

story of the conflict between the two leaders, which ends in the final triumph of Octavius.

Casca. When we first meet with Casca, in the beginning of Act I., he is among the throng that is following Cæsar in the procession to the Lupercal, and it is his stentorian voice that we hear calling for silence when Cæsar speaks. Later in the same day he gives Brutus and Cassius an account of the proceedings, and in telling the story he affects a bluntness of manner to give point to what he says. On the evening of the stormy night we meet with him again, breathless and staring with terror, and with sword drawn; for he is both superstitious and ignorant, and like others of his type he has been carried away by "the unaccustomed terror of the night." In such a mood he easily falls a victim to the persuasion of Cassius, and joins the conspiracy. When the conspirators meet at Brutus' house Casca is there, and on the one occasion in which he offers an opinion it is interesting to see how easily he is swayed by the opinions of others. When plans are made for striking Cæsar down it is agreed that Casca shall strike first,—and he does; but true to his character, he strikes from behind (see Act V., Scene I.). There is a touch of humorous irony in the words of Antony, when, after the assassination, he addresses him as "my *valian'* Casca." In the latter half of the play we hear nothing of him. Like the rest of the unworthy rabble—Metellus, Trebonius, Cinna, and Decius, he drops into obscurity when the fortunes of Brutus and Cassius are put to their real and final test.

Portia is introduced into the play chiefly for the purpose of bringing out more clearly the character of Brutus. We see the gentler side of Brutus' character in the scenes in which Portia appears, and, moreover, the stoicism of Brutus is brought out more strongly by contrast with the conduct of Portia. She urges Brutus to share his secrets with her, on the ground that she is "stronger than her sex"; but when he does so, she is unable to bear the strain of anxiety, and before the story closes we are told that "she fell distract, and, her attendants absent, swallowed fire,"—and died even so. Her death, coming at a time when the fortunes of Brutus are declining, puts the stoicism of Brutus to the strongest test, and helps to add to the pathos of his own fate.

The Historical Background of the Play.

Julius Cæsar was born in 102 B.C., and was assassinated in 44 B.C. During the early years of his life in Rome a fierce civil war was waged