

Some Other Interesting Bits  
from Plutarch's

# LIFE OF CAESAR



Caesar was taken by some pirates, who, at that time, with large fleets of ships and innumerable smaller vessels infested the seas everywhere. When these men at first demanded of him twenty talents for his ransom, he laughed at them for not understanding the value of their prisoner, and voluntarily agreed to give them fifty. He presently dispatched those about him to several places to raise the money, till at last he was left among a set of the most bloodthirsty people in the world, only with one friend and two attendants. Yet he made so little of them, that when he had a mind to sleep, he would send to them, and order them to make no noise.

For thirty-eight days, with all the freedom in the world, he amused himself by joining in their exercises and games, as if they had not been his kidnappers, but his own guards. He wrote verses and speeches, and made them his audience, and those who did not admire them, he called to their faces illiterate and barbarous, and would often, in ridicule, threaten to hang them. They were greatly taken with this, and attributed his free talking to a kind of simplicity and boyish playfulness.

As soon as his ransom was come, he paid it, and was freed, and proceeded at once to man some ships at the port of Miletus, and went in pursuit of the pirates, whom he surprised with their ships still stationed at the island, and took most of them. Their money he made his prize, and the men he secured in prison, and made application to Junius, the governor of Asia, to determine their punishment. Junius, having his eye upon the money, for the sum was considerable, said he would think at his leisure what to do with the prisoners, upon which Caesar took his leave of him, and went off to Pergamus, where he ordered the pirates to be brought forth and crucified; the punishment he had often threatened them with whilst he was in their hands, and they little dreamed he was in earnest.



He was so profuse in his expenses, that before he had any public employment, he was in debt thirteen hundred talents, and many thought that by incurring such expense in order to be popular, he was wasting his money on something that would provide only a short and uncertain return; but in truth he was purchasing what was of the greatest value at an inconsiderable rate. When he was aedile, he provided such a number of gladiators, that he entertained the people with three hundred and twenty single combats, and by his great liberality and magnificence in

theatrical shows, in processions, and public feasting, he gained so much upon the people, that everyone was eager to find out new offices and new honors for him in return for his generosity.



In his journey, as he was crossing the Alps, and passing by a small village of barbarians with but few inhabitants and those wretchedly poor, his companions jokingly asked the question among themselves if there were any canvassing for offices there; to which Caesar made answer seriously, "For my part, I had rather be the first man among these fellows, than the second man in Rome."

It is said that another time, when free from business in Spain, after reading some part of the history of Alexander the Great, he sat a great while very thoughtful, and at last burst out into tears. His friends were surprised, and asked him the reason of it. "Do you think," he said, "I have not just cause to weep, when I consider that Alexander at my age had conquered so many nations, and I have all this time done nothing that is memorable?"



He was so much master of the good-will and hearty service of his soldiers, that those who in other expeditions were but ordinary men, displayed a courage past defeating or withstanding when they went upon any danger where Caesar's glory was concerned. Such a one was Acilius, who, in the sea-fight before Marseilles, had his right hand struck off with a sword, yet did not quit his shield out of his left, but struck the enemies in the face with it, till he drove them off, and made himself master of the vessel.

Such another was Cassius Scaeva, who, in a battle near Dyrrhachium, had one of his eyes shot out with an arrow, his shoulder pierced with one javelin, and his thigh with another; and having received one hundred and thirty darts upon his shield, called to the enemy, as though he would surrender himself. But when two of them came up to him, he cut off the shoulder of one with a sword, and by a blow over the face forced the other to retreat, and so with the assistance of his friends, who now came up, made his escape.

Again, in Britain, when some of the foremost officers had accidentally got into a morass full of water, and there were attacked, a common soldier, while Caesar stood and looked on, threw himself into the midst of them, and after many outstanding demonstrations of his valor, rescued the officers, and beat off the barbarians. He himself, in the end, took to the water, and with much difficulty, partly by swimming, partly by wading, passed it, but in the passage lost his shield. Caesar and his officers saw it and admired, and went to meet him with joy and acclamation. But the soldier, much saddened and in tears, threw himself down at Caesar's feet, and begged his pardon for having lost his shield.



**T**his love of honor and passion for distinction were inspired into them and cherished in them by Caesar himself, [for] there was no danger to which he did not willingly expose himself, no labor from which he pleaded all exemption. His contempt of danger was not even questioned by his soldiers, because they knew how much he desired honor.

But his enduring so much hardship, which he did to all appearance beyond his natural strength, very much astonished them. For he was a spare man, had a soft and white skin, and was subject to an epilepsy, which, it is said, first seized him at Corduba. But he did not make the weakness of his body a pretext for his ease, but rather used war as the best medicine against his weaknesses; while by untiring journeys, coarse diet, frequent lodging in the field, and continual laborious exercise, he struggled with his diseases, and fortified his body against all attacks.



**A**fter the surprise of the attack, Caesar succeeded in making his retreat into a strong position, where, when he had mustered and marshalled his men, his horse was brought to him; upon which he said, "When I have won the battle, I will use my horse for the chase, but at present let us go against the enemy," and so charged them on foot.



When he came to the river Rubicon, which separates Gaul within the Alps from the rest of Italy, his thoughts began to work, now that he was just entering upon the danger, and he wavered much in his mind, when he considered the greatness of the enterprise into which he was throwing himself. He ordered a halt while he debated with himself, and often changed his opinion one way or the other, without speaking a word. Presently he also discussed the matter with his friends who were about him, computing how much destruction his passing that river would bring upon mankind, and what tales of it would be transmitted to posterity. At last, in a sort of passion, casting aside calculation, and abandoning himself to what might come, and using the proverb frequently in the mouths of those who enter upon dangerous and bold attempts, "The die is cast," with these words he took the river.



After this, Caesar gave Pompey battle, though Pompey was encamped very advantageously, and furnished with plenty of provisions both by sea and land, while Caesar himself was ill-supplied, and before the end was extremely pinched for want of necessaries, so that his soldiers were forced to dig up a kind of root which grew there, and tempering it with milk, to feed on it. Sometimes they made a kind of bread of it, and advancing up to the enemy's outposts, would throw in these loaves, telling them, that as long as the earth produced such roots they would not give up blockading Pompey. But Pompey took what care he could, that neither the loaves nor the words should reach his men, who were out of heart and despairing, through terror at the fierceness and hardiness of their Caesar's men, whom they looked upon as sort of wild beasts.

Caesar, when he came to view Pompey's camp, and saw some of his opponents dead upon the ground, others dying, said, with a groan, "This they would have; they brought me to this necessity. I, Caius Caesar, after succeeding in so many wars, had been condemned, had I dismissed my army." Caesar incorporated most of the infantry whom he took prisoners, with his own legions, and gave a free pardon to many of the distinguished persons, and among them, to Brutus, who later killed him.

Caesar, then went in pursuit of Pompey. When he came to Alexandria, where Pompey was already murdered, he would not look upon Theodotus, who presented him with his head, but taking only his signet, shed tears. Those of Pompey's friends who had been

arrested by the king of Egypt, as they were wandering in those parts, he relieved, and offered them his own friendship. In his letter to his friends at Rome, he told them that the greatest pleasure his victory had given him was to be able to save the lives of fellow-citizens who had fought against him.

In another engagement, the enemy again had the better, when Caesar, it is said, seized a standard-bearer, who was running away, by the neck, and forcing him to face about, said, "Look, that is the way to the enemy."



Caesar, upon his return to Rome, gave before the people a magnificent account of his victory, telling them that he had subdued a country which would supply the public every year with two hundred thousand bushels of corn, and three million pounds of oil. He then led three triumphs for Egypt, Pontus, and Africa. After the triumphs, he distributed rewards to his soldiers, and treated the people with feasting and shows. He entertained the whole people together at one feast, where twenty-two thousand dining couches were laid out; and he made a display of gladiators, and of battles by sea.



Caesar was born to do great things, and had a passion after honor, and the many noble exploits he had done did not now serve as an inducement to him to sit still and reap the fruit of his past labors, but were incentives and encouragements to go on, and raised in him ideas of still greater actions, and a desire of new glory, as if the present were all spent. It was in fact a sort of emulous struggle with himself, as it had been with another, how he might outdo his past actions by his future.