Augustus Caesar

In his will, Julius Caesar adopted his great-nephew Octavian and gave him the name Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus. He also left most of his fortune to the eighteen-year-old youth.

Mark Antony, Caesar's top aide and an able general, so incensed the mob of Rome against the murderers of Caesar that the conspirators had to flee Rome. Antony thought that he would simply take control of all of Rome. He knew of Caesar's will but didn't think an eighteen-year-old boy could challenge him.

At the time of Caesar's murder, Octavian was serving in the army in Albania. When he learned of Caesar's will, Octavian hurried back to Rome. There the veterans of Caesar's army flocked around him. Octavian also made contact with important and powerful Romans. In addition, he gave sums of money to the veterans and to the common people of Rome. He became so powerful that he demanded to be made consul, and a frightened Senate approved.

Antony realized that Octavian presented a real challenge and created a Second Triumvirate that consisted of himself, Octavian and Lepidus, a Roman general and politician. Antony's plan was to use the other two men until he could eventually rule all of Rome himself.

In 42 B.C., the Senate voted to make Julius Caesar a god. Octavian ordered a large temple built in honor of Caesar and began calling himself "son of the divine Caesar."

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At Philippi in northeastern Greece in 42 B.C., the army of Octavian and Antony defeated the army of Brutus and Cassius, the men who had murdered Caesar. Octavian and Antony divided the Roman world between themselves. Octavian got the western half of the empire and Antony got the rich eastern provinces. As a consolation, Lepidus received Africa, but Octavian soon forced him out of public life.

On his way back to Rome, Octavian became very ill. When he got there, he found Italy and Rome in terrible condition. The veterans were demanding money. Small armies were living off the land in northern Italy and paying no allegiance to Rome. Worst of all, Sicily was controlled by Pompey's son. Pompey had been Julius Caesar's old rival and his son had no love for Octavian. Since Sicily supplied Rome with grain, this second generation rivalry presented serious problems.

But people didn't know how iron-willed Octavian was. He promised the veterans their pay. His boyhood friend Marcus Agrippa, an excellent general, defeated the roving armies in northern Italy and then defeated Pompey in 36 B.C., gaining control of Sicily. Then Octavian married an older woman named Scribonia, who had important relatives. Thus, Octavian gained complete control of the western provinces.

Meanwhile, Antony had done very little to make himself famous, and all of Octavian's success made him very angry. He hurried back to Rome and almost generated a battle between his forces and those of Octavian, but Octavian smoothed things over. Antony agreed to a truce and even married Octavian's sister Octavia to seal the peace.

But once he was back in the East, Antony tired of Octavia and sent her home. He became Cleopatra's lover and even awarded her children with Roman provinces. Octavian and the people of Rome were furious. They hated Cleopatra. Octavian declared war against her, and in 31 B.C., Agrippa, who was an admiral as well as a general, defeated the fleets of Antony and Cleopatra at Actium. Supposedly, sixty of Cleopatra's ships left the battle, taking her and Antony to Egypt. There, while awaiting Octavian's army, Antony committed suicide and died in Cleopatra's arms. Later, after Octavian had captured her and planned to take her back to Rome, Cleopatra requested a snake be brought to her. She died from its bite.

Octavian was now master of the entire Roman world. He stayed in Egypt for awhile and decided he would make that province his own since it was the richest of all Roman provinces. Then he sailed for home.

In Rome, Octavian was honored with many celebrations and was ready to lead the empire into a period of great peace. In order to do this, he knew the Roman people had to give him total control. So in January, 27 B.C., he told the Senate that he was giving up all his titles and that the Senate could govern Rome. The Senate was shocked. This was the last thing they wanted. The Senate immediately gave him back all of his titles and named him Augustus, "the majestic one, the sacred one, the blessed one."

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Augustus was now ready to forge the empire into an efficient and peaceful unit. With his friend Agrippa handling military matters and the brilliant Maecenas as his prime minister, Augustus, over the years, built an efficient system of civil servants throughout the empire.

One of the persons who was the greatest help was his wife Livia, whom he had married after divorcing Scribonia. Very much in love, the two lived simple and modest lives. Before he died at the age of seventy-six, he said to her "Remember our days together; farewell."

Questions

1. How old was Octavian when Caesar adopted him? _____
2. Name the men in the Second Triumvirate. _____
3. What woman did Antony fall in love with? _____
4. What happened to her? _____
5. Cleopatra and Antony were defeated at _____.
6. What name did the Senate honor Octavian with? _____
7. What does the name mean? _____
8. The prime minister of Augustus was _____.
9. What great general served Octavian? _____
10. _____ was the great love of Augustus.

Activities

1. Augustus rebuilt much of Rome. Do some study about him and his life and find out what he rebuilt in Rome.
2. Look up *Praetorian Guard* and write a brief description of it.
3. In A.D. 9 the army of Augustus was destroyed by Germans at the Battle of Teutoburg Forest. Research this battle and present an oral report on it.
4. Write short reports on Mark Antony, Cleopatra, Battle of Actium and Marcus Brutus.
5. Pretend you are the most powerful person in the world today and can do virtually anything you wish. After considerable thought, list ten things you would do.

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