

JULIUS CÆSAR AND HIS RIVALS.

"He doth bestride the narrow world:
Like a colossus.—*Shakespeare.*



DURING the century which immediately preceded the Christian era, Rome found herself in that state to which all great cities are brought when the hand of government is withdrawn from them, and they become the battleground of rival political parties. The alternate proscriptions of Marius and of Sylla had deprived the Republic of her great, upright citizens, till, at the time of which we treat, every man who hoped for distinction attached himself to one party or the other, and strove for rank and wealth at the expense of his opponents. The old power of the Senate had vanished, for that body was now the aristocratic faction, despised by all good citizens for its weakness and incapacity, and hated by the parties of Marius and Cinna for its cruelty towards the people. Among these rival parties it was impossible to maintain order. Robbers infested the roads and pirates the seas, while in public no man was safe from assassination, either for his political principles, or for his equally dangerous wealth.

The troubled state of the times and the frequent revolutions gave many opportunities to a young man of talents to acquire a reputation and a place in the government of the party, which, in his estimation, would have the upper hand. It was thus that Julius Cæsar commenced a career which left him, at the age of fifty-six, the idol of the people, the recognized head of the state and the master of the world.

Caius Julius Cæsar was born in the year 100 B.C., of a very ancient and honourable family, who even claimed to be descended from Tulus of the *Æneid*. He attached himself at a very early age to the party of Marius, his uncle, who saw his great talents and made him a priest of Jupiter, at the age of fourteen. His ambition began to show itself about this time,

for he broke off a match which his father had proposed, and married, at sixteen, Cornelia, the daughter of the great Cinna. This marriage was highly displeasing to Sylla, who was then in power and who, the next year, ordered Cæsar to divorce Cornelia, to marry anyone who should be provided. Cæsar refused, and deeming himself unsafe, tried to fly, but was caught by Sylla's messengers and brought before the tribunal. However, he had many friends whom Sylla did not wish to offend, and they interceding, the Dictator pardoned him, though with great reluctance. "Take him," he said, "since you will have it so, but I would have you know that the youth for whom you are so earnest, will one day overthrow the aristocracy in this young Cæsar there are many Mariuses."

After this narrow escape, Cæsar thought it wise to get out of the way of his enemy, and accordingly retired to the army in Asia. In the campaign against Mithridates, he began his military career, but it does not appear whether he distinguished himself or not. However, Mithridates was soon reduced to sue for peace, on which Cæsar went to Greece and studied rhetoric under Molon, a celebrated teacher, in order that, on his return to Rome, he might take a creditable part in the contests of his party. He had before gained some reputation as an orator, and had even presumed so far on his talents as to undertake the prosecution of Dolabella, governor of Macedonia, for cruelty and extortion. In this case he was opposed by one of the most celebrated pleaders of Rome, Aurelius Cotta, and his inexperience was no match for the astuteness of this veteran of the law courts. Dolabella escaped, and Cæsar, seeing that his orations lacked art and polish, went to Greece as we have described above.

It is reported that, while crossing the *Ægean*, on the way to the School, Cæsar was captured by pirates, who demanded about twenty-five talents for his ransom.