

Augustus—Empire Builder 2000 Years Ago

Natural Leader, He Took Ruthless Road to Power

(Continued from page one.)

By virtually every measure of his times Augustus was a great man.

By modern standards he falls far short of greatness. This is because, despite his undisputed capacities as a leader of men, he literally splashed his way through blood to attain his position as the supreme power of Rome.

He killed. He plundered.

Back of this killing and plundering were two dominating objectives from which in his ascendancy he never allowed his aim to wander. The first was his purpose to avenge the murder of Julius Caesar, his great-uncle and adoptive father, a purpose based upon an obsession that haunted him for years. The second was the prize that kept his ambitions spurred, the mastery of Rome. Doer, not dreamer, Augustus never let anything stand in his way. He knew when to act, and he also knew when to bide his time. He could be hard and cruel when hardness and cruelty were profitable politics. He was one of history's foremost politicians.

As examples of his pitiless politics: Witness how cleverly he used the loose-tongued Cicero until the time came when he could afford to let him perish. How he made deals with Marc Antony until he grew powerful enough to crush him. How, with the two other triumvirs, Antony and Lepidus, he drew up a list of proscribed citizens and caused the assassination of 300 senators and 2,000 knights. How he put an end to the danger of the presence of Sextus Pompeius' former followers, the runaway slaves, by crucifying 6,000 of them. How he summarily evicted landholders and gave their properties to his soldiers.

Augustus, as emperor, was a grand-scale builder. Fine public structures rose in Rome at his bidding. Excellent paved highways were constructed at his command through various parts of the empire. Aqueducts were laid by skilled engineers in his employ. He was responsible for the creation of huge harbors, tall lighthouses, fortresses, stadia, and at least one magnificent forum. It is said to have been his boast that he found a city of Rome built of bricks and converted it into a Rome of marble.

And on top of all this he bore the magic name of Caesar.

Physically Augustus was only of average size, but it is written that he possessed a noble bearing and a personality that made him a man of distinction in any gathering. Virtually all of his life he was handicapped by indispositions. As a young man he possessed a nervous stomach. In his later years he was beset with one ailment after another.

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Augustus was born in the Palatine quarter of the city of Rome, in a house at a corner called "At the Oxheads," just before sunrise on Sept. 23, 63 B. C. His father was a wealthy plebeian, Gaius Octavius, who originally had come from the town of Veletri and who had gained no little prominence, first as a praetor and then as the provincial governor of Macedonia. His mother was Atia, daughter of Julius Caesar's younger sister, Julia. It was thus through his maternal line that he was connected with the great and powerful Julian clan, the clan of Julius Caesar. The name given to Augustus at the time of his birth was Gaius Octavius, the same as that of his father.

The boy Octavius was in his fifth year when his father died. A year or two later his mother became the wife of Lucius Marcus Philippus, who had been a praetor, governor of Syria, and finally a consul. Octavius dwelt with his grandmother, Julia, until the time of her death, which occurred when he was 12 years old. The boy delivered a stirring funeral oration over the bier of his grandmother, revealing that even at that early age he had the poise required to face a crowd. He went to live in the home of

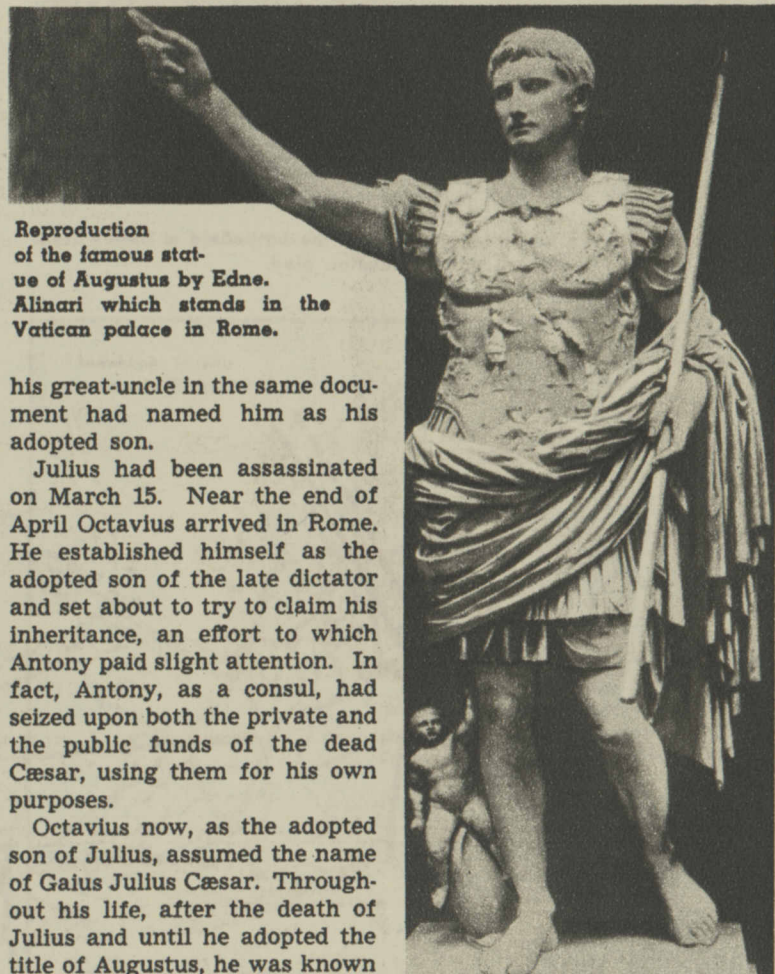
his stepfather thereafter. He was there in his fourteenth year in 49 B. C. when Julius Caesar, his great-uncle, crossed the Rubicon and entered Rome at the head of his army, compelling his rival, Pompey, to flee.

The spring of 45 B. C. found Octavius in Spain on his way to join his great-uncle, who was waging a war on the two sons of Pompey. The youth, then in his eighteenth year, arrived too late at the scene of the struggle to witness the victory of Julius Caesar and the death of the elder of his great-uncle's two rivals, but he made such a fine impression on the great soldier after he did arrive that the two for the time being became inseparable companions.

Julius planned an expedition to crush the Parthians, who not many years before had defeated the Roman general Crassus. He sent Octavius to Apollonia, on the western coast of Macedonia, across the Adriatic from Italy, to study under a Greek tutor and to make himself proficient in military matters. It was planned that Octavius was to accompany his great-uncle on the new campaign. But in the spring of 44 B. C. there came to Octavius at Apollonia a messenger bearing the news that Julius Caesar had been murdered.

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Back to Italy went Octavius. Landing at Brundisium, he learned that Julius Caesar, who had been knifed to death in the senate house by Marcus Brutus, Cassius, and other conspirators, had bequeathed to him in his will three-quarters of his great estate. He learned further that



Reproduction of the famous statue of Augustus by Edmé-Alexandre Barrias, standing in the Vatican museum in Rome.

his great-uncle in the same document had named him as his adopted son.

Julius had been assassinated on March 15. Near the end of April Octavius arrived in Rome. He established himself as the adopted son of the late dictator and set about to try to claim his inheritance, an effort to which Antony paid slight attention. In fact, Antony, as a consul, had seized upon both the private and the public funds of the dead Caesar, using them for his own purposes.

Octavius now, as the adopted son of Julius, assumed the name of Gaius Julius Caesar. Throughout his life, after the death of Julius and until he adopted the title of Augustus, he was known among Romans as Caesar, and that we shall call him here until we come to that time when he officially became known as Augustus.

Cicero, then one of the biggest figures in Rome, once had been a friend of Julius Caesar, but after the latter's death he publicly acclaimed Brutus, Cassius, and the other murderers as heroes and liberators. Cicero had little regard for the young Caesar, and he was the bitter foe of Antony, who posed as having been greatly bereft by the death of Julius. The youthful Caesar, on the other hand, disliked Cicero because of his allegiance to the murderers, but for policy's sake he courted the favor of the older man.

Antony in the meantime was gaining in power. Eventually arrived the time that he became a threat not only to Caesar but to Rome itself. The senate empowered Caesar as an army leader to join in the efforts to crush Antony. Decimus Brutus, the man who had lured Julius Caesar to his death, thus for the moment became an ally of the young Caesar. Decimus Brutus, with an army, was besieged by Antony's force in the city of Mutina. An army, including troops under Caesar, was sent to the aid

of the besieged general. It twice defeated Antony, relieved the pressure on Decimus Brutus, and permitted the latter to join forces with the relieving troops. After these victories Rome expected Caesar to unite with Decimus Brutus in the pursuit of Antony, but this the young man refused to do.

Hirtius and Pansa, two consuls, had been slain in the campaign against Antony, and, since Antony by this time had been proclaimed a public enemy, their deaths left Rome without any consuls. There were stories later, based upon contemporary gossip, to the effect that Caesar had engineered the deaths of Pansa and Hirtius, but modern historians do not place much credence in them.

The aforementioned magic of the name of Caesar and its

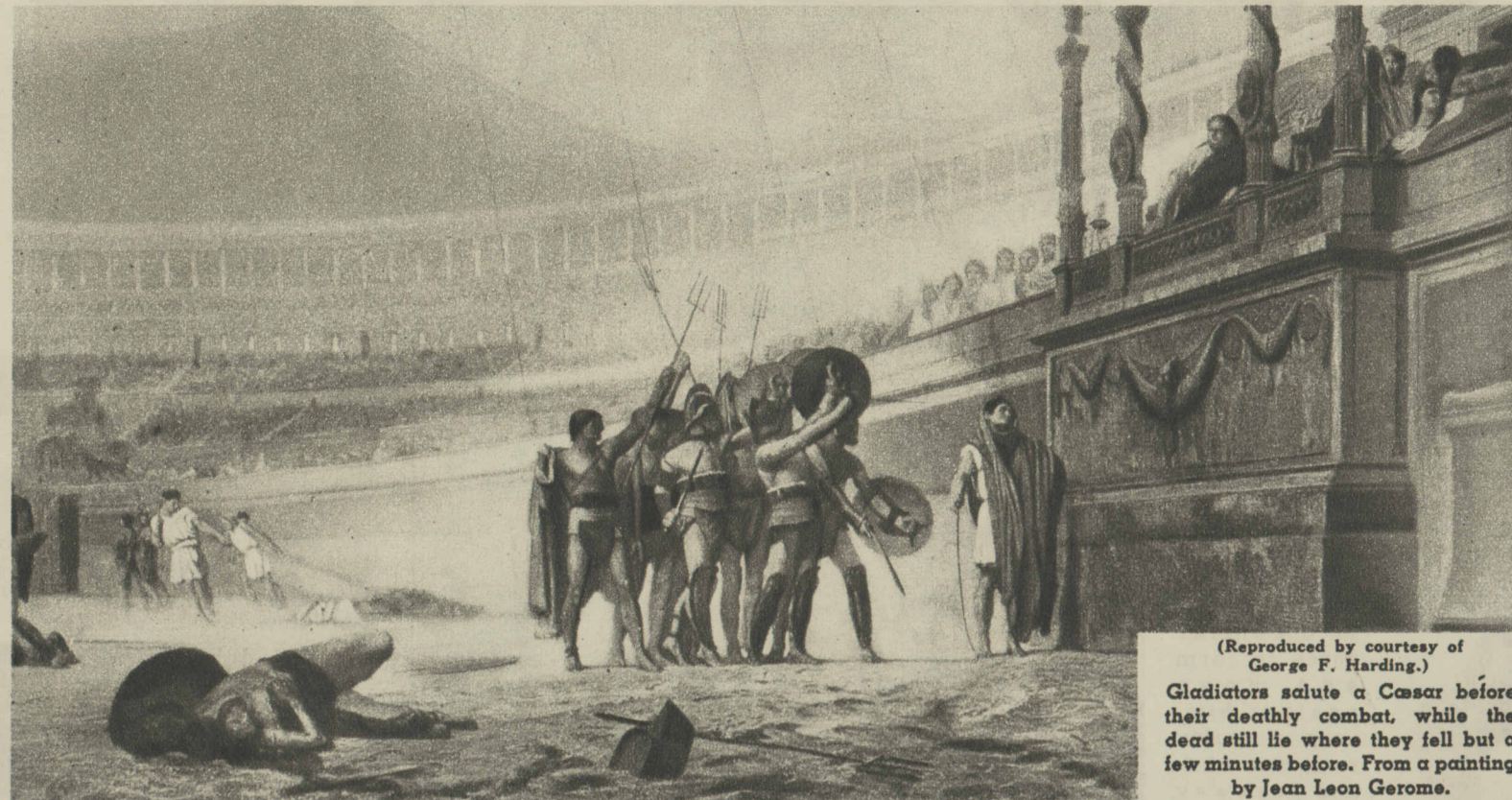
parley half way between the two camps.

The upshot of this meeting was that Caesar, Antony, and Lepidus joined forces. In other words, Caesar made a deal. The three men constituted themselves into a triumvirate. They divided all of the western provinces among themselves, Caesar taking Sicily, Sardinia, and Africa, which, by the way, were under the control of the fleet of Sextus Pompeius; Antony taking all of Gaul except the southern provinces, and Lepidus taking the southern province of Gaul and all of Spain. Caesar's object in making this three-cornered pact, as suggested before, was to strengthen himself against Marcus Brutus and Cassius, who were in control in the eastern provinces.

To cement the deal between

Julius Caesar and who had borne the dictator a son, Caesarion.

Lucius and Fulvia stirred all Italy up into a new civil war. While they were at this, Sextus Pompeius was harassing the western coast of Italy, playing havoc with Rome's food supply. An army under Lucius was defeated by Caesar's general, Agrippa, and Lucius was forced to take refuge with the remnants of his army within the walled city of Perusia. Early in the year of 40 B. C., after a siege of many months, Lucius surrendered and joined forces with Caesar. Fulvia was permitted to go free. Perusia, which now is called Perugia, was burned. Republican remnants of the garrison and senatorial refugees were put to death. This was Caesar's last stage in avenging the death of Julius and



(Reproduced by courtesy of George F. Harding.)
Gladiators salute a Caesar before their deathly combat, while the dead still lie where they fell but a few minutes before. From a painting by Jean Leon Gerome.

the two main figures of the triumvirate Caesar was formally betrothed to Antony's young stepdaughter, Claudia, the child of Fulvia by her former husband, Claudius. This marriage never was consummated.

Here now was Caesar's first great opportunity for vengeance, his chance to act against the enemies of Julius. Brutus and Cassius were beyond his reach, but there were many in Rome with whom he had a score to settle. Antony, too, had many enemies. So the three triumvirs set in motion a terrible proscription which cost the lives of a number of Rome's most prominent citizens. Three hundred senators and 2,000 knights are said to have been put to death.

Among those killed was Cicero.

Territories of many cities in Italy were seized by the triumvirs and divided among their soldiers.

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In the autumn of 42 B. C. Caesar and Antony struck at Brutus and Cassius in Macedonia. The campaign culminated on Oct. 23 in the battle of Philippi, in which the armies of the assassins of Julius Caesar were defeated. Brutus and Cassius ended their lives by throwing themselves on their swords. The cities in the east that had espoused the cause of the two conspirators, Brutus and Cassius, were forced to pay heavy indemnities to help meet the cost of the campaign. Back in Rome, Caesar levied heavy taxes for the same purpose, confiscated lands, and forcibly evicted landholders in order to pay the wages of the soldiers.

These dispossessed landowners formed a sizable group that caused disturbances in Rome and other cities of Italy. Soon there appeared as their champion Lucius Antonius, brother of Antony. As a co-plotter with him was Fulvia, Antony's wife, who was deeply offended because the young Caesar had not married her daughter Claudia, as originally arranged. Antony, who in the meantime had remained in the east to exact tribute for Rome, had sent out an order that the heads of all vassal states should meet him on an appointed day in Tarsus. It was there and under these circumstances that he met the seductive queen of the Egyptians, the Ptolemy ruler Cleopatra, who some years before had been the mistress of

the coup de grace of the moribund conservative cause, according to John Buchan (Lord Tweedsmuir) in his splendid biography of Augustus.

Wrote Suetonius of Caesar's acts immediately following the fall of Perusia:

"After the capture of Perusia he took vengeance on many, meeting all attempts to beg pardon or to make excuses with the one reply, 'You must die!' Some write that 300 men of both orders were selected from the prisoners of war and sacrificed on the ides of March like so many victims at the altar raised to the deified Julius."

Fulvia, whose intrigues had been partly instrumental in turning Caesar and Antony against each other, was taken from the turbulent scene finally by death, and the two men patched up their differences again—made a new deal—with Antony marrying Caesar's sister, Octavia, widow of C. Claudius Marcellus. About that same time Caesar made for himself a political marriage with Scrobina, who was re-

said that he even attended the wedding.

In the war referred to in the preceding paragraph the forces of Caesar again were victorious. Sextus had a powerful fleet at sea, but Agrippa, Caesar's trusted aid, built a fleet of more than equal strength in a small inland lake near Naples, then cut a channel through to the sea and sailed out to meet the son of Pompey, who had met with earlier successes in the war. At the battle of Naulochus, fought off Sicily in 36 B. C., Agrippa sent 300 war vessels against the 300 possessed by Sextus. Agrippa's ships were more skillfully manned and were of greater weight. Sextus was badly beaten and forced to flee with the few vessels of his fleet that escaped destruction. Sextus, in attempting to escape to Armenia, was captured by troops of Antony and put to death at Miletus.

After the defeat of Sextus the triumvir Lepidus demanded possession of Italy. He threatened war, but his troops were won over by Caesar and he was taken



(After a painting by John Collier.)
The death of Cleopatra. This famous queen died at her own hand after being spurned by Augustus.

lated to Sextus Pompeius. This marriage was intended to placate the surviving son of Pompey, whose fleets continued to be a menace to Rome's corn supply.

Caesar's next war was against this very Sextus Pompeius, whose relative he had wedded. It was launched in the spring of 38 B. C., shortly after he had divorced Scrobina and married Livia. The divorce of

prisoner, leaving Caesar master of the west. According to René Francis in the book "Augustus—His Life and His Work," Caesar found between 30,000 and 40,000 runaway slaves among the former followers of Sextus, 6,000 of whom he ordered crucified. This was a cruel political stroke, intended obviously to strike fear in the hearts of slaves who might in the future be

inclined to menace Rome's safety.

Five years have passed. Antony has abandoned his wife, Octavia, sister of Caesar, and married Cleopatra of Egypt, former mistress of Julius—posing before her subjects as a god. The two, with combined armies and combined navies, are established on the coast of Greece. Caesar, with an army and a fleet, the latter under the command of Agrippa, moves against them. Antony decides against a battle on land in favor of a sea fight, despite the fact that he has a great superiority on land. After a long series of operations the naval battle of Actium is fought on Sept. 2, 31 B. C., outside the Gulf of Arta.

The combined fleets of Antony and Cleopatra were beaten. The two fled back to Egypt. Caesar in the following months invaded the country of the queen. Alexandria, the Egyptian capital, surrendered to the Roman army Aug. 1, 30 B. C. Antony threw himself on his sword, was carried to the presence of Cleopatra, and died in her arms.

Cleopatra still had a card to play. She decided to make a final effort to save her country and her throne by employing her charm to melt the heart of Caesar. But the scheme failed. Caesar, not nearly so human as the vain Antony, refused to be tempted. Cleopatra still was a beautiful woman, but it should be borne in mind that she no longer was young. In fact, she was nearing 40 when she played her last card with Caesar. A serpent, secreted at her command in a basket of fruit, accommodated the despairing queen by biting her. She died, and all Egypt belonged to Rome.

For political reasons Caesar then put to death Antyllus, Fulvia's son by Antony, and Caesarion, Cleopatra's son by Julius. But he permitted the twin children born to Antony by Cleopatra to live. All over the Roman world Caesar's great victory was celebrated in triumphs. Caesar was undisputed master.

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In the year 29 B. C. Caesar was proclaimed emperor for life, on the assumption that through his victories he had restored the republic. On Jan. 13, 27 B. C., he was awarded the civic crown to be placed above his door, and four days later he was allowed by the senate to assume the title of Augustus, the act which now is looked upon by historians as marking the beginning of the Roman empire.

Twenty years of civil wars had disorganized the Roman world. Augustus set about the business of restoring it and consolidating the empire. He married off his daughter Julia, widow of Marcellus, to his colleague Agrippa. He put into the hands of his stepsons, Tiberius and the aforementioned Drusus, the task of pacifying the Germans. He contrived to have himself elected pontifex maximus on the death of Lepidus in 12 B. C. In 9 B. C. his stepson Drusus, who was his favorite, died. Succumbed also in the succeeding years his two adopted sons, the children of Julia and Agrippa. Tiberius alone was left to carry on his work, so in A. D. 4 this surviving son of his wife Livia finally was formally adopted and made his heir.

The emperor was about 60 years old when there was born in Bethlehem, Palestine, within his own empire, one who was to make a more lasting impression on the world than all the Caesars and kings combined. It is doubtful, however, whether Augustus ever heard of Jesus.

The defeat in the country beyond the Rhine of his incompetent general Varus, one of the few really incapable lieutenants that he ever had entrusted with a vital task, was the last event of great importance in Augustus' long career. His last five years of life were peaceful.

In his father's house in Nola, on Aug. 19, A. D. 14, Augustus died. His last words were to his faithful wife, bidding her to "live mindful of our wedded life."