



Julius Cesar (Classic Reprint)

William Shakespeare

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Excerpt from Julius Cesar

Shakespeare's "Tragedie of Julius Csesar" was probably written about the year 1600. In Weever's "Mirror of Martyrs," published in 1601, are the lines,

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

We know of nothing which could have suggested these lines to Weever, except Shakespeares Julius Caesar. In Plutarch no such scene exists. Thus it seems that the play must have been produced upon the stage as early as 1601, though its first appearance in print was in the Folio of 1623.

The action of the drama extends from the spring of the year 44 B.C. to the autumn of 42 B.C. ;that is, over a period of about two years and a half. The historical materials of the play were found by Shakespeare in the lives of Csesar, Brutus, and Antony, as given in Sir Thomas Norths translation of Plutarch's "Lives," published in 1579. "North did not," says Skeat, make his translation from the original Greek, or even from a Latin version, but from a French version by Jaques Amyot, Bishop of Auxerre, who is said to have followed the Latin text. As a strict and accurate version, it may, accordingly, have been surpassed in some points by others extant in English; yet it has merits of its own which must not be hastily overlooked. In particular, it must be observed that the translation by Amyot was very faithful, spirited, and well executed; and, though North fell into some mistakes which Amyot had avoided, his English is especially good, racy, and well expressed. He had the advantage of writing at a period when nervous and idiomatic English was well understood and commonly written; so that he constantly uses expressions which illustrate, in a very interesting manner, the language of our Authorized Version of the Bible. But whatever may be the occasional drawbacks of Norths version on the score of inaccuracy, we know that it was his version, and no other, which Shakespeare used; it was from North, and no one else, that he imitated certain phrases, expressions.

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