for the great victory. Especially he thanked them that Rome had such a soldier as Caius Marcius, and engaged that the citizens at home should echo him. But Marcius would have none of this praise. With a humility which really covered an insane pride—a pride which resented even the suggestion that valour in him could possibly be surprising—he protested that he had done no more than Lartius, for instance, had done: "and that's the best I can." His wounds (he said) smarted to hear themselves

thus recognised. When Cominius offered him a tithe of all the horses and treasure captured, he begged to be forgiven for refusing this "bribe to pay his sword," as he put it. To his credit he had an entire contempt for private riches; but this refusal again smacked at least as much of pride as of disinterestedness. "You are too modest," Cominius insisted; "and if you will indeed be such an enemy to your own deserts, give us leave to treat you as they treat madmen who seek their own hurt—that is, put you in handcuffs first and then reason with you. Be it known, then," he raised his voice, "that for his valour I present Caius Marcius with the crown of this war, that I beg him to accept my own horse and harness, and in addition proclaim that henceforth, for his deeds before Corioli, he be known to all the world as we here applaud him—Caius Marcius Coriolanus!"

This compliment, paid before the whole army and acclaimed with shouts and the noise of drum and trumpet, our hero could not refuse. "Let me go wash the blood from my face," he answered, "and then you shall perceive whether I blush or no. But, sir, although I have received princely gifts, I have a boon yet to beg." "It is yours before you ask it," said Cominius. "There is among the Volscians an old friend and host of mine, a man who once used me kindly. I saw him taken prisoner yesterday, but I was pursuing Aufidius, and in my heat I neglected him. It would do me great pleasure if I could save him from being sold as a slave." "A noble request and readily granted. What is your friend's name?" "By Jupiter, I have forgotten!" It was his own fine action, not the prisoner, he was thinking of; and so at the moment

when nothing seemed too small for his magnanimous remembrance his selfishness betrayed him.

Caius Marcius—or Coriolanus as we shall henceforth call him—had reached the height of his renown. At home even the discontented Plebeians were awed by the lustre of his exploits, and the path lay open before him to the Consulship, the highest honour Rome could bestow, and beyond that to a great and useful career. Volumnia and Virgilia went forth with the crowd that welcomed him into the city, the one praising the gods for his honourable wounds, the other stopping her tender ears at the mention of them. And such a crowd it was! Dignified priests jostled with nursemaids and kitchen wenches for a sight of the hero; fine ladies, regardless of their complexions, having found their stations, sat for hours in the sun's eye to await his coming and throw him their gloves and kerchiefs as he passed. Stalls, windows, parapets, ridge-roofs were thronged. It was faces, faces everywhere; faces of all complexions, but all agreeing in their earnestness to catch one glimpse of Coriolanus. His worst enemies, the Tribunes, marked all this and agreed among themselves that the great prize of the state, the Consulship—the one gift left for his mother to desire for him—lay within his grasp. And they foresaw well enough that should Coriolanus be Consul their own office might (as they put it) "go to sleep."

But among these Tribunes were two, Junius Brutus and Sicinius Velutus, astuter than the rest. They watched the exultant entry, and kept their tempers even while Menenius Agrippa (our old friend of the "Belly and the Members" story) jibed at them for envying the Patrician

triumph. They bided their time.

For a Roman who sought the Consulship had to observe certain formalities which they foresaw must go sorely against the grain with Coriolanus. In particular, custom required him to appear on the day of canvassing in a humble dress, wearing only a white tunic like any mere workman, without the flowing cloak, or toga, which marked a Roman of birth; and to solicit each vote as a favour, giving reasons why he thought himself worthy to be Consul, and perhaps even displaying the wounds he had earned in his country's service. For the moment, no doubt, the Plebeians were disposed to forgive Coriolanus' past rancour and to let bygones be bygones. But a very little offensiveness might revive the old dislike and turn the scale against him, and these two clever Tribunes believed they might count on his turning restive and showing some of his old arrogance during the canvass.

As it turned out, they were right. At first Coriolanus' candidature went well enough. He had the Senate's support, and this his commander Cominius announced before a public assembly in a speech which lauded him to the skies. Coriolanus would not stay to listen to it; he had already undergone too much of this praise for his taste, and he had not the least desire to hear all his exploits recounted once more, and himself compared as a warrior to a ship in sail and treading men like weeds under its stem. But he returned to hear that the Senate approved his election, and it only remained for him to speak to the people. Upon this (as the Tribunes had expected) he asked leave to be excused the indignity of

the canvass, a permission which they were too cunning to grant. Assured now that there were difficulties ahead, they went off to drill the people, so that the questions put to him, and the manner of putting them, might be providentially irritating to his temper.

The day of canvass arrived, and Coriolanus appeared in the market-place clad in his candidate's tunic, and feeling hot and very much ashamed of himself. The citizens, who had gathered in knots to await his coming, dispersed at once, and, as their cue was, advanced by ones, twos, and threes to put their questions. From the first Coriolanus was not happy in his manner towards them. "What am I to say?" he asked Menenius Agrippa by his side: "Surely you would not have me ask, 'What, do you want to see my wounds? Here they are then—I got them in my country's service when some of your brethren roared and ran away from the sound of our own drums.'" "Good heavens!" cried Menenius, "you must not speak of that! Talk to them reasonably, as for their good." "For their good? Shall I tell them to go home, then, and wash their faces?"

The very first knot of citizens began to catechise him in a style not likely to improve his temper. This was a great day for them, and they felt a high sense of their own importance. "Tell us, sir, what brings you to stand here?" They insisted upon all the formalities. "My own desert," snapped Coriolanus. "Your own desert?" "Ay, not my own desire." "How not your own desire?" "No, sir; it was never my desire yet to beg of the poor." "You must think, sir," put in one specially offensive catechiser, "that if we give you anything we hope to gain something

from you." Coriolanus appeared to be vastly impressed by this, which, to be sure, was a somewhat shopkeeper-like view of the position. "Ah," he answered, "pray tell me then your price for the Consulship." "The price, sir," interposed another with better sense, "is to ask it kindly." "Kindly?" Coriolanus pitched his voice in a mocking key: "Sir, I pray you let me have it. I have wounds to show, and will show them to you—in private. Your good vote, sir; what say you? May I count on it?" "You shall have it, worthy sir," promised a citizen, whose wits happened to be too thick to catch the sarcasm. "That makes two worthy votes begged then. I have your alms. Good-day!" Coriolanus turned on his heel. "There's something odd about this," grumbled the voter who had talked about exchange; and even the thick-witted one muttered that "if his vote could be given again—but no matter!"

The truth is that even the meanest of us feels a certain importance when he has something to give, and likes to be asked for it politely. Coriolanus was at once too narrowly proud to see what every great leader of men must see, that all men have their feelings, and these must not be rough-ridden but understood, and too honestly proud to stoop to devices which other politicians used while despising them. He did, indeed, go through the form of observance, but with an insolent carelessness which made it worse than omission. Nor was his a noble carelessness, as one humble and mistaken observer had termed it. It was not that he did not care, but that in his heart he hated these Plebeians. He felt all the while how false his position was, and by and by, as this feeling became intolerable, he broke out

bitterly, "Here come more votes! Your votes, pray! For your votes I have fought and kept watch; for your votes I carry two dozen odd wounds, and have seen thrice six battles—or heard of them. Pray, pray, give me your votes then, for indeed I want to be Consul!"

Puzzled and angered, yet remembering his past services, they gave him their votes. To this—as their Tribunes presently discovered with some dismay—they stood committed. Coriolanus had gone off to change his detestable garments, and, as he put it, "know himself again." Nothing remained but to confirm the election. Yet the temper of the people was sulky, and Brutus and Sicinius quickly perceived that all was not lost. "What? Could you not see he was mocking you? Could you not have insisted that as Consul he would be the state's servant, and have pressed your claims and tied him by a promise to serve you instead of speaking, as he always has spoken, against your liberties and charters? Had you not a man's heart amongst you, that you suffered all his contempt and gave him just what he asked?" "It is not too late yet," cried the citizen who had talked about exchange; "the election is not yet confirmed!" "Be quick then, and revoke this ignorant choice of yours! Stay—put the fault on us. Say that we, your Tribunes, over-persuaded you by laying stress on his great deeds and his ancestry, but that on second thoughts you find him your fixed enemy and regret our advice—our advice, mind! Harp on that." "We will!" shouted the crowd, who by this time repented the election almost to a man. They rushed off to the Capitol, and Brutus and Sicinius followed to watch this pretty storm of their raising.

Coriolanus, who fully deemed himself Consul elect, and was so deemed by the Senators, was talking among them with Titus Lartius, newly returned from Corioli. Tullus Aufidius, so Titus reported, had raised new troops, and in the face of them the Romans had been the quicker in offering terms of peace and coming away. In short, the Volscians, though checked for a while, were still dangerous. Their general, Aufidius, in wrath at their yielding Corioli so cheaply, had retired to his own house in the neighbouring town of Antium. "I wish I had cause to seek him there," muttered Coriolanus, little thinking that he would indeed be seeking Aufidius very soon, but not as Consul of Rome.

For while he came along the street discussing this news, he found his way unexpectedly barred by the Tribunes Brutus and Sicinius. "Pass no further," they commanded; "there will be mischief if this man goes to the market-place." "Why," cried the Senators, "is not Coriolanus elected by nobles and commons both?" "No; for the people are incensed against him. They cry out that they have been mocked, and call to mind his late opposition when corn was distributed to them free." "And so," Coriolanus broke out, "on that account they take back their votes, and I am not to be Consul! I'd better deserve the worst of them, then, and be made a vulgar Tribune like yourself!" "Let me tell you," answered Sicinius, "that if you wish to attain whither you're bound, you had better inquire your way, which you're out of, more gently, or you'll never be either Consul or Tribune." Menenius and Cominius here interposed, imploring calm; but Coriolanus broke

out, "Talk to me of corn! What I said then I'll repeat." It was in vain that the Senators tried to check him. "No; I will say it. This shifty, foul-smelling rabble shall learn that I do not flatter. I say again that in truckling to them we are feeding a harvest of tares, of insolence, and sedition, which we ourselves have ploughed for and sown in our folly!" "No more, we beseech you!" his friends entreated. But Coriolanus' anger had passed completely out of control. He rated the Senators for their past lenity. "The rabble had well deserved corn! How? By shirking to fight for their country? By mutinies and revolts during the campaign? No; they demanded it, and the Senate, terrorised by their voting strength, gave way. 'Enough!' you say? Nay, take more—hear it all. When gentry, title, wisdom cannot conclude without the 'yes' or 'no' of general ignorance, then I say you must neglect the true necessity of the state for unstable vanity. I bid you—those of you who prefer a noble life to a long one—pluck out this multitude's tongue! Cease to let it lick poison because it finds poison sweet! Put an end to this dishonour which takes from your state the power to do good by submitting it to the control of that which only knows, or can do, evil!"

"Enough!" cried the Tribunes. "He has spoken like a traitor, and shall answer as a traitor! This man a Consul? Never!" They shouted for their officers, the ædiles, to summon the people. Sicinius laid hands on Coriolanus to arrest him. The Senators offered to be surety, but Coriolanus flung him off. "Hence, old goat! Hence, rotten thing! or I will shake your bones out of your garments." "Help! help!" shouted Sicinius, and the

ædiles and rabble came running together to his rescue. For a while, as they hustled about Coriolanus and tried to lay hands on him, their cries and the counter-cries of the Patricians deafened the air. At length Menenius appealed to the Tribunes to speak to the people, and between them they managed to get a hearing. But when they spoke it was not to soothe the feeling against Coriolanus. "The city of Rome is the people, and we are the people's magistrates. We must stand to that authority or lose it, and in the name of the people we pronounce Marcius worthy of death, and command that he be carried hence and hurled from the Tarpeian rock,"—for this was the form of death set apart for traitors by Roman custom. "Ædiles, seize him!" Coriolanus drew his sword. "No, no!"—Menenius would have prevented him, calling on the Tribunes to withdraw for a while. But it was too late, and a moment after he was shouting to his fellow-nobles to help Coriolanus, as the rabble made a rush crying, "Down with him! down with him!"

In the skirmish which followed the men of birth had the upper hand, and beat Tribunes, ædiles, and mob together out of the street. "On fair ground I could whip forty such curs," panted Coriolanus; but Cominius knew that their advantage was a short one, and he and Menenius persuaded Coriolanus to escape to his house before the crowd came pouring back—as it presently did, demanding his instant death without trial for resisting the law. It taxed all Menenius' powers of persuasion to patch up a truce for the moment, engaging that if the Tribunes would promise a regular form of trial he would produce Coriolanus to submit to it. To this the

Tribunes, after some dispute, declared themselves ready; and dispersed their followers, commanding them, however, to reassemble in the market-place where the trial should be held.

It was no easy matter to persuade Coriolanus to attend. At home he raged up and down, swearing the rabble should pull his house about his ears and pile ten Tarpeian rocks one on another, or tear him in pieces by wild horses before he would submit. His friends could do nothing with him, and it was Volumnia who at length persuaded him to go. Coriolanus had always the deepest respect, as well as love, for his mother. From her he had learnt that passion for honour which he followed with so headstrong a will, and when she besought him to go and use fair speech, insisting that this could not disgrace him, he sullenly consented. "We'll prompt you," promised Cominius; "remember 'mildly' is the word." And "mildly" echoed Menenius. "Mildly be it then," grumbled Coriolanus, "mildly!"

In the market-place the people were awaiting him, well drilled by Brutus and Sicinius to echo whatever cry the Tribunes should raise. These two felt confident that they had only to put Coriolanus in a passion and he would be in their power. Coriolanus entered, his friends following close and standing about him to hold him in check, and Sicinius began to question him. "Do you submit to the people's voice and acknowledge their officers? and are content to suffer such legal censure as may be pronounced on you?" "I am content," was the answer. "There! you see he is content," put in the delighted Menenius: "he is a soldier, remember; you

must not expect a soldier to be over-gentle in his language." "Well, well, no more of that," commented Cominius, who did not feel easy just yet. And in his very next words Coriolanus began to take the offensive, demanding why, after being elected Consul, he was dishonoured by having his election annulled. "It is your business here to answer, not to ask questions," said Sicinius. Still Coriolanus kept down his temper. "True, so it is." "We charge you that you have deprived Rome of her constitutional government and taken to yourself tyrannical power, for which you are a traitor to the people of Rome." This was too much. The charge, a new and unexpected one, had no justification. But it was the word "traitor" which stuck in Coriolanus' throat. " 'Traitor!' "—in a moment he was past holding. "May the fires of lowest hell wrap this people! Call me their traitor! If this lying Tribune had twenty thousand deaths for me, I would call him the liar that he is!" "To the rock! To the rock!" bawled the multitude. Still his friends implored, but Coriolanus was now utterly deaf. "Be it the rock, or be it exile, flaying, starvation, I would not buy their mercy with a single word."

Exile was the sentence the Tribunes had determined on, and in the name of the people Sicinius now pronounced it. Perhaps they hardly dared to exact the last penalty of the Tarpeian rock, but this they promised awaited Coriolanus if he ever again set foot within the gates of Rome.

"Curs!" answered Coriolanus, "it is I who banish *you!* Remain, and tremble at every rumour of war, shake whenever you see the plumes of your invaders

nodding. Banish your defenders one by one, until your ignorance delivers you captive without a blow. For your sakes I despise Rome, and thus turn my back on her. There is a world elsewhere." And so he turned and departed, while they flung up their caps and shouted, "The people's enemy is gone!"

His wife, his mother, and a few friends escorted him to the gate. "Do not weep; a brief farewell is the best. Nay, mother, remember your ancient courage." Volumnia called curses upon the "many-headed beast" that treated her son so ungratefully. Virgilia could only weep. Old Cominius, that true friend, would have gone with him for a while, but Coriolanus forbade it and went his way alone.

Whither was Coriolanus bound? He was, as we have seen, a man with many great elements; and yet not an entirely great man, for selfishness infected them all. Even his high worship of honour had its roots in selfishness. He could say, and he believed, that he had fought and bled for his country, but at heart he thought first of self. He, the brave and noble Coriolanus, had been insulted, abused, treated with shameful ingratitude. The wound to his self-love poisoned all his thoughts. He forgot his boasted affection for his country, forgot everything but his one desire—to be revenged.

It was twilight in the Volscian town of Antium when a stranger, dressed in mean apparel and wearing a muffler about his face, entered the gate and wandered along the streets like a man uncertain of his way. Many people passed, but no man knew him. Of one of these

he asked to be directed to the house of Tullus Aufidius.

Tullus Aufidius was dining and (as it chanced) entertaining the Senators of Antium, for the Volscians were even now on the eve of launching a fresh invasion into Roman territory under his guidance. The troops were mustered, Aufidius had made his preparations, and the Senators had gathered to-night to wish him good speed. From the banqueting-room where they feasted the sound of music poured through the doors into the outer hall, where the serving-men ran to and fro with dishes or shouted for more wine. Such was the scene upon which Coriolanus entered, still in his disguise, and stood for a moment looking about him. "A goodly house! And the feast smells well; but I have scarcely the look of a guest." "Hullo, friend!" called out one of the slaves, "what's your business, and where do you come from? Here's no place for you; go to the door, pray." "And whence are you, sir?" demanded another: "has the porter no eyes, that he admits such fellows? Pray, get you out." "Away!" Coriolanus thrust him aside. "Away? It's for you to go away. I'll have you talked with in a moment." "What fellow's this?" inquired a third. "A strange one as ever I saw. I cannot get him out of the house. Prithee, call my master to him." "Let me but stand here," said Coriolanus; "I will not hurt your hearth." But the fellow insisted that he must begone, and so insolently that Coriolanus lost his temper and caught him a sound buffet. In the midst of this hubbub Aufidius himself entered, having been summoned to deal with the intruder. "Where is this fellow?" he asked; and perceiving Coriolanus, "Your business, pray? and

your name? Be quick, if you please—your name, sir!"

Coriolanus unwound the muffler from his face. "A name, Tullus, not musical in the Volscians' ears, and I believe harsh to thine."

Still Aufidius did not recognise him, being unprepared for this visitor, of all men. "Thou hast a face of command, and seemest a noble ship though thy tackle is torn. But I know thee not."

"I am Caius Marcius, once thy foe in particular, and foe of all the Volscians, as my surname Coriolanus may witness. That name is all my thankless country requites me with. The cruelty and envy of the rabble, by leave of the dastard nobles who forsook me, have swallowed all the rest and hounded me out of Rome. Therefore I am come to your hearth—not in hope to save my life—but in spite, to be revenged on my banishers. If thou, too, desirest revenge on Rome, make my misery serve thy turn; use me, and I will fight against my country with the spleen of all the devils below. If thou dare not, if it weary thee to try thy fortune afresh, then I am weary, weary to live, and offer my life here to thee and our old grudge."

While he spoke Aufidius had drawn back in amazement. But he was a man of generous impulse, and in a moment he fought down his present incredulity and his old malice together:—

"O Marcius, Marcius! Each word of thine plucks up a root of our ancient envy!" He embraced the foe whose body he had so often and vainly assailed with sword and lance. "Not when my wedded wife first crossed

my threshold did my heart dance as it dances now to see thee here, thou noble thing! Why, thou Mars! I tell thee we have a power on foot now, at this moment; and once more I was purposing to hew thy shield from thine arm or lose my own arm in the endeavour. Time upon time thou hast beaten me, and night after night I have dreamed of new encounters—in my sleep we have been down together, tearing loose our helms, fisting each other's throat—and so waked half-dead with nothing. Worthy Marcius! Had we no other quarrel with Rome than her banishing thee, we would muster all from youngest to oldest to avenge thee. Come, come in; take our friendly Senators by the hand—they are here to wish me good speed. Take the half of my command, and direct thine own revenge. Thou shouldst know best when and how to strike Rome. Come in, I say. They shall say yes to all thy desires. Welcome a thousand times! more a friend than ever an enemy—and yet that was much, Marcius! Your hand, come!"

They passed together into the banqueting-room, and soon the disconcerted slaves had plenty to gossip about as they saw the strange visitor seated at the upper table and feasted, questioned, and consulted amid the deferential awe of the Senators. Aufidius was as good as his word, and readily gave up to Coriolanus the half of his commission. With this undreamt ally there was no division and no hesitation in the counsels of Antium. It was war now, and war without delay.

In Rome the Tribunes were congratulating themselves. Their enemy was gone, and they had heard no more of him. It was pleasant to see the tradesmen

singing in their shops, or going amicably about their business instead of running about the streets in tumult as in the days when they had Caius Marcius to provoke them. The Tribunes took great credit for this and for having rid Rome of one who aimed at kingship. They could repeat this false accusation safely; and Menenius and his fellow-Senators, while they shook their heads, took care to treat the Tribunes with consideration. As for Coriolanus, even his mother and wife heard nothing from him.

The first warning of something amiss came from a slave, who reported that the Volscians were astir again and had crossed the Roman frontiers with two separate armies. He carried this news to the ædiles, and was by those wiseacres promptly clapped into prison for a liar. "Have him whipped," commanded Brutus. Menenius suggested that it might be as well to make a few inquiries before whipping him.

And while Brutus and Sicinius protested that the tale could not be true—it was not possible—there arrived a messenger with word that the nobles had received news, and were crowding to the Senate House. The slave's report had been confirmed by a second. Marcius had joined with Aufidius, and was marching on Rome to revenge himself.

"A likely story!" sneered Sicinius. "Ay," added Brutus, "and raised no doubt to make the weaker spirits wish him home again." But this messenger was followed by another, and he again by Cominius in a towering rage. "You've made good work!" he broke out, addressing

the Tribunes. "What news? What news?" asked Menenius eagerly; and being told it, he too rounded on the Tribunes. "You've made good work, you and your apron-men! Oh, you've made fine work!" "But is this true, sir?" Brutus stammered. "True? You'll look pale enough before you find it anything else. He will shake Rome about your ears. Who can blame him? And who can beg his mercy? Not you Tribunes—you who deserve such pity as a wolf deserves of the shepherd. Yes, indeed, you've made good work of it! You've brought Rome to a pretty pass!" "Say not we brought it." "Who, then?" snapped Menenius: "Was it we? We loved him; but, cowards that we were, we gave way and allowed your crew of danglers to hoot him out of the city. Here they come, your danglers!" as the crowd poured around them discussing the news. "Well, sirs, how do you like your handiwork?" The crowd was scared, but clamorous after its wont, each man noisily anxious to shift the blame off his own shoulders. "For my part, when I voted to banish him I said 'twas a pity." "I always said we were in the wrong." "So did we all." "You are goodly things, you voters," said Cominius, with bitter contempt.

The peril was urgent. Town after town yielded before Coriolanus without a blow, and Rome, divided within her gates, lay apparently at his mercy. In name he shared the command with Aufidius, but in fact Coriolanus was the sole hero of the campaign. The Volscian soldiery swore by their new leader, and his popularity began to teach Aufidius that the roots of ancient envy are not so easily plucked up after all. Aufidius was a generous man, up to a point; he had proved it by a highly generous

action. But to obey a generous impulse is easier than to keep a magnanimous temper constant in face of a rival's success. Something of the old jealousy awoke in the Volscian leader; he saw, or thought he saw, that Coriolanus behaved more haughtily towards him than at first; his near friends and lieutenants encouraged the suspicion; he began to repent that he had given up half his command. Too big a man to deny his rival's merit, he was little enough to be galled by it, and to spy out faults which might some day serve for an accusation. "Coriolanus has merit; yet something brought him to grief once in spite of it. He has merit enough to silence criticism; yet he fell. Our virtues are as men choose to interpret them; a man may have power and be conscious of his own deserts, yet he will not find in an epitaph what he lacked in the praise of the living. Fire drives out fire, one nail another, and one man's reputation another's. When Rome has fallen, and Caius Marcius thinks himself strongest, my time shall come."

In Rome there was absolute dismay, and no attempt even to disguise it. Panic-stricken women ran wailing about the streets; the temples were filled with old folks weeping bitterly and entreating the gods; nor could a man be found wise or strong enough to provide for the city's defence. At the suit of the Tribunes (humble enough by this time) Cominius had been persuaded to visit the Volscian camp and supplicate Coriolanus in person. Coriolanus would not listen to his old commander; but as he knelt and pleaded their old acquaintance and blood shed together for Rome's sake, bade him rise, and with no more words, but a

wave of the hand only, dismissed him back to the city. Where Cominius had failed would Menenius succeed? It was not likely; yet Menenius had strong claims on Coriolanus' love, and at length suffered himself to be persuaded. Cominius had perhaps chosen an unhappy moment. Menenius, a firm believer in the influence of the stomach over men's actions, would choose a propitious one, after dinner. The mission flattered his sense of importance; he might be able to show these huckstering Tribunes something, these fellows who were likely to cheapen coals by getting Rome burnt to the ground. After all he did not despair.

So he too set out for the Volscian camp. But his reception there was scarcely encouraging. The sentries at first would not let him pass, and seemed as little impressed by his name as by his recital of friendly services done for Coriolanus in the past. "You are mistaken," they assured him, "if you think to blow out the fire preparing for Rome with such weak breath as this." While they wrangled, Coriolanus himself came by in talk with Aufidius. "Now, you fellow," Menenius promised, "you shall see in what estimation I am held, and if a Jack-in-office can keep me from my son Coriolanus without hanging for it or worse"; and approaching Coriolanus, "The glorious gods sit in hourly synod about thy particular prosperity, and love thee no worse than thy old father Menenius does! O my son, my son! I was hardly moved to come to thee; but being assured that none but myself could move thee, I have been blown out of our gates with sighs, and conjure thee to pardon Rome and thy petitioning

countrymen. The good gods assuage thy wrath, and turn the dregs of it upon this varlet here—this blockhead, who like a block hath denied my access to thee!" "Away!" answered Coriolanus. "Eh? How? Away?" stammered Menenius. "Away! I know not wife, mother, or child; I am servant to the Volscians now. My ears are closed against your petitions more firmly than your gates against me. Not another word!" He turned to Aufidius. "This man was my dear friend in Rome, yet thou see'st." "You keep a constant temper," said Aufidius. The two generals turned away and left Menenius standing red and discomfited before the jeers of the sentinels. "As for you, I take no account of such fellows. I say to you as I was said to, Away!" and away he stalked, followed by their laughter.

There was yet one plea left for Rome. While Coriolanus sat within his tent, grieved to have sent this old friend home (as he said) with a cracked heart, and resolute to listen to no more embassies, a stir arose without in the camp. No man had the cruelty to disturb or forbid this new procession. At the head of it in deepest mourning walked Virgilia, and behind her Volumnia leading Coriolanus' little son Marcius by the hand, and behind them again a train of Roman ladies, all in sorrowful black. They entered the tent and knelt before him, while Coriolanus rose, divided between his heart's instinct and his resolution to deny it.

"My lord and husband!" murmured Virgilia, and ceased.

"These eyes"—Coriolanus tried to recover his

firmness—"are not the same I wore in Rome."

"Sorrow—the sorrow that has changed us—makes you think so."

He could hold back his love no longer. "Best of my flesh, forgive me; but do not say, 'Forgive our Romans.' One kiss—a kiss as long as my exile, as sweet as my revenge!" He turned to his mother and knelt to salute her.

But Volumnia bade him rise, and, in spite of his protestation, sank herself upon her knees, and the child Marcius beside her. "Thou art my warrior; I helped to frame thee; this is thy son, and thyself in little." "The god of soldiers," said Coriolanus, "make him a noble soldier, proof against shame, and give him to stand in war like a great sea-mark, steadfast, the salvation of men who look upon him!" "And it is we who plead with you," said Volumnia.

"Nay, I beseech. Or, if you will plead, bid me not dismiss my soldiers or capitulate a second time with Rome's mechanics; plead not against my revenge, for to that I have sworn."

"You deny beforehand all we ask, yet we will and must ask." "Then all the Volscians shall hear it," said Coriolanus, and he called them to stand around.

"My son," said Volumnia, "should we hold our peace, yet the sight of us and our raiment would bewray what manner of life we have led since thy exile. Think how far more unfortunate than all living women are we, since the sight of thee, which should make our eyes flow with

joy, our hearts dance with comfort, constrains them to weep and shake with sorrow and terror, making us, thy wife, thy mother, thy child, to see thee besieging the walls of his native country. Ah, it is worst for us; for others may pray to the gods, but we cannot. How can we pray for our country and for thy victory—both so dear to us—when one must destroy the other? when, whichever wins, a curse is bound up in the prayer? Either my son must be led, a foreign recreant, in manacles through our streets, or march in triumph through them, trampling on his country's ruin. But, for me, I will not see that day. If I cannot persuade thee, thou shalt march to assault thy country over thy mother's body that brought thee into the world."

"Ay," echoed Virgilia, "and over mine that brought thy son into the world to keep thy name alive."

Coriolanus groaned. "I do wrong to look on women's faces; they turn a man to womanish tenderness." He turned to leave them.

"Nay," commanded Volumnia, "go not thus from us. Did we implore thee to save the Romans by destroying the Volscians, thou mightst condemn us as aiming against thine honour. But we plead only to reconcile them, so that the Volscians may say, 'This mercy we have shown'; and the Romans, 'This mercy we have received,' and both unite in blessing thee as the maker of this peace. Son, the end of war is uncertain; but this is certain, that if thou conquer Rome it will be to reap a name which shall be dogged with curses, and its chronicle thus written, 'The man was noble, but with

his last attempt he wiped out the remembrance of it and destroyed his country, and his name remains abhorred.' "

Yet Coriolanus sat silent. He could not trust himself to speak.

"Answer me, my son. Dost thou think it honourable for a noble man to remember the wrongs and injuries done him? Daughter, speak to him. He cares not for your weeping. Speak to him, boy; thy childishness may move him more than our reasoning. Son, no son in the world owes his mother more than thou owest; never in thy life hast thou shown thy mother any courtesy; not when she, poor soul, fond of no other child, doted on thee going to the wars, doted on thee returning laden with honour. Is my plea unjust? Spurn it, then. But if it be just, as thou fearest heaven, deny not thy mother her due."

A last time he would have turned away, but she and Virgilia and the child flung themselves on their knees together, uplifting their hands.

And seeing this, Coriolanus was mastered. He stepped to his mother, and lifting her, held her by the hand for a moment, silent. Then with a cry speech broke from him—"O mother, mother, what have you done to me!" Still he held her hand, fighting for words. "O mother, you have won a happy victory for your country, but—though you know it not—mortal and unhappy for your son!" He turned to Aufidius. "Sir, though I cannot make this war as I promised, I can and will make a peace to suit you. Say," he added, almost wistfully, since he had come to trust Aufidius, "could you in my place

have listened to a mother less? or have granted less?" "I was moved myself," owned Aufidius, but this was all he would say. "I dare be sworn you were. But advise me, my friend, touching what peace you will make. I remain here, and I pray you stand by me in this matter." He would fain have gone to Rome with them whose dearness to him he had just so dearly proved; but his honour held him among the Volscians. "By and by," he promised; and dismissed them back on their happy errand. "You deserve to have a temple built to you; all the swords in Italy could not have made this peace."

Meanwhile in Rome the citizens swayed between hope and despair. Watchers lined the walls, their eyes bent on the Volscian camp. Within the city the mob had seized upon Brutus, and haled him up and down, promising him a lingering death if the petitioners brought back no comfort.

At length a cry went up from the walls, a shout. The Volscian camp was moving, retiring. Messengers came running, one after another, with the tidings; and soon, like the blown tide through an archway, the glad throng poured in through the gates. Trumpets sounded, drums, all instruments of music half-drowned in a tumult of cheering. And when at length Volumnia and her ladies appeared, escorted by the Senators, the crowd pressed about them rapturously, strewing flowers and shouting, "Welcome! Welcome!" Some lit triumphal fires; others ran and flung open the gates of all the temples, which soon were filled with men crowned with garlands and doing sacrifice as though news had come of a great victory.

Coriolanus was not to share this joy. He had spoken truth when he told his mother that she had won a victory most mortal for him. He turned his back upon the rejoicing city, and went, as his honour summoned him, friendless back to his fate. For as he led the Volscian troops homeward, Aufidius hurried before him, and before he reached Antium with drum and colours, Aufidius had made ready to receive him. "He has betrayed us. For a few women's tears he has bartered all the blood and labour of our great actions"; such was the charge forwarded by Aufidius in letters to the Senators. So when Coriolanus halted in the market-place, and delivered up the terms of peace, Aufidius stepped forward. "Read it not, noble lords! But tell this man he is a traitor!"

"Traitor!" Coriolanus turned on him fierce and amazed. "Ay, traitor," Aufidius repeated doggedly, "traitor and coward." "My lords," Coriolanus faced the Senators, "you shall judge me, and your judgment shall give this cur the lie, as he—he who shall carry the marks of my past whippings to his grave—already knows himself to be a liar." The Senators would have interposed, but the crowd had been instructed beforehand. Many had cause to hate Coriolanus for sons, fathers, kinsmen lost to them in fighting Rome. They pressed about him, crying, "Kill! Kill!"—and pierced with stroke upon stroke of their daggers, Coriolanus fell.

They had killed him believing him their enemy; but, their rage spent, they knew that they had slain a great man. Lifting the body, they bore it with military

honours through the streets of Antium, and buried it as became its rank and its great deeds.

JULIUS CÆSAR

FOUR HUNDRED AND FIFTY years had passed and the Rome of Coriolanus had become the mistress of the world. But all these years had not healed the quarrel between the patricians and plebeians; for as the city increased in size and dignity and empire, so her citizens increased in numbers and grew less and less inclined to submit to the rule of a few noble and privileged families. And these civil quarrels became more bloody and dangerous as Rome lost that fear of the foreigner which had once bound her citizens together in self-defence.

To hold and garrison her vast possessions, too, she needed soldiers, and drew them from far and wide to fight under her eagles. And in times of peace these soldiers, being out of employment, were only too apt to meddle with civil affairs; until at length it became clear that whoever wanted the upper hand must get the support of the army. The man who perceived this most clearly was himself a soldier and one of the greatest generals the world has ever known—Julius Cæsar; and his hope was, by making himself master of the army, to rule alone and supreme and by strong and steady government to put an end to the miserable dissensions from which the state suffered.

To this he attained after a long struggle with his great rival Pompey. When it was over and the sons of Pompey, after their father's death, had been crushed in the battle of Munda, Cæsar treated the vanquished party with great leniency, no doubt because he wanted as few enemies as possible in the work of steady government to which, as master of the whole Roman world, he was now to turn his mind.

But he had made more enemies than he bargained for, and some quite unsuspected ones. To begin with, the beaten Pompeians were not men of the sort to understand his generosity or to be grateful for it. Then some of his own followers were angry because their rewards had fallen short of what they believed themselves entitled to; and also because Cæsar, though he had given them high appointments, went his own way, as strong men will, without consulting them. There were others again—noble spirits—who loved him and yet believed that so much power in the hands of one man was a danger to that Liberty on which the Romans had always prided themselves. As for the mob, they cheered for the man who was up, after the manner of mobs. A few months ago they had climbed the walls and house-tops and shouted themselves hoarse for Pompey. Now that Pompey was dead, and Cæsar returned in triumph from his victory over Pompey's sons, they shouted with equal enthusiasm for Cæsar.

And Cæsar, in the glow of his triumph, had parted with some of his old wisdom. Men of his great achievements become what we call "men of destiny"; and just as their enemies fail to see that success so

mighty must contain something *fatal*, and cannot wholly depend on one man's cleverness or good luck, so they themselves are apt to forget that they are but the instruments of Heaven, and to take all the credit and become vain and puffed up. Thus the moment of Cæsar's triumph was the moment of his most dangerous weakness; for fancying himself almost a god, he began to talk and act in a way which persuaded his enemies that he was no more than a man with an ordinary man's frailties. Both were mistaken, and Destiny as usual turned the mistakes of both to her own sure purposes.

As usual, too, she gave warning; and at first in that small and seemingly casual voice which men disregard at the time and remember afterwards. There was an annual festival at Rome called the Lupercalia, held on the 15th of February, at the foot of the Aventine Hill, where Romulus and Remus, the founders of the city, had been discovered as infants with a she-wolf for their nurse. No doubt in the beginning it had been a rude shepherd's festival; but the Romans, proud to be reminded of their city's small beginnings, had appointed a company of priests who yearly on this date made a sacrifice of goats in honour of the old mother-wolf, and afterwards cut their skins into thongs. And the custom was for many noble youths to strip naked and run with these thongs, with which they playfully struck the bystanders. One of the runners this year was Mark Antony, a young man of pleasure, but of ambition too and excellent parts, when his love of pleasure allowed him to use them, and an especial friend of Cæsar's. Cæsar himself attended in state with his train of followers and flatterers, among

whom one Casca was foremost calling "Silence!" to the crowd whenever the great man so much as opened his mouth.

The great man just now was talking familiarly with Antony, who stood ready stripped for the course, when a shrill voice from the throng cried "Cæsar!" "Ha! who calls?" asked Cæsar, turning about, and the officious Casca ordered silence again. "Beware the Ides of March!"—It was a soothsayer who gave this warning, and repeated it when Casca called him forward; but Cæsar lightly dismissed him as a "dreamer," and passed on to see the show.[1]

The crowd followed at his heels, and left two men standing—noble Romans both of them. Their names were Marcus Brutus and Caius Cassius, and a close friendship united them in spite of their very different natures. No citizen of Rome was more upright than Brutus, more single-minded, more unselfishly patriotic. A philosopher and a man of books rather than of action, he was in some ways as simple as a child; and being perfectly honest himself, doubted not that every one else must be honest. Privately he liked Cæsar and was respected by Cæsar; but he believed from the bottom of his heart that all this power in the hands of one man was a monstrous treason to the old Roman idea of liberty,

[1] The Romans marked off their months by three points: the Kalends or 1st day, and the Nones and Ides, which were the 7th and 15th of March, May, July, October, and the 5th and 13th of other months. They began by reckoning the number of days before the Nones, then the Ides, then the Kalends of next month. The Ides of March were the 15th.

and a danger to the commonwealth, and he watched it with a growing sadness and indignation.

Cassius, too, was indignant; but for reasons less lofty than those which moved Brutus. He felt the wrong done to the state; but being of a splenetic and angry temper, he disliked and was jealous of Cæsar. And Cæsar paid back this feeling with suspicion. "That Cassius," he said once to Antony, "has a lean and hungry look. He thinks too much, and such men are dangerous." "Fear him not, Cæsar," replied Antony, "he is a noble Roman and well disposed." "I would he were fatter," Cæsar persisted, who liked to have sleek and contented men about him: "If I, Cæsar, were liable to fear, I do not know whom I should avoid so soon as that spare Cassius. He reads much, is a great observer; he loves no plays as thou dost, Antony; hears no music; smiles seldom, and then as if he scorned himself for smiling. Men such as he are never easy of heart while they behold a greater than themselves; and therefore they are very dangerous." And Cæsar was right, though he fancied himself too great to fear this danger which he pointed out.

"Will you go see the runners?" asked Cassius, as he and Brutus were left alone.

"Not I," said Brutus, "I am not inclined for sport, and lack Antony's lively spirits. But do not let me hinder you, Cassius."

"Brutus, how comes it that your manner to me has changed of late? I miss the old gentleness and show of love, and observe that you bear yourself stiffly towards the friend who loves you."

"Pardon me, Cassius. I am troubled in mind, at war with myself; and it is this which makes me seem negligent in my behaviour to my good friends."

"Then," said Cassius, "I have mistaken you, and my mistake has made me keep buried in my breast some thoughts of mine well worth imparting. Tell me, Brutus," he asked abruptly, "can you see your face? . . . I wish you could; and I have heard men of the best respect in Rome—except *immortal* Cæsar," he put in with a sneer; "men groaning under this present yoke—declare how they wished Brutus would but use his eyes."

"Cassius, into what dangers would you lead me?"

"Well, my friend, let me be your glass; and look on me that you may discover more of yourself than you yet know." And he was beginning to protest what Brutus well knew, that he was no common flatterer or loose talker in company, when the noise of distant shouting interrupted him.

"What means this shouting?" said Brutus; "I fear the people are acclaiming Cæsar for their king."

"Ay, do you *fear* that? Then I must think you would not have it so."

"No, Cassius, though I love him well. But what is it you would impart to me? If it be aught toward the public good, you know that I prize what is honourable more than I fear death."

Thus encouraged, Cassius unfolded his tale of grievance. "Is it honour that we should all stand in awe of this one Cæsar, a man like ourselves? You and

I were born free as Cæsar. Is he in any way more of a man? He is a great swimmer; yet I have swum the roaring Tiber with him, and he has called to me to save him from drowning. I have seen him in Spain, sick of a fever—this god of ours—shaking and pallid, and calling for drink like a sick girl."

"Hark!" said Brutus, "they are shouting again. I do believe this applause must be for some new honours heaped on him."

"Why, man, he bestrides this narrow world like a Colossus, and we petty men walk under his huge legs and peep about to find ourselves dishonourable graves. Men at one time or another are masters of their own fate, and if we are underlings, we, and not our stars, not our destinies, are to blame. Brutus and Cæsar! Why Cæsar more than Brutus? Is Rome so degenerate that in this last age it holds but one man, and makes him king? There was a Brutus once who would have brooked the devil himself in Rome as easily as a king." He spoke of that Lucius Junius Brutus, his friend's ancestor, who had in old times expelled the Tarquins. Cassius was indeed no common flatterer, but knew exactly how to touch his friend's pride. Brutus was moved. He confessed that he guessed Cassius' meaning; he would think of what had been said; would talk of it further at some other time. Meanwhile let Cassius sustain himself with this—"Brutus had rather be a villager than repute himself a son of Rome under such conditions as he foresees will be laid upon Romans."

The re-entry of Cæsar and his train broke off their

talk. Something had clearly happened at the games to annoy the great man, for his face wore an angry spot, and his wife Calpurnia was pale, while the great orator Cicero had the look he put on when crossed in debate. As they went by Cassius plucked Casca by the sleeve and delayed him to know what the matter was. "Oh," said Casca, "there was a crown offered to Cæsar, or a kind of crown. It was mere foolery, and I did not mark it. Antony offered it, and Cæsar refused it thrice, and then he fell down in a fit." Casca had a bluff hearty manner with him, but he was really a sly unstable man who took his cue from his company. "A fit?" said Brutus; "that is likely enough, he suffers from the falling-sickness."[2] "Nay," interposed Cassius, with meaning, "it is not Cæsar, but you and I and honest Casca here that suffer from the *falling*-sickness." Casca scented the hint at once, and still keeping his jolly good-fellow-well-met way of speaking, let fall another in answer. "The tag-rag people," said he, "clapped and hissed Cæsar, just as if he were playing a part; and what's more, he gave them excuse enough, for just before he fell down he plucked open his doublet and offered me his throat to cut! If I had only been a practical fellow instead of the easy-going one you see, I swear I'd have taken him at his word." "And when all was over," said Brutus, "Cæsar came away sad, as we saw him?" "Ay." "Did Cicero say anything?" asked Cassius (for Cicero might or might not join the plot, and it was worth while to find out how he behaved). "Ay, he spoke Greek." "To what effect?" "Nay," said Casca, with a shrug of the shoulders, "you mustn't ask me that. I'm a

[2] A name given to the epilepsy.

plain fellow, and it was Greek to me at any rate. There was more foolery besides, if I could remember it." "Will you dine with me to-morrow, Casca?" asked Cassius, for he saw cunning where Brutus saw bluntness only. Casca promised, and so they parted.

And during the next month Cassius was busy. He feared, on second thoughts, to trust Cicero; but he sounded others of his acquaintance—Trebonius, Ligarius, Cinna, Decimus Brutus, Metellus Cimber—who were ready to join the plot. Their main hope, however, rested on Marcus Brutus; for whatever their own several motives might be, they knew none but the highest would persuade him to lift a hand against Cæsar, and that the people would give him credit for this. Cassius, to influence his friend, had letters and scrolls carefully prepared in different handwritings, all hinting at Cæsar's ambition, and that Rome looked to Brutus for deliverance. Some of them would be thrown in at Brutus' window, others laid among the petitions in his prætor's chair, others again pinned to the statue of his great ancestor. Every day brought a fresh shower of these letters, which Brutus believed to come honestly from the people and express their wishes.

Indeed, as often happens when treason or conspiracy is in the air, the public mind began to be disquieted with vague rumours and whisperings. Whence they came, or what they meant precisely, none knew. But folk began to talk of omens, signs of heaven, mysterious fires and meteors. A lion had been found wandering loose in the streets; an owl had settled at noonday above the great market-place; a slave's hand had burst into flame, but

when he had cast the flames from him the hand was found to be unhurt—such were the foolish tales spread and discussed. Certainly the heavens were unsettled and broke on the night before the Ides into a furious thunderstorm.

Cassius passing through the drenched streets, reckless of the lightning, to join his fellow-conspirators, ran against Casca, whom the storm and its horrors had completely terrified. He had left Casca to the last, knowing him to be easily pliable. But now the time was short. To-night the plotters were to come together and hear Brutus' final answer. It took Cassius but a few minutes to convince the shaking man that the portents at which he trembled were really directed against Cæsar, to whom in the morning, if report said true, the senators meant to offer the crown; and but a few minutes more to persuade him that he really was a bondman and owed Cæsar a grudge. "I am ready," he protested, "to dare as much as Cassius in putting down the tyrant. I am no tell-tale." Cassius had his own opinion about this; but now that the time for tale-bearing was past, disclosed the plot to him and bade him follow to the porch of Pompey's Theatre, where the conspirators were assembling to pay their visit together to Brutus' house.

Brutus meanwhile had been passing through a terrible time. The more he pondered the more clearly he seemed to see that Cæsar's life was a daily-growing menace to the welfare and liberties of Rome. "It must be by his death," he heard an inner voice whispering. Another voice would whisper that privately he could find no quarrel with Cæsar. And then a third would

answer that Cæsar's tyranny must increase with his opportunities. "It is the bright day that brings forth the adder, and therefore," it said, "kill this serpent in the egg."

These were the thoughts which for days had kept him distracted. They allowed him no sleep to-night, but drove him from his bed long before daybreak. He wakened his young slave Lucius, and bidding him set a taper in the study, walked out into his orchard when the storm had spent itself and left the heavens clear enough for the eye to mark the meteors shooting above the dark trees.

But out here the same miserable doubts dogged and besieged him. The boy brought word that his taper was lit, and handed him a sealed paper which he had found by the window in searching for a flint. "Go back to bed," said his master, "it is not day yet. By the way, is not to-morrow the Ides of March?" "I know not, sir." "Go then first and look in the calendar, and bring me word."

He broke the seal of the paper, and read a sentence or two by the light of the trailing stars. It was another of the mysterious letters. "Brutus, thou sleepest. Awake and see thyself"—the very words might have told him who the author was. Another call to him in the name of his great ancestors to come to the rescue of Rome!

The boy, coming back to report the date, was interrupted by a knocking without. It was Cassius, with the rest of the conspirators, heavily cloaked and wrapped. By his master's order Lucius admitted them to the dark garden. Cassius made them known—Trebonius,

Decimus Brutus, Casca, Cinna, Metellus Cimber; and then drew Brutus aside while the rest fell into constrained trivial talk which barely hid their uneasiness.

But Brutus' mind was made up. After some whispering with Cassius he came forward. "Give me your hands—no oath is necessary. We are Romans, and a promise is enough." He laid great stress on this; to him it meant everything to read in their purpose the genuine old Roman spirit. Cassius recalled him to more practical matters. "What of Cicero? Shall we sound him?" "We must not leave him out," said Casca, and Cinna and Metellus agreed. Brutus urged that Cicero was not a man to follow what others began. "Better leave him out, then," said Cassius, who mistrusted Cicero on other grounds. "No, indeed, he won't do," chimed in Casca, ready as usual to contradict himself and echo the last speaker.

Decimus Brutus wished to know if Cæsar alone should be sacrificed. "Well urged," said Cassius; "if we allow Mark Antony to live, he is just the man to do us mischief. Antony must fall too."

But this counsel revolted Brutus. "We are sacrificers and not butchers," he dwelt again on the sober justice of their purpose—as it appeared to him. He abhorred bloodshed, and pleaded for no more than was necessary.

"Yet I fear him," urged the more far-sighted Cassius, "for the love he bears to Cæsar."

"Do not think of him," Brutus answered impatiently. He underrated Antony, and Cassius felt sure he was wrong, but gave way.

It was three in the morning and high time to disperse. There remained a doubt whether Cæsar, who had grown suspicious of late, would not be deterred by recent omens from going to the Capitol. Decimus Brutus engaged to override any such hesitation and bring him. They left promising to send another likely conspirator—Caius Ligarius—whom Brutus was to persuade; and with yet another reminder of the Roman part they were to play, he saw them through the gate.

As he turned and bent over the boy Lucius, who, having no plots or cares on his mind, had fallen into a sound sleep, Brutus' wife, Portia, came out from the house.

She was uneasy about her husband. He had been strange in his manner for many days. Men, she knew, had their dark hours, and she had waited and watched. But this trouble, it seemed, would not let him eat, or talk, or sleep. It had changed him so that only in feature was he the Brutus she knew. "Dear my lord, tell me the cause of your grief!"

"I am not well in health; that is all."

"Is it for your health, then, that you are here abroad on this cold raw morning? No, you have some sickness of the mind rather, which as your wife I have a right to share. See, I beg you on my knees, by the beauty you once commended and the great vow you swore to me—your other half—that you tell me the truth. What men were here just now—men who kept their faces hidden?"

Then, as Brutus hesitated, she reminded him that though a woman only she was Brutus' wife and Cato's

daughter. "Listen," she said, "before asking to share your secret I determined to test myself, to prove if I were worthy of it. See, I took a knife and gashed myself here, in the thigh. The wound is very painful, but I have kept my lips tight, and not allowed the pain to overcome me. Now say if I cannot be trusted to keep my lips closed on your secret!"

Brutus, touched and amazed by his wife's heroism, took her in his arms, and would have told her the whole story then and there, but a knocking interrupted him, and with a hurried promise that she should know all, he dismissed her into the house just as the boy admitted the last of the conspirators, Caius Ligarius.

Nor was Portia the only wife who had slept ill on that ominous night. Cæsar's wife, Calpurnia, had been tormented with horrible dreams; dreams in which she had seen her husband's statue spouting blood from a hundred wounds, while a crowd of Romans came and bathed their hands in it; dreams so ghastly that thrice in her sleep she had started up crying for help—that Cæsar was being murdered.

To unnerve her further, close upon these dreams had come early reports of the night's portents, the horrid sights seen by the watch. A lioness had whelped in the streets; the very graves had been shaken; the men swore to hearing noises of battle, the neighing of horses, the groans of dying men, the squealing of ghosts among the voices of the storm, and that the clouds had actually drizzled blood on the Capitol. Calpurnia had

not Portia's firmness of mind. She gave herself up to terror, and protested that Cæsar should not stir from the house that day.

Her fears even infected Cæsar, though he would not own it to himself. He gave orders that the priests should do sacrifice and report what omens the victim yielded. Then he turned to Calpurnia. "What the gods purpose men cannot avoid. These portents are meant for all men, not specially for Cæsar. But suppose them meant for me—well, cowards die many times before their death, but a brave man tastes of death once, and once only. It seems to me the strangest of all wonders that men should be fearful, seeing that a man must die and the end must come in its due time."

His servant returned with word that the augurs warned Cæsar against stirring abroad that day. On plucking forth the entrails of the victim they discovered yet another portent—the heart was missing. Cæsar would have made light of it. "'Tis the gods' reproof of cowardice," he said; "I, too, should lack a heart were I to stay at home for fear." But Calpurnia besought him to stay and send word by Mark Antony that he was not well; and Cæsar, divided between a belief that he was above danger and a sense of menace in the air, was promising to humour her, when Decimus Brutus arrived to accompany him to the Senate-house.

"Tell them," said Cæsar, "that I will not come. It were false to say I cannot, and false to say that I dare not. So say that I will not."

Decimus asked for his reasons; and being told of

Calpurnia's fears, so well enacted his promised part of flatterer, with hints of what the Senate might say or suspect, that Cæsar soon felt ashamed to have yielded to his wife's fears. "Give me my robe," said he, "I will go." And an escort of his supposed friends (for the conspirators were among them) arriving at that moment settled the matter. "Come, Antony, Cinna, Metellus!—what, Trebonius? You are the man I want to talk with. Keep near me that I may remember." "I will," muttered Trebonius darkly.

Cæsar was to have yet another warning. One Artemidorus, a teacher of rhetoric, had an inkling of the plot, and had posted himself in the crowd before the Capitol with a letter. The citizens cheered as the great man passed through the streets, while Brutus' wife, Portia, waited outside her door, straining her ears at every sound borne across the city from the direction of the Senate-house. She bade Lucius run thither, and broke off, forgetting she had given the boy no message to take. She read meanings into the talk of the passers-by. She breathed a prayer for Brutus, and then was terrified to think the boy had overheard it. "Run," said she, "any message! Tell my lord I am cheerful, and bring me back word what he answers."

Cæsar, arriving before the steps of the Senate-house, spied amid the crowd there the soothsayer who had warned him against the Ides of March, and halted to throw him a rallying word. "So the Ides of March are come!"

"Ay, Cæsar," answered the man, "but not gone."