

INTRODUCTION

A poet may be a story-teller, and in his narrative tell us what men have felt, said, and done in some great struggle. Touched by the magic of his imagination, exalted by his noble speech, his story becomes immortal, and is cherished even by men of other races and times, long ages after the men of whom he wrote have returned to the dust. They are still the objects of his praise or blame, and that of many generations of readers whose attitude towards them the poet has determined. He has told what manner of men they were.

This, however, is not the way in which the dramatic poet works. It is his part, not to tell us what has been done, and why it was done, but to bring men and women before us in action. We see what they do, and hear what they say; and their characters are revealed to us by their own deeds and words, and by what others, friends or foes, say of them. In fact we come to know them much as we know our acquaintances in the flesh. If the writer is a true dramatic poet his characters will become wonderfully real to us; they will be the objects of our wonder, suspicion, admiration, pity, dislike, or love, much as men we know are. To us they will be honest men or knaves, noble or base, strong or weak, cheerful or moody, wise or foolish, generous or selfish. They may be this or that; but they will be real to us, living a real life before us, with its loves and hates, its hopes and fears, its ambitions and its ideals. A new world filled with interest, delight, and profit will open before us, as we read a great drama.

Julius Cæsar is a dramatic poem. In it the world's greatest dramatist brings us to a land and time when a great political struggle, extending over many generations, is reaching its crisis. The poem bears the name of one of the world's greatest men. He had risen to a place of power such as no man had occupied in the world before. In the Roman world, extending from the Euphrates to the Atlantic, he was supreme. The government of the world was upon his shoulders. In capacity, in experience, and in temper he was fitted for the imperial task. He began to rule wisely, but was soon struck