

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE FOUNDING OF THE PRINCIPATE; THE JULIAN PRINCES

31 B.C.—41 A.D.

496. The Augustan Government. — The battle of Actium made Octavianus master of the Roman world.¹ As Lepidus had been dropped from the triumvirate, and Antony had committed suicide, Octavianus was sole triumvir. He had, too, the consulship. For a time it seemed doubtful whether, in imitation of his adoptive father, he would retain all the power in his own hands, or resign it after the example of Sulla; but finally a middle course was taken. Early in 27 B.C. he laid down the office of triumvir, with all his extraordinary power, and restored the government to the senate and people. This was a formal return to the republic. Appreciating his service in the reëstablishment of peace, the senate voted him the title Augustus. Heretofore this epithet had been reserved for the gods and their shrines. In conferring it on Octavianus the senate granted no power, but wished to mark him as the one whom all should revere. Although we shall henceforth speak of him as Augustus, we are to bear in mind that all his successors held this title as their chief distinction. It is nearly equivalent to His Sacred Highness, yet without denoting any official position, whether religious or political.

The senate, however, did not allow him to retire into private life. It assigned to him certain provinces. For their government it gave him proconsular power. Soon afterward it voted that this power should include a supervision over all the provincial governors. As these officers commanded the armies of their provinces, the superior position of Augustus made him general-in-chief of all the military forces. After holding the consulship many years by annual election, he gave up that magistracy. The assembly conferred

¹ § 401.

on him instead the tribunician power, without the office of tribune. This authority made his person sacred,¹ and marked him as a champion of the people. Through it also he had a share in the government of Rome and Italy. Sometimes, with a colleague, he undertook the duties of the censor; and when Lepidus, the pontifex maximus, died, Augustus accepted for life an appointment to the latter office. It made him head of the state religion. Augustus was also imperator. In his time the title still meant "General"; not till more than a century after his death did it come to signify "Emperor." In estimating the position finally held by Augustus let us notice that his military authority was the same as that of the President of the United States; his civil authority was far less. All the old republican magistrates still existed, and continued to exercise the same functions as before. Constitutionally Augustus was on a level with the consuls. In honor and in personal influence, however, he overshadowed all the other officials. He was always consulted on the suitability of candidates for the various offices and on every other matter; and his policy was usually carried out. It is clear that most of his power was exercised, not as a magistrate, but as a political "boss." The Romans dignified his position with the title princeps, "leading citizen." The idea came in part from Cicero's *Republic*.² We may translate this title by its derivative, "prince," with the understanding that in Roman history it means simply the most influential citizen, whose actual power as a "boss" far exceeded his constitutional authority. In this sense a principate was a republic controlled by such a prince. The Roman principate was in fact a transitional stage between the republic and the monarchy.³

497. The Provinces. — The border provinces, and all others which danger threatened, were under the direct care of the prince. His lieutenants had charge of their judicial and military affairs; his agents attended to finance. Egypt was not called a province, but a prefecture, governed by a prefect appointed by Augustus. The Egyptians looked upon the prince as a king, and the prefect as his viceroy. The older and more peaceful provinces still belonged to the senate, which appointed annual governors. This division of

¹ § 382.² § 493.

§ 512.



power was carried through the whole government. Each of the two powers exercised a certain control over the other. The prince's supervision over the senate's provinces made the governors juster and more efficient. On the other hand, the senate checked the authority of the prince in two ways: (1) all the governors, excepting that of Egypt, and all the higher officers of the army, had to be senators; (2) the prince, like any other magistrate, gave to the senate periodically an account of his administration, and was therefore responsible to that body for all his acts.

Augustus followed the example of Julius Caesar in insisting on a just and vigorous government; although he withheld the Roman citizenship, the provincials still enjoyed a large degree of local freedom. He encouraged trade and knit the empire together by building well-paved roads to the remotest parts of the Roman world. Thus the imperial government brought the provinces protection and happiness.

498. The Eastern Frontier. — A study of the frontier must take account of the provinces and dependent states on and near the border, as the management of such countries was closely connected with the question of frontier defence. In the time of Augustus the part of the empire east of the Adriatic was densely populated and rich, whereas Italy and the West had a relatively sparse population and little wealth. In settling the affairs of the East, therefore, Augustus had to proceed cautiously in order not to stir up opposition. In general he confirmed Pompey's arrangements.¹ The small kingdoms of Asia Minor, as Cappadocia and Ga-la'ti-a,² were left undisturbed. Judea, too, had become a kingdom, and was now ruled by Herod. This man, the builder of a great temple to Jehovah in Jerusalem, was king at the time Jesus was born. But some years after Herod died, the kingship was abolished, and Judea was placed under the rule of an agent — *proc-u-ra'tor* — of Augustus. In general the tendency was gradually to convert the dependent kingdoms into provinces. The great frontier province of the East was Syria. Three legions were quartered in it for the defence of the Euphrates border. As the governor of Syria was commander of this force, he had to be a man of military experience and ability.

¹ § 476.

² Galatia, however, was converted into a province in 25 B.C.

Beyond the Euphrates lay Armenia and Parthia. The latter was the only great, well-organized state outside the Roman empire. The question as to whether Rome or Parthia should control Armenia was the source of endless trouble between the two great powers.

499. The Southern Frontier. — Egypt supplied Rome with grain during a third of the year. It abounded in wealth of every kind. Alexandria was still a great centre of commerce, industry, and intellectual life.¹ The person who commanded the resources of this country held the key to the mastery of the empire. Hence Augustus cleverly retained the direct management of it, always appointed to its government some personal friend among the knights, and permitted no senator even to visit the Nile valley without his special consent. One legion was enough to guard its southern border against the Nubians.

West of Egypt still fewer troops were needed to protect the frontier from the sparse tribes of the desert. Cy-re-na'i-ca, the district west of Egypt, had been annexed to the province of Crete. Farther west was Africa, which since the time of Julius Caesar included the former kingdom of Numidia. West of Africa was Mauretania, which was still a dependent kingdom. In Africa the Phoenician language still prevailed in everyday life, yet Rome would have nothing but Latin for official use. Carthage had been restored by Julius Caesar, and was already a flourishing city. From the province of Africa, Rome drew a great part of her supply of grain and fruit.

500. The Northern Frontier: (1) **the Danube and the Alps.** — The protection of the northern frontier presented the most difficult problem with which the prince had to deal, for the country beyond still swarmed with fierce, aggressive barbarians. Under the principate of Augustus the governor of Macedonia extended the empire northward to the lower Danube. The new conquest was organized as the province of Moe'si-a. Augustus himself began the conquest of the country west of Moesia and north of Illyricum. The inhabitants of this district, however, were liberty-loving and warlike. They frequently rebelled; and it was only after hard struggles that Tiberius, stepson of Augustus, finally

¹ § 346.

subdued them.¹ Thereupon their country became the province of Pan-no'ni-a.

Meanwhile the tribes of the Alps and their neighborhood were disturbing northern Italy. The hard task of subduing these mountaineers was achieved by Tiberius and his brother Drusus.² Two provinces were made of the conquered district — Nor'i-cum, the mountainous country west of Pannonia, and Rae'ti-a, on the headwaters of the Danube and Rhine. The work of organizing these four Danubian provinces and of protecting them with a chain of forts fell chiefly to Tiberius, the ablest and most conscientious general and administrator of the age.

501. The Northern Frontier: (2) the Rhine. — It was stated above that Augustus divided Gaul into four provinces.³ Afterward he found it necessary for the defence of the German border to organize also two frontier provinces covering the left bank of the Rhine. They were called Upper Germany and Lower Germany.

The governors of these new provinces had to be military men, commanding strong armies and ever watchful against the attacks of the restless Germans. It occurred to Augustus that in the end much blood and money might be saved in the protection of the empire by conquering Germany, at least as far as the Elbe River. Drusus undertook this task. But after three years of successful warfare he fatally injured himself by a fall from his horse. It was a great loss to the imperial family, for Drusus was an able man and popular with the army.

After Tiberius had completed the conquest, Augustus made Va'rus, a distant kinsman, governor of the new province. This man considered his subjects mere slaves, whom he tried to govern by the principles he had learned in the Orient. They resisted; and under the lead of Ar-min'i-us, a chieftain's son who had received his education at Rome, they plotted against their tyrannic governor. As he was leading his three legions through the Teu'to-berg Forest on his way to winter quarters, they surrounded him and cut his army

¹ Livia, wife of Augustus, had two sons, Tiberius and Drusus, by a former marriage. As the adopted son of Augustus, Tiberius entered the Julian family and became the second prince; § 505.

² Their brilliant success was celebrated by the poet Horace, *Odes*, iv. 14, quoted by Botsford, *Story of Rome*, p. 233.

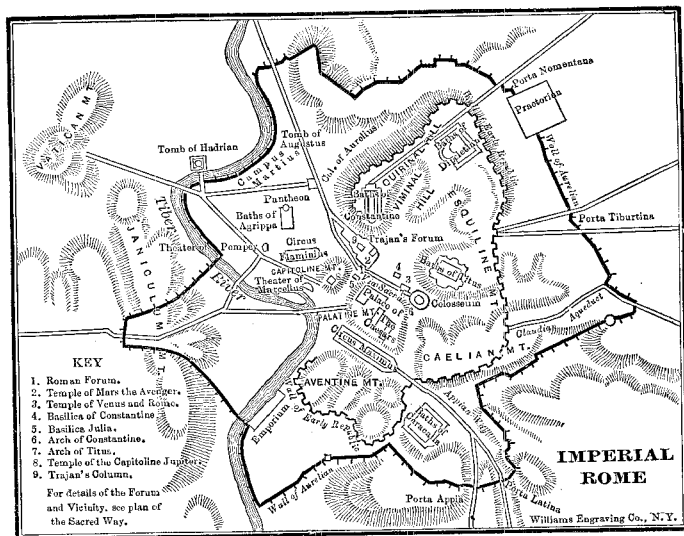
³ § 482.

to pieces. Varus killed himself; the barbarians hung their prisoners to trees and tortured them to death (9 A.D.). Though Augustus appeared to bear the news with a brave heart, his spirit was broken by the misfortune he could not repair. From time to time he would say, "Varus, Varus, give me back my legions." Convinced that the strength of the empire should not be further wasted upon such projects, he established the Rhine as the boundary, and decided resolutely on a policy of peace.

502. The Army. — The chief reason for this policy of peace was the extreme difficulty of obtaining soldiers. The legionaries had to be Roman citizens. When occasionally provincials were enlisted in this class of troops, they had to be given the citizenship. But Augustus opposed the bestowal of citizenship on provincials; for he believed that the unity and the protection of the empire could be maintained most effectively by keeping up the military spirit of the Romans and their pride in the superiority of their race. Since the time of Marius the legion contained from five thousand to six thousand regular troops. Augustus attached to each legion some auxiliaries from the provincials, making the total number of soldiers in each legion about ten thousand. At the close of his administration there were in all twenty-five legions. He had, too, a considerable navy on the Mediterranean and its tributary seas and on the frontier rivers. For the protection of his own person he kept in and about Rome a body of soldiers called the pretorian guard.¹ The fire department and the police of the capital were likewise organized in military form. All these forces within and near Rome amounted to about twenty thousand men. Police duty in the provinces was performed by native militia.

A standing army for the empire was altogether new. But as organized by Augustus it was remarkably small. Excluding the provincial police, it could hardly have exceeded three hundred thousand. Besides the difficulty of enlisting troops, Augustus had to reckon with expense. As the wealth of the empire had been wasted in the long civil wars, he felt that the taxes could not justly be increased. In order to spare the provincials, he devoted a great

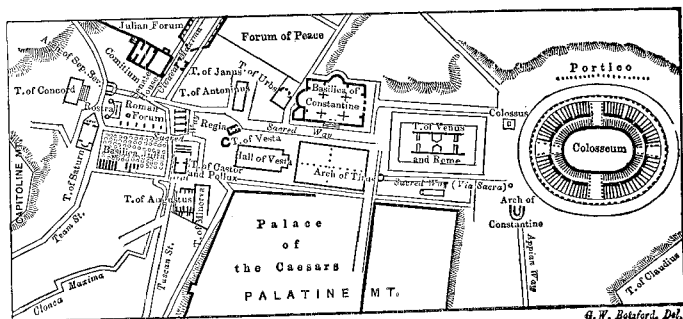
¹From *prae-to'ri-um*, the general's tent, — the pretorian guard was an outgrowth from the guard which protected the general's headquarters.



MAP OF IMPERIAL ROME

part of his own immense fortune to the current administration and to public improvements.

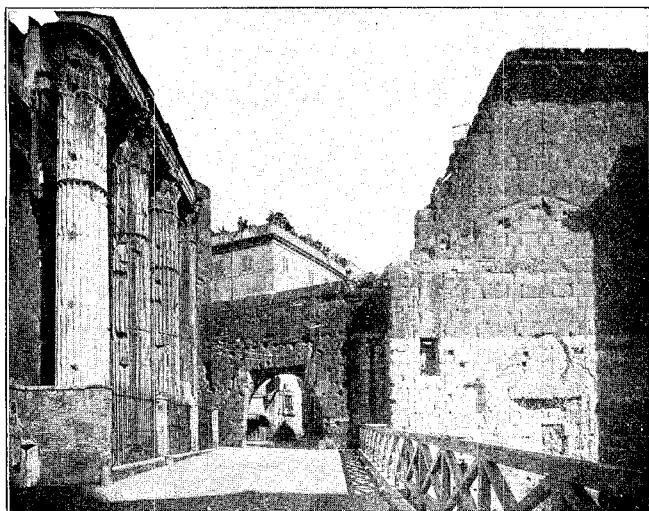
503. **Public Improvements; Architecture.** — Augustus planted many colonies both in Italy and in the provinces. His aim was



not only to furnish his retired veterans with farms, but also to re-settle vacant districts, so as to increase the prosperity of the country.

With him begins the great age of Roman architecture. He himself tells us of his public works:—

“The Capitol¹ and the Pompeian theatre I have repaired at enormous expense. . . . Aqueducts which, by reason of age,



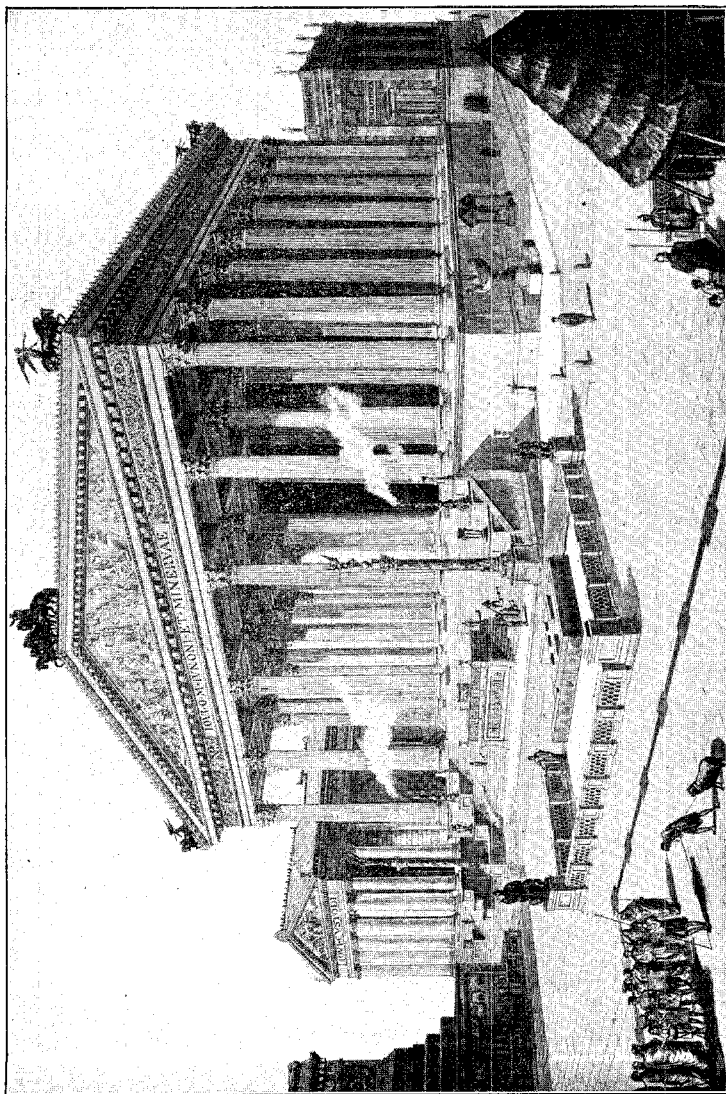
THE TEMPLE OF MARS THE AVENGER

(In the Augustan Forum. The high wall borders this forum on the north. From a photograph)

were crumbling in many places, I have restored . . . and have finished the Julian Forum and the basilica which was between the temple of Castor and the temple of Saturn, works begun and almost completed by my father²; and when that same basilica was consumed by fire, I began its reconstruction on an enlarged scale, inscribing it with the names of my sons. If I do not live to complete it, I have given orders that it be finished by my heirs. In accordance with a decree of the senate, while consul for the sixth time,

¹ The Capitoline temple of Jupiter.

² *I.e.* Julius Caesar, the adoptive father of Augustus. On the Basilica Julia, see § 495.



CAPITOLINE TEMPLE OF JUPITER, JUNO, AND MINERVA
(Restored by Gatteschi)

I restored eighty-two temples of the gods, passing over none which was at that time in need of repair. In my seventh consulship I [re] built the Flaminian Way to Ariminum, and all the bridges except the Mulvian and the Minucian.

"Upon private ground I have built with the spoils of war the temple of Mars the Avenger and the Augustan Forum."¹ The Mars of this temple was not to be the god of conquest; his function rather was to punish foreign powers which disturbed the peace of the empire. The Pantheon, which means the "all-divine," was the work of Agrippa, the prince's ablest minister. In it men worshipped Mars and Venus, the chief gods of the Julian family. It was afterward rebuilt by Hadrian. The activity of Augustus wrought a complete change in the appearance of Rome. At the close of his principate he could boast that he had found the city of brick, but left it of marble.



FLAMINES

(From the Altar of the Augustan Peace; Museum of the Terme, Rome)

One of the most remarkable works of the age was a great Altar of Peace erected by the senate to commemorate the suppression of disturbances in Spain and Gaul, and more generally to express the spirit of peace for which the empire now stood. It was richly

¹ Augustus, *Deeds*, xx, xxi. This document is an account of the achievements of Augustus, composed by himself. It is preserved in an inscription — known to scholars as the *Monumentum An-cy-ra-num*, from Ancyra, the place where it was found.

adorned with reliefs representing not only the imperial family, senators, magistrates, and priests, but also plants and garlands. The reliefs of persons are doubtless real portraits, influenced, like



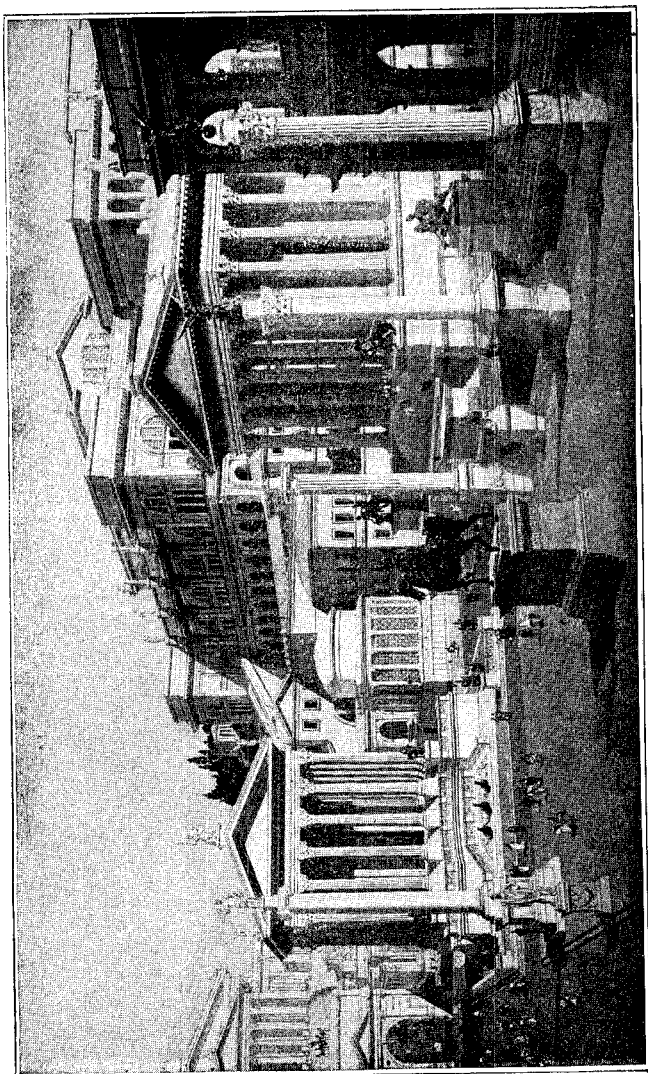
GARLAND OF FRUIT AND FLOWERS

(From the Altar of the Augustan Peace; Museum of the Terme, Rome)

the busts and statues of the time, by Greek idealism.¹ The fruit and flowers are chiselled with wonderful accuracy and taste—the most beautiful art of the imperial age.

504. Literature and Religion. — The principate of Augustus is known as the Golden Age of Roman literature. He encouraged and aided literary men. Through their works he aimed to purify

¹ § 345.



Temple of
Venus and
Roma

Temple of Julius
Caesar

Temple of
Vesta
Equestrian Statue
of Vespasian

Palace of the Caesars
Hall of Vesta

Temple of Castor
and Pollux

Basilica Julia

A PART OF THE ROMAN FORUM

(Restored by Becchetti)

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