

THE BRUTUS OF SHAKESPEARE.

IF a single name in ancient history embodies valor, generosity, and patriotism, there can be no doubt that such a name should be found in that greatest of Shakespeare's creations, Julius Cæsar, in which Brutus plays so important a part. The popular idea of Brutus is that of a man, whose ardent patriotism overwhelmed all other feelings; a man, who, forced to decide between the sacrifice of his friend's life and the imperiling of his country's welfare, did not hesitate to shed the blood of "the foremost man of all this world"; a man of truly upright character, whose slightest step from the path of virtue must be ascribed to some sort of delusion, not to any lack of sensitiveness or delicacy of principle. A brief perusal of Shakespeare's "Julius Cæsar" serves only to strengthen this conception. We learn from the conspirators, that the chief reason of their desire to have Brutus at the head of the plot is that,

He sits high in the people's hearts !
 And that which would appear offence in us,
 His countenance, like richest alchemy,
 Will change to virtue and to worthiness.

Then what stronger argument could be brought forward, than that beautiful panegyric coming as it does from the lips of Mark Antony. This was the noblest Roman of them all:

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His life was gentle; and the elements
 So mix'd in him, that Nature might stand up
 And say to all the world, *This was a man !*

So that we have the fair name of Brutus endorsed alike by friends and enemies.

But Shakespeare's method of portraying characters is peculiarly his own. It is not the Julius Cæsar of history, that he shows us in the play of that name; it is rather Cæsar, as the conspirators saw or pretended to see him; Cæsar, the vain bragging vapourer, godding it over the whole world. It is from the other characters of Shakespeare that we learn of Julius Cæsar, "the conqueror, of whom death makes no conquest." In like manner we have a picture of Brutus, as he appeared to the conspirators, and this it is, that impresses us in a cursory reading; but on serious study of the play, the first effect is speedily effaced. We are at a loss to reconcile some of the traits of Brutus with the high eulogiums conferred upon him.

That he is susceptible to flattery, is a fact most apparent to Cassius, who works upon him accordingly.

And it is very much lamented, Brutus,
 That you have no such mirror as will turn

Your hidden worthiness into your eye,

That you might see your shadow.

And when the arch-conspirator