

75 AD

THE COMPARISON OF DION AND BRUTUS

Plutarch
translated by John Dryden

Plutarch (46-120) - Greek biographer, historian, and philosopher, sometimes known as the encyclopaedist of antiquity. He is most renowned for his series of character studies, arranged mostly in pairs, known as "Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans" or "Parallel Lives." Dion and Brutus Compared (75 AD) - Compares and contrasts the lives of Dion, a Greek scholar, and Brutus, a Roman politician.

COMPARISON OF DION AND BRUTUS

THERE are noble points in abundance in the characters of these two men, and one to be first mentioned is their attaining such a height of greatness upon such inconsiderable means; and on this score Dion has by far the advantage. For he had no partner to contest his glory, as Brutus had in Cassius, who was not, indeed, his equal in proved virtue and honour, yet contributed quite as much to the service of the war by his boldness, skill, and activity; and some there be who impute to him the rise and beginning of the whole enterprise, saying that it was he who roused Brutus, till then indisposed to stir, into action against Caesar.

Whereas Dion seems of himself to have provided not only arms, ships, and soldiers, but likewise friends and partners for the enterprise. Neither did he, as Brutus, collect money and forces from the war itself, but, on the contrary, laid out of his own substance, and employed the very means of his private sustenance in exile for the liberty of his country. Besides this, Brutus and Cassius, when they fled from Rome, could not live safe or quiet, being condemned to death and pursued, and were thus of necessity forced to take arms and hazard their lives in their own defence, to save themselves, rather than their country. On the other hand, Dion enjoyed more ease, was more safe, and his life more pleasant in his banishment, than was the tyrant's who had banished him, when he flew to action, and ran the risk of all to save Sicily.

Take notice, too, that it was not the same thing for the Sicilians to be freed from Dionysius, and for the Romans to be freed from Caesar. The former owned himself a tyrant, and vexed Sicily with a thousand oppressions; whereas Caesar's supremacy, certainly, in the process for attaining it, had inflicted no trouble on its opponents, but, once established and victorious, it had indeed the name and appearance, but fact that was cruel or tyrannical there was none. On the contrary, in the malady of the times and the need of a monarchical government, he might be thought to have been sent as the gentlest physician, by no other than a divine intervention. And thus the common people instantly regretted Caesar, and grew enraged and implacable against those that killed him. Whereas Dion's chief offence in the eyes of his fellow-citizens was his having let Dionysius escape, and not having demolished the former tyrant's tomb.

In the actual conduct of war, Dion was a commander without fault, improving to the utmost those counsels which he himself gave, and where others led him into disaster correcting and turning everything to the best. But Brutus seems to have shown little wisdom in engaging in the final battle, which was to decide everything, and when he failed not to have done his business in seeking a remedy; he gave all up, and abandoned his hopes, not venturing against fortune even as far as Pompey did, when he had still means enough to rely on in his troops, and was clearly master of all the seas with his ships.

The greatest thing charged on Brutus is, that he, being saved by Caesar's kindness, having saved all the friends whom he chose to ask for, he moreover accounted a friend, and preferred above many, did yet lay violent hands upon his preserver. Nothing like this could be objected against Dion; quite the contrary; whilst he was of Dionysius's family and his friend, he did good service and was useful to him; but driven from his country, wronged in his wife, and his estate lost, he openly entered upon a war just and lawful. Does not, however, the matter turn the other way? For the chief glory of both was their hatred of tyranny, and abhorrence of wickedness. This was unmixed and sincere in Brutus; for he had no private quarrel with Caesar, but went into the risk singly for the liberty of his country. The other, had he not been privately injured, had not fought. This is plain from Plato's epistles, where it is shown that he was turned out, and did not forsake the court to wage war upon Dionysius. Moreover, the public good made Brutus Pompey's friend (instead of his enemy as he had been) and Caesar's enemy; since he proposed for his hatred and his friendship no other end and standard but justice. Dion was very serviceable to Dionysius whilst in favour; when no longer trusted, he grew angry and fell to arms. And, for this reason, not even were his own friends all of them satisfied with his undertaking, or quite assured that, having overcome Dionysius, he might not settle the government on himself, deceiving his fellow-citizens by some less obnoxious name than tyranny. But the very enemies of Brutus would say that he had no other end or aim, from first to last, save only to restore to the Roman people their ancient government.

And apart from what has just been said, the adventure against Dionysius was nothing equal with that against Caesar. For none that was familiarly conversant with Dionysius but scorned him for his life of idle amusement with wine, women, and dice; whereas it required an heroic soul and a truly intrepid and unquailing spirit so much as to entertain the thought of crushing Caesar, so

formidable for his ability, his power, and his fortune, whose very name disturbed the slumbers of the Parthian and Indian kings. Dion was no sooner seen in Sicily but thousands ran in to him and joined him against Dionysius; whereas the renown of Caesar, even when dead, gave strength to his friends; and his very name so heightened the person that took it, that from a simple boy he presently became the chief of the Romans; and he could use it for a spell against the enmity and power of Antony. If any object that it cost Dion great trouble and difficulties to overcome the tyrant, whereas Brutus slew Caesar naked and unprovided, yet this itself was the result of the most consummate policy and conduct, to bring it about that a man so guarded around, and so fortified at all points, should be taken naked and unprovided. For it was not on the sudden, nor alone, nor with a few, that he fell upon and killed Caesar; but after long concerting the plot, and placing confidence in a great many men, not one of whom deceived him. For he either at once discerned the best men, or by confiding in them made them good. But Dion, either making a wrong judgment, trusted himself with ill men, or else by his employing them made ill men of good; either of the two would be a reflection on a wise man.

Plato also is severe upon him, for choosing such for friends as betrayed him.

Besides, when Dion was killed, none appeared to revenge his death. Whereas Brutus, even amongst his enemies, had Antony that buried him splendidly; and Caesar also took care his honours should be preserved. There stood at Milan in Gaul, within the Alps, a brazen statue, which Caesar in aftertimes noticed (being a real likeness, and a fine work of art), and passing by it presently stopped short, and in the hearing of many commanded the magistrates to come before him. He told them their town had broken their league, harbouring an enemy. The magistrates at first simply denied the thing, and, not knowing what he meant, looked one upon another, when Caesar, turning towards the statue and gathering his brows, said, "Pray, is not that our enemy who stands there?" They were all in confusion, and had nothing to answer; but he, smiling, much commended the Gauls, as who had been firm to their friends, though in adversity, and ordered that the statue should remain standing as he found it.

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