

*Jacta est alea!*<sup>1</sup>

## Literature 22



### A Musical Contest of Long Ago and Julius Caesar and Pompey: How the Two Made War and Who Conquered

#### 1 Greece

Read "A Musical Contest of Long Ago" You will find it on the *Mothers' Companion* flashdrive in Volume 3, Classics, "Legends of Greece and Rome" by G. H. Kupfer, no. 33.

#### 2 Rome

*Stories from Roman History* Retold by Lena Dalkeith (1906)

'If it were not for Caesar,' said Pompey, 'I should be the greatest man in Rome.'

'If it were not for Pompey I should rule the world,' said Caesar. 'There is no virtue in the Republic; it is near to its end. The time has come for one man to take command over all, and why should I not be that man!'

'Why should not I?' echoed Pompey.

Mark you, neither of the two rivals spoke their thoughts aloud, but their deeds spoke for them, and there was not a man in Rome but could have told you that trouble was brewing between Pompey and Caesar.

They were both of them great generals, both commanded large armies, both wanted to be at the head of the State, neither would give in to the other, and in the end their jealous quarrel brought the misery of a civil war on their countrymen.

The people, at least most of them, preferred Caesar, because he always took their part against the patricians. As for the senators, they favoured Pompey; he had not such a strong will as Caesar, and

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<sup>1</sup> The die is cast. Attributed to Julius Caesar by the historian Suetonius. Sometimes given as *alea jacta est*.

therefore he could more easily be flattered into giving them what they wanted.

First, then, the senate set about humbling Caesar. A messenger was sent to Gaul, over which he was reigning like a king.

'Give up the command of Gaul; dismiss your army,' was the order Caesar received.

'Why should I send away my army when Pompey still keeps his?' he replied, and later he sent word again to Rome:

'If Pompey will give up his command I will do the same.'

But Pompey refused, and the quarrel went on until at last the senate said that unless Caesar laid down his arms before a given day, they would declare him to be an enemy of the people.

They did not even wait until that day, so eager were they to defy him. A letter that he sent was not read, and when his friends, Mark Antony and another tribune, objected to the declaration, they were thrust from the senate, and afterwards had to flee from the city in disguise.

Caesar had left Gaul and was in Ravenna when he first heard of what the senate had done. Only one Legion was with him at the time, – that is to say 5000 foot and 400 horse soldiers; nevertheless he decided straight-way to march to Rome.

First he sent the Legion forward to await him at the River Rubicon, and then, as if nothing had happened, he went to the theatre to see the gladiator show, and afterwards feasted some friends in his own house. Towards the middle of the evening he left them, entered his chariot, and drove away through the darkness to join his troops.

Now the River Rubicon marked the boundary between Italy, as it was then, and the provinces. No general was allowed to cross it with his army. If any one did so it was a sign that he entered Italy not as a friend but as an enemy, not in peace but in war.

When Caesar came at last to this river he hesitated; – for a long time he sat on the bank, silent, in deep thought. He was unwilling to turn back, yet loth to enter his own country as an enemy. Officers and men both watched him anxiously, and even as they watched him he rose to his feet and crying 'Jacta est alea' ('the die is cast'), gave the order to cross; but before ever a man could put foot on the bridge he turned to his officers and said: 'We may turn back yet, but once we cross this river all must be decided by the sword.' Then at the head of the Legion Caesar crossed the Rubicon.

This was on the 16th of January, 49 years before the birth of Christ, and on the 16th of March, two months later, without fighting a single battle, without shedding a drop of blood, Caesar was master of all Italy.

What had happened to Pompey, then? Pompey, at the first word of his enemy's approach, had fled from Rome to Epirus<sup>2</sup> across the Adriatic Sea, and with him were his legions and most of the patricians. And why did he leave Italy without giving battle, he who had once boasted that he had only to stamp his foot and legions of soldiers would appear?

The truth was he wanted to gain time. Although his army was as large, his soldiers were not so skilled in war as were those of Caesar. They had need of much drilling and training before they could be trusted in battle. And then the East had always brought fortune to Pompey. He had won his

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2 A wild mountainous region of ancient Greece.

third Triumph by the conquest of Asia, and he knew that the wild Eastern warriors would flock to his banner as soon as he landed in Epirus. And he was right. They came pouring into his camp by thousands and tens of thousands, and soon his army was more than doubled.

Caesar was as busy gathering troops in the West as Pompey in the East. Gaul sent him many a brave legion; Germany gave him cavalry; Spain, which he took from Pompey's lieutenants, also sent troops; indeed every country that had ever been conquered by the Romans sent soldiers to fight either for Pompey or for Caesar, either to the East or to the West.

Caesar, ever quick in his movements, made the first step. He set sail for Epirus with only three legions. He had few ships, for Pompey commanded the whole of the fleet, and so the rest of Caesar's army was forced to wait with Mark Antony at Brundisium until more ships could be found to transport it.

After being nearly wrecked on the rocks by which he passed to escape Pompey's ships, Caesar landed safely in Epirus, and pitching his camp close to that of the enemy, settled down to wait for his legions.

Fortunately for him and his small army winter set in, and until the cold weather passed no battle could be fought. Pompey steadily drilled his soldiers, Caesar anxiously watched for the ships that never came. Months passed, and still there was no sign of them, for Pompey's ships guarded the sea, and Antony dared not venture. At last Caesar could wait no longer; he would go and fetch them himself, and putting on a large cloak he stole secretly down to the seashore. There he hired a fishing-boat and bade the men row him over to Brundisium.

Both wind and current were against them; a storm arose; Caesar uncovering his face, cried:

'Fear not; ye carry Caesar and his fortunes with you.'

But although the men rowed bravely and well it was of no use; even Caesar could not command the sea, and at last he gave the order to return.

Not long after this, however, the ships hove in sight, and soon Caesar had the whole army under his command again. Pompey, more cautious than ever, marched to a safer place by the sea, and Caesar, following him, pitched his camp there also. Both armies were soon in a sorry plight. Pompey's soldiers had no water and no green food for their horses, for Caesar had taken care to cut off all the streams. The Caesareans, on the other hand, had nothing to eat but roots and herbs.

When the days began to be hot Pompey made up his mind to attack his enemy. Guided by some deserters he entered Caesar's camp by a secret way, surprised them and put them all to flight.

You can imagine Pompey's pride and the joy of his army. They had defeated the famous conqueror of Gaul! Another battle and their cause would be won. So sure were the patrician officers of this that they cast lots for Caesar's gardens and palaces in Rome.

But Pompey's very success was his ruin in the end. Instead of following his enemy and giving battle again at once, he avoided him, and this gave Caesar time to put the sick and wounded in a friendly town and march to the Plain of Pharsalia, where Pompey was now encamped. A river divided the plain into two equal parts, and on the banks of this river one of the greatest battles in the world was fought.

Pompey was not anxious to give battle. He would have liked to tire his enemy out by letting him

march through Greece, wasting his strength in small tussles. But the vain and haughty patricians, longing to return to their pleasant life in Rome, taunted and reproached him until at last he gave way. Caesar rejoiced greatly when one day at noon he saw the Pompeians marching out in order of battle, and yet verily it seemed as though Pompey would be the victor. He had twice as many foot and seven times as many horse soldiers as Caesar, and so many Eastern warriors that they could not be counted.

The two armies faced each other. Pompey placed himself on the left; Caesar opposite, headed his favourite Tenth Legion. Near to Pompey was the cavalry, magnificent men and horses both; Caesar, noticing this, put behind his poor little thousand of German horse, three cohorts of foot-soldiers, and he warned them that the success of the day depended greatly on their bravery. They swore not to fail him, and they kept their vow.

The order for the attack was given. The Caesareans dashed forward at a run, threw their javelins, drew out their swords, and the battle began.

Pompey's cavalry charged, the German horse gave way – slowly – slowly, until they had retreated to where the cohorts stood. These then rushed forward, thrusting their spears into the faces of their enemies, and so furiously that the dismayed horsemen broke their lines and fled to the hills for safety.

The brave cohorts now attacked the archers and slingers, and having swept them aside, fell upon the soldiers to the left of the line.

Caesar, seeing that the victory would be his, ordered his men to attack the Eastern soldiers, and to spare their own countrymen as much as possible. The soldiers advanced, shouting the order, and Pompey's Roman legions hearing, opened up their ranks. The Caesareans swept onward and very soon put the barbarians to flight.

And Pompey? Pompey lost heart early in the day when the cavalry failed him. He retired to his camp silent and downcast, only to be told by the frightened soldiers that he was not safe even there. 'What! assault my very camp!' he cried, and went out to see to its defence. But there was no hope of defending it; the guards had fled, and Pompey, mounting his horse, galloped quickly through the gates at one end of the camp just as Caesar's soldiers rushed in at the other.

And what do you think they found in the deserted camp? The patricians were so sure of victory that they had caused a feast to be made ready for their return. Tables stood spread with delicate meats and delicious wines in golden dishes and goblets. Couches had been laid out for them and their turf-huts (tents were not fine enough for these dainty warriors) had been hung with myrtle and ivy leaves. A very different sight this from Caesar's camp before the battle, and very likely Pompey would not have suffered so great a defeat had he been without his patrician officers.

But now all was over. Never again did Pompey make another stand against Caesar, for before he could gather together a new army he was treacherously killed in Egypt, where he had fled for safety.

I think he was glad when death came to him. He was growing old, and he had been defeated. It would have been hard for him to live to see his rival ruling victorious in Rome.

Caesar wept when he was told of Pompey's death. He buried him with great honour and magnificence, and caused the men by whom he had been so treacherously slain to be fitly punished for their crime.

Two new words for your notebook; a noun and an adjective.

*castra, -orum* – camp

This second declension neuter noun goes like *bellum* BUT it has no singular form. Although we would translate it camp or camps according to context, the Romans evidently considered any camp was a plural entity – presumably because it was composed of a number of tents! So:

*castra*

*castra*

*castra*

*castrorum*

*castris*

*castris*

This is a military word it is not really a holiday camp we should see in our mind's eye here! Both Julius Caesar and Pompey had camps of this sort. You can see its military connection because it is related to the word “castle.”

Bible example:

*stetit inter castra Aegyptiorum et castra Israhel*

*et erat nubes tenebrosa* [to them ( *Aegyptiorum* ) ] *et inluminans noctem* [to those(*Israhel*)]

*ut ad se invicem toto noctis tempore accedere non valerent* Exodus 14:20.

The subject of this sentence is not stated. When this happens in Latin we can deduce the subject (he, she, it, we, you, they, etc.) from the verb ending. The verb here is *stetit* “he/she/it stood” (related word “stationary”) and you can work out easily *where* it stood<sup>3</sup>. From that (if you know the story) you will work out what “it” was! Our English translation puts in some words which help with the next part and I have put them into the text above in square brackets. In Latin when you see *et.....et* you should usually translate one of the *et* as “both” and the other as “and” This makes good sense here. The rest of the text is difficult but you will get when it happened – *toto* [related to “total”] *noctis tempore* [related to “temporary,” “temporal” and tempo.] There are some little words you know and the *non* tells you that something did not happen.

*medius, -a, -um* middle, the middle of

What is a *via media*? Answer on last page.

Bible example:

*vigilate ergo nescitis enim quando dominus domus veniat sero*

(more helpful word order: *vigilate ergo, enim nescitis quando dominus domus sero veniat*)

*an media nocte*

*an galli cantu*

*an mane*

Mark 13:35

Plenty of words here that are already in your notebook: *ergo, enim, dominus*. *Quando* means “when” and can go in your notebook too. *Vigilate* is imperative (a command) and I expect you can guess what it means. Break *ne scitis* down into *scitis* “you know” and *ne* which makes it negative. *Domus* is a house (related to “domestic”) and *veniat sero* means “is going to come.” *An... an... an...* is a bit like *et... et...* – it means “whether... or... or...” *Gallus* is a cock and *mane* means “early in the morning.”

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3 Remember *inter* is “between.”

Answer:

A middle way or compromise.