

The Killing of Julius Cæsar “Localized”

Mark Twain

[BEING THE ONLY TRUE AND RELIABLE ACCOUNT EVER PUBLISHED, AND TAKEN FROM THE ROMAN “DAILY EVENING FASCES,” OF THE DATE OF THAT TREMENDOUS OCCURRENCE.]

NOTHING in the world affords a newspaper reporter so much satisfaction as gathering up the details of a bloody and mysterious murder, and writing them up with aggravated circumstantiality. He takes a living delight in this labor of love—for such it is to him—especially if he knows that all the other papers have gone to press and his will be the only one that will contain the dreadful intelligence. A feeling of regret has often come over me that I was not reporting in Rome when Cæsar was killed—reporting on an evening paper and the only one in the city, and getting at least twelve hours ahead of the morning paper boys with this most magnificent “item” that ever fell to the lot of the craft. Other events have happened as startling as this, but none that possessed so peculiarly all the characteristics of the favorite “item” of the present day, magnified into grandeur and sublimity by the high rank, fame, and social and political standing of the actors in it. In imagination I have seen myself skirmishing around old Rome, button-holing soldiers, senators and citizens by turns, and transferring “all the particulars” from them to my note-book; and, better still, arriving “at the base of Pompey’s statue” in time to say persuasively to the dying Cæsar: “O, come now, you ain’t so far gone, you know, but what you could stir yourself up a little and tell a fellow just how this thing happened, if you was a mind to, couldn’t you—now do!” and get the “straight of it” from his own lips. And be envied by the morning paper hounds!

Ah! if I had lived in those days I would have written up that item gloatingly, and spiced it with a little moralizing here and plenty of blood there; and some dark, shuddering mystery; and praise and pity for some, and misrepresentation and abuse for others, (who didn’t patronize the paper,) and gory gashes, and notes of warning as to the tendency of the times, and extravagant

descriptions of the excitement in the Senate-house and the street, and all that sort of thing.

However, as I was not permitted to report Cæsar's assassination in the regular way, it has at least afforded me rare satisfaction to translate the following able account of it from the original Latin of the *Roman Daily Evening Fasces* of that date—second edition:

Our usually quiet city of Rome was thrown into a state of wild excitement, yesterday, by the occurrence of one of those bloody affrays which sicken the heart and fill the soul with fear, while they inspire all thinking men with forebodings for the future of a city where human life is held so cheaply, and the gravest laws are so openly set at defiance. As the result of that affray, it is our painful duty, as public journalists, to record the death of one of our most esteemed citizens—a man whose name is known wherever this paper circulates, and whose fame it has been our pleasure and our privilege to extend, and also to protect from the tongue of slander and falsehood, to the best of our poor ability. We refer to Mr. J. Cæsar, the Emperor elect.

The facts of the case, as nearly as our reporter could determine them from the conflicting statements of eye-witnesses, were about as follows: The affair was an election row, of course. Nine-tenths of the ghastly butcheries that disgrace the city now-a-days, grow out of the bickerings and jealousies and animosities engendered by these accursed elections. Rome would be the gainer by it if her very constables were elected to serve a century, for in our experience we have never even been able to choose a dog-pelter without celebrating the event with a dozen knock-downs and a general cramming of the station-house with drunken vagabonds over night. It is said that when the immense majority for Cæsar at the polls in the market was declared the other day, and the crown was offered to that gentleman, even his amazing unselfishness in refusing it three times, was not sufficient to save him from the whispered insults of such men as Casca, of the Tenth Ward, and other hirelings of the disappointed candidate, hailing mostly from the Eleventh and Thirteenth, and other outside districts,

who were overheard speaking ironically and contemptuously of Mr. Cæsar's conduct upon that occasion.

We are further informed that there are many among us who think they are justified in believing that the assassination of Julius Cæsar was a put-up thing—a cut-and-dried arrangement, hatched by Marcus Brutus and a lot of his hired roughs, and carried out only too faithfully according to the programme. Whether there be good grounds for this suspicion or not, we leave to the people to judge for themselves, only asking that they will read the following account of the sad occurrence carefully and dispassionately before they render that judgment:

The Senate was already in session, and Cæsar was coming down the street toward the capitol, conversing with some personal friends, and followed, as usual, by a large number of citizens. Just as he was passing in front of Demosthenes and Thucydides' drug-store, he was observing casually to a gentleman who, our informant thinks, is a fortune-teller, that the Ides of March were come. The reply was, Yes, they were come, but not gone yet. At this moment Artemidorus stepped up and passed the time of day, and asked Cæsar to read a schedule or a tract, or something of the kind, which he had brought for his perusal. Mr. Decius Brutus also said something about an "humble suit" which *he* wanted read. Artemidorus begged that attention might be paid to his first, because it was of personal consequence to Cæsar. The latter replied that what concerned himself should be read last, or words to that effect. Artemidorus begged and beseeched him to read the paper instantly. [Mark that; it is hinted by William Shakspeare, who saw the beginning and the end of the unfortunate affray, that this "schedule" was simply a note discovering to Cæsar that a plot was brewing to take his life.] However, Cæsar shook him off, and refused to read any petition in the street. He then entered the capitol, and the crowd followed him.

About this time, the following conversation was overheard, and we consider that, taken in connection with the events which succeeded it, it bears an appalling significance: Mr. Popilius Lena remarked to George W. Cassius (commonly known as

the "Nobby Boy of the Third Ward,") a bruiser in the pay of the Opposition, that he hoped his enterprise to-day might thrive; and when Cassius asked, "What enterprise?" he only closed his left eye temporarily, and said with simulated indifference, "Fare you well," and sauntered toward Cæsar. Marcus Brutus, who is suspected of being the ringleader of the band that killed Cæsar, asked what it was that Lena had said; Cassius told him, and added in a low tone, "*I fear our purpose is discovered.*"

Brutus told his wretched accomplice to keep an eye on Lena, and a moment after, Cassius urged that lean and hungry vagrant, Casca, whose reputation here is none of the best, to be sudden, for *he feared prevention*. He then turned to Brutus, apparently much excited, and asked what should be done, and swore that either he or Cæsar *should never turn back*—he would kill himself first. At this time, Cæsar was talking to some of the back-country members about the approaching fall elections, and paying little attention to what was going on around him. Billy Trebonius got into conversation with the people's friend and Cæsar's—Mark Antony—and under some pretence or other, got him away, and Brutus, Decius, Casca, Cinna, Metellus Cimber, and others of the gang of infamous desperadoes that infest Rome at present, closed around the doomed Cæsar. Then Metellus Cimber knelt down and begged that his brother might be recalled from banishment, but Cæsar rebuked him for his fawning, sneaking conduct, and refused to grant his petition. Immediately, at Cimber's request, first Brutus and then Cassius begged for the return of the banished Publius; but Cæsar still refused. He said he could not be moved; that he was as fixed as the North Star, and proceeded to speak in the most complimentary terms of the firmness of that star, and its steady character. Then he said he was like it, and he believed he was the only man in the country that was; therefore, since he was "constant" that Cimber should be banished, he was also "constant" that he should stay banished, and he'd be d—d if he didn't keep him so!

Instantly seizing upon this shallow pretext for a fight, Casca sprang at Cæsar and struck him with a dirk, Cæsar grabbing him

by the arm with his right hand, and launching a blow straight from the shoulder with his left, that sent the reptile bleeding to the earth. He then backed up against Pompey's statue, and squared himself to receive his assailants. Cassius and Cimber and Cinna rushed upon him with their daggers drawn, and the former succeeded in inflicting a wound upon his body, but before he could strike again, and before either of the others could strike at all, Cæsar stretched the three miscreants at his feet with as many blows of his powerful fist. By this time the Senate was in an indescribable uproar; the throng of citizens in the lobbies had blockaded the doors in their frantic efforts to escape from the building, the Sergeant-at-Arms and his assistants were struggling with the assassins, venerable Senators had cast aside their encumbering robes and were leaping over benches and flying down the aisles in wild confusion toward the shelter of the Committee-rooms, and a thousand voices were shouting "PO-LICE! PO-LICE!" in discordant tones that rose above the frightful din like shrieking winds above the roaring of a tempest. And amid it all, great Cæsar stood with his back against the statue, like a lion at bay, and fought his assailants weaponless and hand-to-hand, with the defiant bearing and the unwavering courage which he had shown before on many a bloody field. Billy Trebonius and Caius Ligarius struck him with their daggers and fell, as their brother-conspirators before them had fallen. But at last, when Cæsar saw his old friend Brutus step forward, armed with a murderous knife, it is said he seemed utterly overpowered with grief and amazement, and dropping his invincible left arm by his side, he hid his face in the folds of his mantle and received the treacherous blow without an effort to stay the hand that gave it. He only said "*Et tu, Brute?*" and fell lifeless on the marble pavement.

We learn that the coat deceased had on when he was killed was the same he wore in his tent on the afternoon of the day he overcame the Nervii, and that when it was removed from the corpse it was found to be cut and gashed in no less than seven different places. There was nothing in the pockets. It will be exhibited at the Coroner's inquest, and will be damning proof of the fact of

the killing. These latter facts may be relied on, as we get them from Mark Antony, whose position enables him to learn every item of news connected with the one subject of absorbing interest of to-day.

LATER.—While the Coroner was summoning a jury, Mark Antony and other friends of the late Cæsar got hold of the body and lugged it off to the Forum, and at last accounts Antony and Brutus were making speeches over it and raising such a row among the people that, as we go to press, the Chief of Police is satisfied there is going to be a riot, and is taking measures accordingly.

(1864)