

Gossip From The Classics.

SNAP-SHOTS OF A GREAT ROMAN.

By JAS. A. ELLIOTT.

"Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus, and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs, and peep about
To find ourselves dishonorable graves."
—Caesar.

The private as well as the public acts and utterances of great men possess an especial interest. When glimpses of what is going on behind the scenes throw light upon the public career they are not only interesting but instructive. It is said that no one is a hero to his valet de chambre, but the more accurate version runs thus; it is only to a valet that a truly great man can appear less than a hero. While modern journalism and even more serious biography have in some instances shown a tendency to play the valet by lingering upon the private and pultry, as though such were the full measure of the man, there is, nevertheless, a place in history for sketches of public men when off duty. To Plutarch, Cicero, Suetonius, and a few other writers, we are indebted for many interesting snap-shots of Julius Caesar—probably the greatest of Roman citizens. The life of this distinguished personage was full of stirring incidents and romance. He figured in an age when heroic methods were unhesitatingly adopted to reach the desired end. Each man held the view that he that was not with him was against him, and acted accordingly. If we listen to the enemies of Caesar we imagine that he must have been a demon. If, on the other hand, we put our trust in the panegyrics of admirers, we know that he could not have fallen short of a deity. There are not wanting, however, indications that he had some at least of the limitations of the inhabitants of this planet. He led his legions from victory to victory against Gaul and Briton; he routed the Germans in their own forests, and overthrew the mighty Pompey, but he fell an easy victim to the feminine charms of Cleopatra. That distinguished lady seems to have first impressed Caesar by a clever and successful ruse to gain admittance to his presence. She rolled herself up in a bale of goods and was carried past the unsuspecting guards of Alexandria. The conquest was completed by her beauty, repartee, and strange philosophical lore. It was whispered that this friendship was responsible for the modification of the Egyptian campaign, and it is certain that the famous Alexandrian library was destroyed by fire which originated in Caesar's ships lying in the harbor. From youth he was what might be called a society man. He frequented the baths, the trysting places of Rome's fashionable set, and paid special attention to his hair. He dressed in a negligé fashion, but always with an eye to the effect upon society. In later years, when the affairs of state were resting heavily upon his shoulders, this dandified airs were not completely laid aside. Cicero, who was among the first to recognize his powers, remarked: "When I see him adjusting his hair and scratching his head with one finger; I can hardly imagine such a man conceiving so vast and fatal a design as the destruction of the Roman Commonwealth." That there was courage and character behind this dilettanteism was abundantly shown when, at the age of seventeen, he flatly refused to obey the command of the omnipotent Sylla, to put away his wife. For this presumptuous act he was proscribed and Cornelia's dowry confiscated. While eluding the officers of the Dictator he was captured near the island of Pharos by pirates, then the lords of the Mediterranean, who set twenty talents, or nearly twenty thousand dollars, as his ransom. He laughed at the ignorance of these men, for had they known their captive they might have had fifty talents. With three attendants he remained for several weeks a prisoner among these law-

less brigands, to whom murder was a trifle, conducting himself more like master than captive. He would write poems and orations and rehearse them to the pirates, who, if unappreciative of his efforts, were roundly abused for their stupidity. If they disturbed him while resting or sleeping he would send and order them to be quiet, and when they especially exasperated him, he threatened to crucify them. This latter threat he made good shortly after he regained his liberty.

He was early marked as a man of extravagant expenditure. Before he succeeded in obtaining any public employment he is said to have been in debt to the extent of 1,300 talents. He was famous for the magnificence of his public entertainments, which far outshone any that had gone before. We may gauge his prodigality as well as the quality of the public morals of Rome from the fact that he gained immense popularity by exhibiting three hundred and twenty pairs of gladiators. Beneath this display and expenditure there lay the far-seeing ambition of the man. If he were to reach the highest place in his country's gift he must receive it at the hands of the people, and experience had shown that public spectacles were among the readiest means of reaching the popular heart. He took no pleasure in these bloody exhibitions himself, and seemed to inculcate a higher thought by reading or writing while the butcheries were in progress.

It does not appear that Caesar made any attempt to conceal his ambition, as a few incidents will illustrate. On his way to assume the governorship of Spain, a friend jokingly said to him as they passed through a little town nestling among the Alps: "Can there be any contentions and rivalry for office and precedence here such as we find at Rome?" He at once replied: "I had rather be the first man here than the second man in Rome." When in Spain he occupied some leisure hours reading a history of Alexander the Great. His friends noticed that he became very pensive, and at length completely broke down. To his wondering companions he said: "Do you not think I have sufficient reason for concern when Alexander at my age reigned over so many conquered countries, and I have not one glorious achievement to boast?" When a candidate for the office of Pontifex Maximus his last words to his mother on the morning of the election were: "Mother, you will see me this day either a victor or an exile." When he had outstripped all his rivals, and become the first man in the commonwealth, his restless ambition urged him on to fresh achievements. It became almost a mania with him to surpass his own previous record.

The claims of Caesar to greatness rest upon a variety of talents, each one of which is sufficient to give him a permanent place in history. His oratory was praised in unmeasured terms by the master of public utterance. His writings are before us, and their merits cannot be mistaken. His opportunities for statesmanship were limited, but he left his impress upon the state that had given him its highest office, and his achievements in the field have been the inspiration of soldiers ever since.

He studied oratory at Rhodes under Appellennius Molon, who was also Cicero's instructor. The latter said of Caesar that he surpassed in oratory those who had practised no other art. He was pronounced the second orator in Rome, and he might have been the first had he not chosen arms as a profession. Most of his writings have been lost, but his commentaries still remain. Of these Cicero has said: "Fools might think to improve them, but no wise man would try it." His style is eloquent and forceful in its simplicity and directness. There is no attempt at ornament, but every line retains that subtle

power which seems to bring reader and author face to face.

He achieved his greatest fame as a soldier and general. He was quick to decide, cool in action, infallible in his judgment of men, resourceful, ready to expose himself to the greatest danger. His most brilliant military feat was probably the taking of the town of Alesia. Gaul was supposed to have been conquered, when suddenly an uprising of almost all the tribes took place under the young and clever Vercingetorix. The town of Alesia was occupied by about 76,000 Gallic troops, and Caesar gave battle with about half that number. To the dismay of the Romans they were soon surrounded by about 300,000 Gauls. Caesar divided his forces, part carried on the assault and part fought the reinforcements. So effectively was the work done that the town was taken before the garrison knew of the presence of their friends.

There was grim humor in that order from Caesar to strike at the faces of the gayly equipped cavalry of Pompey. He hoped that these young cavaliers, who had no experience of war or wounds, and valued highly their beauty, would avoid, if possible, the pain and disfigurement of wounds in the face. The result was as expected. They turned their faces from the spears and swords levelled at them and soon fell into inextricable confusion. In another engagement, when the enemy had a temporary advantage, Caesar caught an ensign by the neck as he was running away, and, turning him round, told him to look that way for the enemy.

The personal affection and fidelity shown by some of Caesar's soldiers are quite touching. In Britain some of the advanced guard got entangled in a morass, and were attacked by the enemy, when a private soldier, in the sight of Caesar, threw himself into the midst of the assailants, and, by prodigious exertions, beat off the barbarians, and rescued the men. After this, with much difficulty, partly by swimming, partly by wading, he passed the morass, but in passing lost his shield. Caesar and those about him, astonished at the action, ran to meet him with demonstrations of joy, but the soldier, in great distress, threw himself at Caesar's feet, and with tears in his eyes, begged pardon for the loss of the shield. It was only by this mutual confidence between soldier and general that Caesar's achievements were possible. On one occasion there was slight tension. The Gallic war had been brought to a successful issue, and the soldiers began to murmur because they thought they were not receiving rewards commensurate with their services. They went so far as to ask for their discharge, not dreaming that Caesar would part with them. Much to their astonishment he granted their request at once. In addressing them, he called them "fellow-citizens"—no longer "fellow-soldiers," "comrades-in-arms," as of old. This cut them to the quick. They begged to be reinstated. They would do anything he asked, and they would follow him to Africa or the world's end if only he would accept their services. He hesitated for some time before receiving them back, and then only on the understanding that he would have no one serve him unwillingly. The amazing nature of Caesar's military undertakings is thus summarized by Plutarch, who says that "in less than ten years' war in Gaul he took eight hundred cities by assault, conquered three hundred nations and fought pitched battles at different times with three million men, one million of whom he cut to pieces, and made another million prisoners."

His career as a statesman, if measured by his advancement in public offices, must have been satisfactory to himself and his friends. He held the offices of chief pontiff, aedile, questor, tribune, praetor, governor, consul, dictator, and, according to Mark Antony "he was three presented a kingly crown, which he did thrice refuse." His sympathies were with the popular party, and his influence was cast on the side of law and order—at least as far as that was possible for a practical politician of those days. The Julian laws, the publication of the proceedings of the Senate, the correction of the