

THE MOB SCENE IN JULIUS CÆSAR

ONE night, in Stratford! How inadequate the time for such tantalizing sights as I found in this Elizabethan village made famous by Shakespeare. Only one night to enjoy a Shakespearean play in the new Memorial Theatre. It seemed hardly fair that I should have no choice as to which play I should see. There are plays and plays—even by Shakespeare! Evidently I must go for Shakespeare rather than for the play.

To my delight that evening's presentation was *The Tragedy of Julius Cæsar*. With no other play was I as familiar, as truly intimate, for on no other piece of literature had I spent so many hours of work and study. I felt I knew every line, every pause, every grimace. For four semesters I had taught this play in the ninth grade literature classes. I, at least, had learned much.

But from my one night in Stratford I gained a new insight and interpretation of the outstanding scene of the play—Act III, scene 2. It is here that the two statesmen, Brutus and Antony, plead their cases before the assembled mob in the Forum. It is a common street mob, made up of the riff-raff and a few of the steadier merchants and artisans. All lose their identity in the mob, and their thoughts become a part of that perplexing enigma—mob psychology. Few dramatists have attempted to portray the fickleness of feeling and opinions in a mob, and fewer directors are successful in presenting such scenes.

W. Bridges Adams, the director of The Stratford-upon-Avon Festival Company, interpreted the Roman mob most convincingly. His production made one feel a keener interest in those street loafers than in Antony himself, for upon their next thoughts and utterances hinged the play.

With the close of Brutus's speech the commoners are wild with enthusiasm and excitement. To be sure, they have missed

the point of his speech, but their excitement is such that they are swept away with the pleasure of it. They hate to have to quiet down to hear more even from Brutus. With mutterings and rumblings they acquiesce in Brutus's request that they stay to hear Mark Antony. They are sarcastic about his "noble Antony" and we can imagine as they talk among themselves that they agree to have no foolishness from the young fellow, for hissing, booing and rock-throwing were not unknown to ancient Rome.

Antony's first words, barely heard above the din, are enough to unloose their suspicion and antagonism. His actual words are: "For Brutus' sake, I am beholding to you." Most of the crowd hear only the word Brutus, and they suspect their new idol is being maligned. A rumble of protest rises up against the defenceless figure standing a few steps above them.

Again he tries to make himself heard. "You gentle Romans——"

But still the shouting and the din of those who stay as Brutus ordered, but who do it grudgingly. For his sake they remain, but that is all. Evidently Antony is determined to speak, so they quiet down somewhat but are still antagonistic to this friend of Cæsar.

A third time Antony makes a start on his speech, hoping now to soothe their hatred and allay their fears by his opening word of address.

"Friends——"

A wild protest arises. Friends indeed! They are no friends of Antony or of his cause, and they want the world to know it. Angry glances and ugly words exchanged among the commoners show their distrust of the speaker before them. Friends! The very word sets them on fire.

Patiently Antony tries again, realizing his previous mistakes. Now he addresses them, "Romans."

Almost as though from habit they shout a protest, this time less forceful than before. They are Romans, and every chest expands with the knowledge of that fact.

But even this appeal to their patriotism is not enough to overcome their hatred of Antony. They mutter among themselves.

Again Antony tries to quiet them so that he may get his message across.

"Countrymen——"

He is their countryman. The speaker cannot be so wicked then. They acquiesced but not without murmuring and nodding their heads one to the other. If he must speak, let him do it and be done.

Still as Antony plunges into his speech there are a few protesters. The field is not his by any means. As he mentions Cæsar's name the undercurrent threatens to drown him out. He faces every odd until, realizing the mood of his audience, he cleverly mentions "noble Brutus". These are soothing words and the street mob is more willing to listen. Antony, feeling he is not yet master of the situation, inserts that now famous clause, "For Brutus is an honorable man."

A wild shout of applause goes up, the first affirmative vote of the dissenters. The young upstart they listened to unwillingly is expressing their own thoughts. Brutus is truly an honorable man. Well do they know it, and they soften towards the speaker who utters the words with such sincerity.

Thus does Antony convert a wild mob of angry, protesting revolutionists into an orderly, receptive group, ready to listen, then to mourn, and finally to fight. All the odds were against him, but he was clever enough to persevere in his efforts, to appeal to their pride, and to praise their hero Brutus.

To read the printed page or, for that matter, to hear the average presentation of *Julius Cæsar* is not enough. The incorrigible mob does not make itself heard in those few speeches of the "citizens". No interruption is indicated after each of the words "Friends, Romans, countrymen" which are usually read in the perfunctory tones of the after-dinner speaker who begins, "Mr. Chairman, Ladies, and Gentlemen". Antony says far more than that. Each noun of address is a new plummet by which Antony

tests the waters of disapproval. Only by the superb acting of the mob can one realize Antony's problem and later appreciate his success.

Director Adams brought to the scene a vividness and thrill which I have never seen anywhere on the stage. Psychologically he is right to show the mob's prolonged protest against Antony, the symbol of their hatred. Mobs are fickle, but they do not change to a new leader without some outward and visible sign of inward struggle. Once the change is made, the struggle is forgotten. But it should not be omitted at its proper time in the play, for thereon hangs the fire and verve of the whole scene.

Such is the outstanding impression of my one night in Stratford.

NANCY LARRICK

IN A HOLE

WE marvel at the amazing superiority of air travel over walking by which the range of man's adventuring is increased to the point where he can cover in an airplane in an hour the distance he could walk in a fortnight. We should realize as vividly that the superiority of written over oral communication is a greater miracle; that print brings to every man at the breakfast table the story of the enterprise and wisdom of men in the remote areas of the globe; that when a man can read, his range of learning embraces the world. Without print every man would be provincial, and his experience would be limited by the happenings of the geographical area which could easily be covered in person by him and his immediate associates.

To read with speed and comprehension is therefore recognized by school people to be the major technical objective of public education. The ability to read is more important than a knowledge of history, geography, arithmetic, or foreign languages because while a child learns to read he learns these subjects and what knowledge he does