

On Julius Caesar

Source: Suet. *Div. Jul.* 1, 2, 10, 14, 20, 25, 31–36. Translated by Alexander Thompson and T. Forrester. In Kevin Guinagh and Alfred P. Dorjahn (eds.). *Latin Literature in Translation*. New York: Longmans, Green and Co, 1942.

Suetonius wrote The Twelve Caesars around 121 CE, in the time of the emperor Hadrian. This work is important not only for details about the early emperors not preserved elsewhere, but also for the attitudes toward these men, their followers, and their accomplishments that obtained among Roman aristocrats a few generations later.

Julius Caesar, the divine, lost his father when he was in the sixteenth year of his age; and the year following, being nominated to the office of high-priest of Jupiter, he repudiated Cossutia, who was very wealthy, although her family belonged only to the equestrian order, and to whom he had been contracted when he was a mere boy. He then married Cornelia, the daughter of Cinna, who was four times consul; and had by her, shortly afterwards, a daughter named Julia. Resisting all the efforts of the dictator Sulla to induce him to divorce Cornelia, he suffered the penalty of being stripped of his sacerdotal office, his wife's dowry, and his, own patrimonial estates; and, being identified with the adverse faction, was compelled to withdraw from Rome. After changing his place of concealment nearly every night, although he was suffering from a quartan ague, and having effected his release by bribing the officers who had tracked his footsteps, he at length obtained a pardon through the intercession of the vestal virgins, and of Mam. Aemilius and Aurelius Cotta, his near relatives. We are assured that when Sulla, having withstood for a while the entreaties of his own best friends, persons of distinguished rank, at last yielded to their importunity, he exclaimed- either by a divine impulse, or from a shrewd conjecture: "Your suit is granted, and you may take him among you; but know," he added, "that this man, for whose safety you are so extremely anxious, will, some day or other, be the ruin of the party of the nobles, in defense of which you are leagued with me; for in this one Caesar, you will find many a Marius."

His first campaign was served in Asia, on the staff of the praetor, M. Thermus; and being dispatched into Bithynia, to bring thence a fleet, he loitered so long at the court of Nicomedes, as to give occasion to reports of a criminal intercourse between him and that prince; which received additional credit from his hasty return to Bithynia, under the pretext of recovering a debt due to a freedman, his client. The rest of his service was more favorable to his reputation, and when Mitylene was taken by storm, he was presented by Thermus with the civic crown....

In his aedileship, he not only embellished the Comitium, and the rest of the Forum, with the adjoining halls, but adorned the Capitol also, with temporary piazzas, constructed for the purpose of displaying some part of the superabundant

collections he had made for the amusement of the people. He entertained them with the hunting of wild beasts, and with games, both alone and in conjunction with his colleague. On this account, he obtained the whole credit of the expense to which they had jointly contributed; insomuch that his co]league, M. Bibulus, could not forbear remarking, that he was served in the manner of Pollux. For as the temple erected in the Forum to the two brothers went by the name of Castor alone, so his and Caesar's joint munificence was imputed to the latter only. To the other public spectacles exhibited to the people, Caesar added a fight of gladiators, but with fewer pairs of combatants than he had intended. For he had collected from all parts so great a company of them, that his enemies became alarmed; and a decree was made, restricting the number of gladiators which anyone was allowed to retain at Rome....

After he was chosen praetor, the conspiracy of Catiline was discovered; and while every other member of the senate voted for inflicting capital punishment on the accomplices in that crime, he alone proposed that the delinquents should be distributed for safe custody among the towns of Italy, their property being confiscated. He even struck such terror into those who were advocates for greater severity, by representing to them what universal odium would be attached to their memories by the Roman people, that Decius Silanus, consul elect, did not hesitate to qualify his proposal, it not being very honorable to change it, by a lenient interpretation; as if it had been understood in a harsher sense than he intended, and Caesar would certainly have carried his point, having brought over to his side a great number of the senators, among whom was Cicero, the consul's brother, had not a speech by M. Cato infused new vigor into the resolutions of the senate. He persisted, however, in obstructing the measure, until a body of the Roman knights, who stood under arms as a guard, threatened him with instant death, if he continued his determined opposition. They even thrust at him with their drawn swords, so that those who sat next him moved away; and a few friends, with no small difficulty, protected him, by throwing their arms round him, and covering him with their togas. At last, deterred by this violence, he not only gave way, but absented himself from the senate-house during the remainder of that year....

[At the end of his praetorship, Caesar drew Farther Spain. After quieting his creditors, he hurried off to his province. When peace was restored there, he hastened back to Rome to stand for the consulship. To this office he was elected with Bibulus.]

Having entered upon his office, he introduced a new regulation, that the daily acts both of the senate and people should be committed to writing, and published. He also revived an old custom, that an officer should precede him, and his lictors follow him, on the alternate months when the fasces

were not carried before him. Upon preferring a bill to the people for the division of some public lands, he was opposed by his colleague, whom he violently drove out of the forum. Next day the insulted consul made a complaint in the senate of this treatment; but such was the consternation, that no one having the courage to bring the matter forward or move a censure, which had been often done under outrages of less importance, he was so much dispirited, that until the expiration of his office he never stirred from home, and did nothing but issue edicts to obstruct his colleague's proceedings. From that time, therefore, Caesar had the sole management of public affairs; insomuch that some wags, when they signed any instrument as witnesses, did not add "in the consulship of Caesar and Bibulus," but, "of Julius and Caesar;" putting the same person down twice, under his name and surname. The following verses likewise were currently repeated on this occasion:

Non Bibulo quidquam nuper, sed Caesare factum est;

Nam Bibulo fieri consule nil memini.

Nothing was done in Bibulus's year:

No; Caesar only then was consul here.

The land of Stellas, consecrated by our ancestors to the gods, with some other lands in Campania left subject to tribute, for the support of the expenses of the government, he divided, but not by lot, among upwards of twenty thousand freemen, who had each of them three or more children. He eased the 'publicans, upon their petition, of a third part of the sum which they had engaged to pay into the public treasury; and openly admonished them not to bid so extravagantly upon the next occasion. He made various profuse grants to meet the wishes of others, no one opposing him; or if any such attempt was made, it was soon suppressed. M. Cato, who interrupted him in his proceedings, he ordered to be dragged out of the senate house by a lictor, and carried to prison. L. Lucullus, likewise, for opposing him with some warmth, he so terrified with the apprehension of being criminated, that to deprecate the consul's resentment, he fell on his knees. And upon Cicero's lamenting in some trial the miserable condition of the times, he the very same day, by nine o'clock, transferred his enemy, P. Clodius, from a patrician to a plebeian family; a change which he had long solicited in vain. At last, effectually to intimidate all those of the opposite party, he by great rewards prevailed upon Vettius to declare, that he had been solicited by certain persons to assassinate Pompey; and when he was brought before the rostra to name those who had been concerted between them, after naming one or two to no purpose, not without great suspicion of subornation, Caesar, despairing of success in this rash stratagem, is supposed to have taken off his informer by poison....

During nine years in which he held the government of the province, his achievements were as follows: he reduced all Gaul, bounded by the Pyrenean forest, the Alps, mount Gebenna, and the two rivers, the Rhine and the Rhone, and being about three thousand two hundred miles in compass, into the form of a province, excepting only the nations in alliance with the republic, and such as had merited his favor; imposing upon this new acquisition an 'annual tribute of forty

millions of sesterces. He was the first of the Romans who, crossing the Rhine by a bridge, attacked the Germanic tribes inhabiting the country beyond that river, whom he defeated in several engagements. He also invaded the Britons, a people formerly unknown, and having vanquished them, exacted from them contributions and hostages. Amidst such a series of successes, he experienced thrice only any signal disaster; once in Britain, when his fleet was nearly wrecked in a storm; in Gaul, at Gergovia, where one of his legions was put to the rout; and in the territory of the Germans, his lieutenants Titurius and Aurunculeius were cut off by an ambuscade....

The Civil War

When intelligence, therefore, was received, that the interposition of the tribunes in his favor had been utterly rejected, and that they themselves had fled from the City, he immediately sent forward some cohorts, but privately, to prevent any suspicion of his design; and, to keep up appearances, attended at a public spectacle, examined the model of a fencing-school which he proposed to build, and as usual sat down to table with a numerous party of his friends. But after sun-set, mules being put to his carriage from a neighboring mill, he set forward on his journey with all possible privacy, and a small retinue. The lights going out, he lost his way, and wandered about a long' time, until at length, by the help of a guide, whom he found towards day-break, he proceeded on foot through some narrow paths, and again reached the road. Coming up with his troops on the banks of the Rubicon, which was the boundary of his province, he halted for a while, and, revolving in his mind the importance of the step he was on the point of taking, he turned to those about him, and said: "We may still retreat; but if we pass this little bridge, nothing is left for us but to fight it out in arms."

While he was thus hesitating, the following incident occurred. A person remarkable for his noble mien and graceful aspect, appeared close at hand, sitting and playing upon a pipe. When, not only the shepherds, but a number of soldiers also flocked from their posts to listen to him, and some trumpeters among them, he snatched a trumpet from one of them, ran to the river with it, and sounding the advance with a piercing blast, crossed to the other Side. Upon this Caesar exclaimed, "Let us go whither the omens of the Gods and 'the iniquity of our enemies call us. The die is now cast."

Accordingly, having marched his army over the river, he showed them the tribunes of the people, who, upon their being driven from the city, had come to meet him; and, in the presence of that assembly, called upon the troops to pledge him their fidelity, with tears in his eyes, and his garment rent from his bosom. It has been supposed, that upon this occasion he promised to every soldier a knight's estate; but that opinion is founded on a mistake. For when, in his harangue to them, he frequently held out a finger of his left hand and declared, that to recompense those who should support him in the defense of his honor, he would willingly part even with his ring; the soldiers at a distance, who could more easily see than hear him while he spoke, formed their conception of what he said, by the eye, not by the ear; and accordingly gave out, that he had

promised to each of them the privilege of wearing the gold ring, and an estate of four hundred thousand sesterces.

Of his subsequent proceedings I shall give a cursory detail, in the order in which they occurred. He took possession of Picenum, Umbria, and Etruria; and having obliged L. Domitius, who had been tumultuously nominated his successor, and held Corsinium with a garrison, to surrender, and dismissed him, he marched along the coast of the Upper Sea, to Brundisium, to which place the consuls and Pompey were fled with the intention of crossing the sea as soon as possible. After vain attempts, by all the obstacles he could oppose, to prevent their leaving the harbor, he turned his steps towards Rome, where he appealed to the senate on the present state of public affairs; and then set out for Spain, in which province Pompey had a numerous army, under the command of three lieutenants, M. Petreius, L. Afranius, and M. Varro; declaring amongst his friends, before he set forward, "That he was going against an army without a general, and should return thence against a general without an army." Though his progress was retarded both by the siege of Marseilles, which shut her gates against him, and a very great scarcity of corn, yet in a short time he bore down all before him.

Thence he returned to Rome, and crossing the sea to Macedonia, blocked up Pompey during almost four months, within a line of ramparts of prodigious extent; and at last defeated him in the battle of Pharsalia. Pursuing him in his flight to Alexandria, where he was informed of his murder, he presently found himself also engaged, under all the disadvantages of time and place, in a very dangerous war, with king Ptolemy, who, he saw, had treacherous designs upon his life. It was winter, and he, Within the walls of a well-provided

and subtle enemy, was destitute of everything, and wholly unprepared for such a conflict. He succeeded, however, in his enterprise, and put the kingdom of Egypt into the hands of Cleopatra and her younger brother; being afraid to make it a province, lest, under an aspiring prefect, it might become the centre of revolt. From Alexandria he went into Syria, and thence to Pontus, induced by intelligence which he had received respecting Pharnaces. This prince, who was son of the great Mithridates, had seized the opportunity which the distraction of the times offered for making war upon his neighbors, and his insolence and fierceness had grown with his success. Caesar, however, within five days after entering his country, and four hours after coming in sight of him, overthrew him in one decisive battle. Upon which, he frequently remarked to those about him the good fortune of Pompey, who had obtained his military reputation, chiefly, by victory over so feeble an enemy. He afterwards defeated Scipio and Juba, who were rallying the remains of the party in Africa, and Pompey's sons in Spain.

During the whole course of the civil war, he never once suffered any defeat, except in the case of his lieutenants; of whom C. Curio fell in Africa, C. Antonius was made prisoner in Illyricum, P. Dolabella lost a fleet in the same Illyricum, and Cneius Domitius Calvurnus, an army in Pontus. In every encounter With the enemy where he himself commanded, he came off with complete success; nor was the issue ever doubtful, except on two occasions; once at Dyrrachium, when, being obliged to give ground, and Pompey not pursuing his advantage, he said that "Pompey knew not how to conquer;" the other instance occurred in his last battle in Spain, when, despairing of the event, he even had thoughts of killing himself.