

79. This open insult to the Senate was emphasized by an even worse example of his arrogance. As he returned to Rome from the Alban Hill, where the Latin Festival had been celebrated, a member of the crowd set a laurel wreath bound with a royal white fillet on the head of his statue. Two tribunes of the people, Epidius Marullus and Caesetius Flavus, ordered the fillet to be removed at once and the

offender imprisoned. But Caesar reprimanded and summarily deposed them both: either because the suggestion that he should be crowned King had been so rudely rejected, or else because – this was his own version – they had given him no chance to reject it himself and so earn deserved credit. From that day forward, however, he lay under the odious suspicion of having tried to revive the title of King; though, indeed, when the commons greeted him with ‘Long live the King!’ he now protested: ‘No, I am Caesar, not King’; and though, again, when he was addressing the crowd from the Rostra at the Lupercalian Festival, and Mark Antony, the Consul, made several attempts to crown him, he refused the offer each time and at last sent the crown away for dedication to Capitoline Jupiter. What made matters worse was a persistent rumour that Caesar intended to move the seat of government to Troy or Alexandria, carrying off all the national resources, drafting every available man in Italy for military service, and letting his friends govern the city. At the next meeting of the House (it was further whispered), Lucius Cotta would announce a decision of the Fifteen who had charge of the Sibylline Books, that since these prophetic writings stated clearly: ‘Only a king can conquer the Parthians,’ the title of King must be conferred on Caesar.

80. Because his enemies shrank from agreeing to this proposal, they pressed on with their plans for his assassination. Several groups, each consisting of two or three malcontents, now united in a general conspiracy. Even the commons had come to disapprove of how things were going, and no longer hid their disgust at Caesar’s tyrannical rule but openly demanded champions to protect their ancient liberties. When foreigners were admitted to the Senate someone put up a poster which read: ‘Long live our country;¹ but if any newly-appointed senator inquires the way to the Senate House, let nobody direct him there!’ And the following popular song was sung everywhere:

Caesar led the Gauls in triumph,
Led them uphill, led them down,
To the Senate House he took them,
Once the glory of our town.
‘Pull those breeches off,’ he shouted,
‘Change into a purple gown!’

1. *Bonum factum (sit)*, a formula prefixed to edicts.

As Quintus Maximus, one of the three-months’ Consuls, entered the Theatre, the lictor called out as usual: ‘Make way for the Consul!’ Cries of protest went up: ‘What? For him? He’s no Consul!’ The deposition of Caesetius and Marullus caused such widespread annoyance that at the next Consular elections the commons cast a great many votes in their favour. Someone then wrote on the pedestal of Lucius Brutus’ statue: ‘If only you were alive now!’ and on that of Caesar himself:

‘Brutus was elected Consul
When he sent the kings away;
Caesar sent the Consuls packing,
Caesar is our King today.’

More than sixty conspirators banded together against him, led by Gaius Cassius and Marcus and Decimus Brutus. A suggested plan was to wait until the consular elections, when Caesar would take his stand on the wooden bridge along which voters walked to the poll; one group of conspirators would then topple him over, while another waited underneath with daggers drawn. An alternative was to attack him in the Sacred Way or at the entrance to the Theatre. The conspirators wavered between these plans until Caesar called a meeting of the Senate in the Pompeian Assembly Room for the Ides of March; they then decided at once that this would be a convenient time and place.

81. Unmistakable signs forewarned Caesar of his assassination. A few months previously the veterans who had been sent to colonize Capua under the Julian Law were breaking up some ancient tombs in search of stone for their new farm-houses – all the more eagerly when they came across a large hoard of ancient vases. One of these tombs proved to be that of Capys, founder of the city, and there they found a bronze tablet with a Greek inscription to this effect: ‘Disturb the bones of Capys, and a man of Trojan stock will be murdered by his kindred, and later avenged at great cost to Italy.’ This story should not be dismissed as idle fiction, or a lie, because our authority for it is none other than Cornelius Balbus, a close friend of Caesar’s. Soon afterwards news reached Caesar that a herd of horses which he had dedicated to the river Rubicon, after fording it, and allowed to roam untended in the valley, were beginning to show a repugnance for the

pasture and shedding bucketfuls of tears. Again, during a sacrifice, the augur Spurrinna warned Caesar that the danger threatening him would not come later than the Ides of March; and on the day before the Ides a little bird, called the King Bird, flew into the Hall of Pompey with a sprig of laurel in its beak – pursued by a swarm of different birds from a near-by copse, which tore it to pieces there and then. And on his last night Caesar dreamed that he was soaring above the clouds, and then shaking hands with Jupiter; while his wife Calpurnia dreamed that the gable ornament, resembling that of a temple, which had been one of the honours voted him by the Senate, collapsed, and there he lay stabbed in her arms! She awoke suddenly and the bedroom door burst open of its own accord.

These warnings, and ill-health, made him hesitate for some time whether to go ahead with his plans, or whether to postpone the meeting. Finally Decimus Brutus persuaded him not to disappoint the Senate, who had been in full session for some time, waiting for him to arrive. It was about ten o'clock when he set off for the House. As he went, someone handed him a note containing details of the plot against his life, but he merely added it to the bundle of petitions in his left hand, which he intended to read later. Several victims were then sacrificed, and despite consistently unfavourable omens, he entered the House, deriding Spurrinna as a false prophet. 'The Ides of March have come,' he said. 'Yes, they have come,' replied Spurrinna, 'but they have not yet gone.'

82. As soon as Caesar took his seat the conspirators crowded around him as if to pay their respects. Tillius Cimber, who had taken the lead, came up close, pretending to ask a question. Caesar made a gesture of postponement, but Cimber caught hold of his shoulders. 'This is violence!' Caesar cried, and at that moment, as he turned away, one of the Casca brothers with a sweep of his dagger stabbed him just below the throat. Caesar grasped Casca's arm and ran it through with his stylus; he was leaping away when another dagger blow stopped him. Confronted by a ring of drawn daggers, he drew the top of his gown over his face, and at the same time ungirded the lower part, letting it fall to his feet so that he would die with both legs decently covered. Twenty-three dagger thrusts went home as he stood there. Caesar did not utter a sound after Casca's blow had drawn a groan from him; though some say that when he saw Marcus Brutus about

to deliver the second blow, he reproached him in Greek with: 'You, too, my child?'

The entire Senate then dispersed in confusion, and Caesar was left lying dead for some time until three slave boys carried him home in a litter, with one arm hanging over the side. The physician Antistius conducted the *post mortem* and came to the conclusion that none of the wounds had been mortal except the second one, in the chest. It had been decided to drag the dead man down to the Tiber, confiscate his property, and revoke all his edicts; but fear of Mark Antony, the Consul, and Lepidus, the Master of Horse, kept the assassins from making their plans good.