

JULIUS CAESAR

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The “IHS” Christogram on the title page is an ancient symbol used in the early Western church and is derived from the first three letters of Jesus’ name in the Greek alphabet. The first use of “IHS” in an English document was in 1377, in a printing of the medieval classic, *Piers Plowman*.

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FOREWORD.

 JULIUS Caesar dominates history in a way few other men ever have. His name, Caesar, became both a title for rulers and a metaphor for political rule. His successor and nephew, Octavian, took the name Caesar, as did every other Roman ruler that followed. For several centuries, Russian rulers were called Czars, which derived from the word Caesar, and when Germany united in 1870, its leader took the title Kaiser, which was the German version of Caesar. Since Jesus spoke of rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar's, the name has been applied to the whole realm of civil government.

Thanks to Shakespeare's play *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, many people are familiar with that drama's version of Caesar's last days. The play's impact is so great that it is hard to imagine that Caesar did not say, *Et tu, Brute* to his friend who joined the conspirators. Likewise, we imagine Marc Antony actually gave his powerful elegy

containing the words, “I come not to praise Caesar, but to bury him.”

Some of Caesar’s actions and sayings are unforgettable, such as crossing the Rubicon. Poised outside of Rome, Caesar violated the order to leave his army on the north bank of the Rubicon River; instead, he and his army crossed the river, knowing this would force a showdown with his political enemies inside Rome. When we make a major decision, one that involves no turning back, we say we have “crossed the Rubicon.” If one is a little more educated, particularly in Latin, you can say as Caesar reportedly said, *Jacta alea est*, meaning, “The die is cast.”

Caesar’s pithy summary of a battlefield victory in Asia Minor, *Veni, vidi, vici*, or “I came, looked, and conquered” is still repeated, parodied, and paraphrased. His love affair with Cleopatra is remembered as one of the great political love matches of history. His assassination on March 15 still gives currency to the saying, “Beware the ides of March.”

In times past when nearly all schools followed a classical curriculum, after some foundational work on Latin grammar and vocabulary, students began translating a literary work titled *Gallic Wars*, which is Caesar’s account of his military campaigns.

If recurring political titles, the influence of Shakespeare’s play, writings, sayings, and actions are not enough to secure Caesar’s remembrance, we have a whole month of the year named after him. But even those thirty-one days do not do him justice, for our whole calendar, with its 365 days and a leap year day every four years, is still modeled after the Julian Calendar. Caesar literally influenced all the times that have followed his life.

Perhaps less well known are the details of Caesar’s political struggles and the wisdom and clemency that

characterized his reign. The assassinated leader, as often found in history, leaves an unfulfilled legacy. His unexpected dying seems to raise the expectation of possibilities had he lived. In our own national history, the violent deaths of Presidents Lincoln and Kennedy have enshrined their memories in the national consciousness far beyond that of men who served out their terms in office. Caesar's life, also, holds out that mystery of what he might have accomplished had he lived longer.

Less than half a century after Caesar's death, in territory he had once conquered, Jesus of Nazareth was born. Hailed at His birth by angels and men as both King of the Jews and Savior of the world, Jesus changed the world in far greater ways than Caesar could imagine. The words of Jesus and of Caesar still live, but the words of Jesus give life. Caesar conquered the Gauls, but Jesus conquered sin, death, and the devil. Both men shunned an earthly crown, but Jesus attained a greater crown and rules from His heavenly throne. Both were struck down violently by men convinced of their own righteousness. Both died and were buried. But Jesus rose from the dead.

Despite the comparisons made, Jesus Christ and Julius Caesar really cannot be compared. But if Jesus Christ had never come into the world, Julius Caesar would be the highest ideal we could attain to as humans. Caesar, however, as a substitute savior has little to offer. Strangely enough, people want a political messiah. An imagined world in which Christ was never born, or our world which ignores, misinterprets, or rejects His Advent, seeks a savior all the same, but the messiah is political.

Julius Caesar's most appealing attribute was his policy of *clementia*, or mercy. Conquered tribes, foiled conspirators, and family members of political enemies all benefited

from his desire to show mercy. This biography by Jacob Abbott aptly shows how this great conqueror on the battlefield and in the political arena was merciful. An interesting example of his mercy was Marcus Junius Brutus, the most famous member of the band who assassinated Caesar.

Caesar's mercy was a gift from the state. This was not an atonement, only political favor. Justice was not satisfied or law upheld; rather, justice was suspended and law was ignored. A merciful Julius Caesar paved the way for his successors, like Nero, Caligula, and Domitian, who were all ruthless men and tyrants.

We can apply the words of Jesus in Matthew 22:21 to Caesar in this way: We can render the rightful honor due to a great figure in history. Caesar's life earns our attention and respect, but we must also remember that the Bible verse says to render to God what belongs to God. History is God's story and Caesar, for all his greatness of power over his time and ages to follow, simply fulfilled God's plan.

BEN HOUSE
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CHAPTER I

MARIUS AND SYLLA.

THERE were three great European nations in ancient days, each of which furnished history with a hero: the Greeks, the Carthaginians, and the Romans.

Alexander was the hero of the Greeks. He was King of Macedon, a country lying north of Greece proper. He headed an army of his countrymen and made an excursion for conquest and glory into Asia. He made himself master of all that quarter of the globe and reigned over it in Babylon until he brought himself to an early grave by the excesses into which his boundless prosperity lured him. His fame rested on his triumphant success in building up so vast an empire. The admiration amongst mankind is heightened when considering his youth and the noble and generous impulses which strongly marked his character.

Hannibal was the great Carthaginian hero. He earned his fame by the energy and mercilessness of his hate. The work of his life kept a vast empire in a state of continual

anxiety and terror. His claim to greatness and glory rested on the determination, perseverance, and success with which he fulfilled his calling. While he lived, he was the terror of the world.

The Roman hero was Caesar. He was born just one hundred years before the Christian era. His fame did not depend, like that of Alexander, on foreign conquests nor, like that of Hannibal, on the fierce energy of his aggressions on foreign foes, but on his lengthy and dreadful contests with, and ultimate triumphs over, his rivals and competitors at home. When he appeared on the stage, the Roman empire already included nearly all of the world that was worth possessing. There were no more conquests to be made. Caesar enlarged the boundaries of the empire; but the main question in his day was who should possess the power which preceding conquerors had acquired.

The Roman empire, as it existed in those days, was not united together under one compact and consolidated government. It was a vast collection of nations, widely dissimilar in every respect from each other, speaking various languages and having various customs and laws. They were all, however, more or less dependent on and connected with the great central power. Some of these countries were provinces governed by officers appointed and sent out by the authorities in Rome. These governors had to collect the taxes of their provinces and preside over and direct, in many important respects, the administration of justice. They had, therefore, abundant opportunities to supply themselves with riches while in office by collecting more money than the government required and by taking bribes to favor the rich man's cause in court. Therefore, the more wealthy and prosperous provinces were objects of great competition among candidates for office in Rome. Leading men would

get the appointments and, after remaining long enough in their provinces to acquire a fortune, would go back to Rome, and spend it in underhanded plots and maneuvers to obtain higher offices still.

Whenever there was any foreign war to be carried on with a distant nation or tribe, there was always a great eagerness among all the military officers of the state to be appointed to the command. They each felt sure that they would conquer in the contest, and they could enrich themselves still more rapidly by the spoils of victory in war than by extortion and bribes in the government of a province in peace. A victorious general coming back to Rome always found that his military fame added vastly to his influence and power in the city. He was welcomed with celebrations and triumphs; the people flocked to see him and to shout his praise. He placed his trophies of victory in the temples and entertained the people with games and shows and with combats of gladiators or of wild beasts, which he had brought home with him for this purpose. While he was enjoying his triumph, his political enemies would be thrown into the background, though one of them might be earning the same honors in some other field to come back in due time and claim his share of power and fame in his turn. In this way, Rome would often be distracted and torn apart by the conflicts and contentions of military rivals, who had acquired powers too vast for all the civil influences of the Republic to regulate or control.

There were two such rivals just before the time of Caesar, who had filled the world with their quarrels—Marius and Sylla. Their very names have been, in all ages of the world since their day, symbols of rivalry and hate. They were the representatives respectively of the two great parties into which the Roman state was divided—the upper

and the lower; or as they were called in those days, the patrician and the plebeian. Sylla was the patrician; the higher and more aristocratic portions of the community were on his side. Marius was the favorite of the plebeian masses. In the campaigns they waged with each other, they did not trust in the mere influence of votes. They relied much more on the soldiers they could gather and on the power of using them to intimidate the Roman assemblies. There was a war to be waged with Mithridates, a very powerful Asiatic monarch, which promised great opportunities for acquiring fame and plunder. Sylla was appointed to the command. While he was absent, however, in Italy, Marius devised a plan to have the decision reversed and the command transferred to him. Two officers, called tribunes, were sent to Sylla's camp to inform him of the change. Sylla killed the officers for daring to bring him such a message and began immediately to march toward Rome. In retaliation for the murder of the tribunes, the party of Marius killed some of Sylla's prominent friends, and a general alarm spread throughout the population. The Senate, which mainly embodied the power and influence of the patrician party, and was on Sylla's side, sent a message out to him when he had arrived within a few miles of the city, urging him to come no closer. He pretended to comply; he marked out the ground for a camp; but he did not materially delay his march. The next morning he was in possession of the city. The friends of Marius attempted to resist him by throwing stones down on his troops from the roofs of the houses. Sylla ordered every house from which these symptoms of resistance appeared to be set on fire. Therefore, the whole population of a vast and wealthy city was thrown into extreme danger and terror by the conflicts of two great bands of armed men, each claiming to be their friends.

Marius was conquered in this struggle and fled for his life. Many of the friends whom he left behind were killed. The Senate was assembled, and at Sylla's orders, a decree was passed declaring Marius a public enemy and offering a reward to anyone who would bring his head back to Rome.

Marius fled, friendless and alone, to the south, hunted everywhere by men who were eager to get the reward offered for his head. After various impractical adventures and narrow escapes, he succeeded in making his way across the Mediterranean Sea and found at last a refuge in a hut among the ruins of Carthage. He was an old man now over seventy years of age.

Of course, thinking that his great rival and enemy was now finally disposed of, Sylla began to make preparations for his Asiatic campaign. He raised an army, built and equipped a fleet, and went away. As soon as he was gone, Marius's friends in the city began to come forward to take measures for reinstating themselves in power. Marius returned from Africa and soon gathered about him a large army. Being the friend, as he pretended, of the lower classes of society, he collected vast multitudes of revolted slaves, outlaws, and other reckless criminals and advanced toward Rome. He assumed the dress, and air, and savage demeanor of his followers. His face was rendered haggard and cadaverous partly by the influence of exposures, hardships, and suffering on his advanced age, and partly by the harsh and moody intentions of revenge which were perpetually revolving in his mind. He listened to the protests which the Roman Senate sent to him from time to time, as he advanced toward the city, but refused to agree to any terms. He moved forward with all the outward deliberation and calmness suitable to his years, while all the ferocity of a tiger was burning within him.

As soon as he had gained possession of the city, he began his work of destruction. He first beheaded one of the consuls and ordered his head to be set up on public display in the most conspicuous place in the city. This was only the beginning. All the prominent friends of Sylla, men of the highest rank and station, were then killed, wherever they could be found, without sentence, without trial, without any other accusation than the military decision of Marius that they were his enemies, and therefore, must die. For those against whom he felt any special animosity, he came up with some special methods of execution. One, whose fate he wished particularly to note, was thrown down from the Tarpeian Rock.

The Tarpeian Rock was a precipice about fifty feet high, which can be seen in Rome, from which the worst of state criminals were sometimes thrown. They were taken up to the top by a set of stairs and then hurled from the summit to die miserably, writhing in agony after their fall on the rocks below.

The Tarpeian Rock received its name from the ancient story of Tarpeia. The tale is that Tarpeia was a Roman girl, who lived at a time in the earliest periods of Roman history, when the city was besieged by an army from one of the neighboring nations. Besides their shields, the story is that the soldiers had golden bracelets on their arms. They wished Tarpeia to open the gates and let them in. She promised to do so if they would give her their bracelets; but, as she did not know the name of the shining ornaments, the language she used to describe them was, "Those things you have on your arms." The soldiers agreed to her terms; she opened the gates, and they, instead of giving her the bracelets, threw their shields on her as they passed, until the poor girl was crushed down by them and destroyed. This

was near the Tarpeian Rock, which afterward took her name. The rock has a great many subterranean passages, the remains, probably, of ancient quarries. Some of these galleries are now walled up; others are open; and the people who live around the spot believe that an enchanted Tarpeia sits, far in the interior of the caverns, covered with gold and jewels, but that whoever attempts to find her is fated by an irresistible destiny to lose his way and never return.

Marius continued his executions and massacres until the whole of Sylla's party had fled or been slain. He made every effort to find Sylla's wife and child, with the thought of destroying them also, but they could not be found. Some friends of Sylla, taking compassion on their innocence and helplessness, concealed them and therefore saved Marius from committing his intended crime. Marius was disappointed, too, in some other cases, where men whom he had intended to kill destroyed themselves to baffle his vengeance. One shut himself up in a room with burning charcoal and was suffocated by the fumes. Another bled to death on a public altar, calling down the judgments of the god to whom he offered this dreadful sacrifice, on the head of the tyrant whose atrocious cruelty he was attempting to evade.

By the time Marius was fairly established in his new position and was completely master of Rome, and the city had begun to recover a little from the shock and horror produced by his executions, he fell sick. He was attacked with an acute disease that ravaged his body. The attack was perhaps produced, and was certainly aggravated by, the great mental stress he endured during his exile and in the entire change of fortune which had attended his return. From being a wretched fugitive, hiding for his life among gloomy and desolate ruins, he found himself suddenly transferred

to the mastery of the world. His mind was agitated, too, in respect to Sylla, whom he had not yet reached or subdued, but who was still carrying on his war against Mithridates. Marius had the senate pronounce him an enemy to his country and was considering plans to reach him in his distant province, believing that his triumph was incomplete as long as his great rival was at liberty and alive. The sickness cut short these plans.

As the dying tyrant tossed restlessly on his bed, it was plain that the delirious ravings which he began to utter were agitated by the same sentiments of insatiable ambition and ferocious hate whose calmer dictates he had obeyed when well. He imagined that he had succeeded in displacing Sylla in his command and that he was himself in Asia at the head of his armies. Impressed with this idea, he stared wildly around; he called aloud the name of Mithridates; he shouted orders to imaginary troops; he struggled to break away from the restraints which the attendants had imposed, to attack the phantom foes which haunted him in his dreams. This continued for several days, and when at last he was exhausted by the violence of the spasms, the vital powers which had been for seventy long years spending their strength in deeds of selfishness, cruelty, and hatred found their work done, and sank to revive no more.

Marius left a son, of the same name as himself, who attempted to retain his father's power; but Sylla, having brought his war with Mithridates to a conclusion, was now on his return from Asia, and it was evident that a terrible conflict was about to ensue. Sylla advanced triumphantly through the country, while the younger Marius and his partisans concentrated their forces around the city and prepared for defense. The people of the city were divided—the aristocratic faction adhering to the cause of Sylla, while the

democratic influences sided with Marius. Political parties rise and fall, in almost all ages of the world, in alternate fluctuations, like those of the tides. The faction of Marius had been dominant for some time, and it was now its turn to fall.

Sylla found, as he advanced, everything favorable for the restoration of his own party to power. He destroyed the armies which came out to oppose him. He shut up the young Marius in a city not far from Rome, where he had attempted to find shelter and protection. Then Sylla advanced and took possession of the city. There he caused again the horrid scenes of massacre and murder which Marius had perpetrated before, going as far beyond the previous example, as men usually do in the commission of crime. He gave out lists of the names of men whom he wished to have destroyed, and the unhappy victims of his revenge were hunted out by bands of reckless soldiers, in their homes or in the places of public relaxation in the city, and dispatched by the sword wherever they could be found. The scenes which these deeds created in a large and populated city can scarcely be conceived by those who have never witnessed the horrors produced by the massacres of civil war.

Sylla himself went through with this work in the most cool and unconcerned manner, as if he were performing the most ordinary duties of an officer of state. He called the Senate together one day, and while he was addressing them, the attention of the Assembly was suddenly distracted by the noise of outcries and screams in the neighboring streets from those who were suffering military execution there. The senators listened in horror at the sound. Sylla, with an air of great composure and unconcern, directed the members to listen to him and to pay no attention to what was

happening elsewhere. The sounds they heard were, he said, only some correction which was applied by his orders on certain people disturbing the public peace.

Sylla's orders for the execution of those who had taken an active part against him were not confined to Rome. They went to the neighboring cities and to distant provinces, carrying terror and distress everywhere. Still, dreadful as these evils were, it is possible for us, in the thoughts that we form, to overrate the extent of them. In reading the history of the Roman empire during the civil wars of Marius and Sylla, one might easily imagine that the whole population of the country was organized into the two contending armies, and were employed totally in the work of fighting with and massacring each other. But that's simply not true. It was but a small part of an extended community that actively and personally engaged in these deeds of violence and blood. On the contrary, man ordinarily wants to live in peace and quietness, to till his lands and tend his flocks, and to enjoy the blessings of peace and repose. It is comparatively but a small number in any age of the world, and in any nation, whose passions of ambition, hatred, or revenge become so strong as that they love bloodshed and war. But these few, when they get weapons into their hands, trample recklessly and mercilessly on the rest. One ferocious human, with a spear or a bayonet to brandish, will tyrannize as he pleases over a hundred quiet men, who are armed only with shepherds' crooks and whose only desire is to live in peace with their wives and their children.

While Marius and Sylla, with some hundred thousand armed and reckless followers, were carrying terror and dismay wherever they went, there were many millions of herdsmen and farmers in the Roman world who were dwelling in the peace and quietness they could command,

improving, with their peaceful industry, every acre where corn would ripen or grass grow. It was by taxing and plundering the proceeds of this industry that the generals and soldiers, the consuls and praetors, and proconsuls and propraeors filled their treasuries, fed their troops, and paid the artisans for fabricating their weapons. With these profits they built the magnificent buildings of Rome and adorned the surrounding areas with luxurious villas. As they had the power and the weapons in their hands, the peaceful and the industrious had no alternative but to submit. They went on as well as they could with their labors, bearing patiently every interruption, returning again to till their fields after the desolating march of the army had passed through, and repairing the injuries of violence, and the losses sustained by plunder, without useless complaining. They looked on an armed government as a necessary and inevitable affliction of humanity and submitted to its destructive violence as they would submit to an earthquake or a pestilence. The tillers of the soil in that area manage better in the present day. They have the power in their own hands, and they watch carefully to prevent the organization of such hordes of armed desperadoes as have held the peaceful inhabitants of Europe in terror from the earliest periods down to the present day.

When Sylla returned to Rome and took possession of the supreme power there, in looking over the lists of public men, there was one whom he did not know at first what to do with. It was the young Julius Caesar, the subject of this history. Caesar was, by birth, patrician, having descended from a long line of noble ancestors. There had been, before his day, a great many Caesars who had held the highest offices of the state, and many of them had been celebrated in history. He belonged to Sylla's side, as Sylla was the

representative of the patrician interest. But then Caesar had personally been inclined toward the party of Marius. The elder Marius had married his aunt, and Caesar had married the daughter of Cinna, who had been the most efficient and powerful of Marius's assistants and friends. Caesar was at the time a very young man, and had an ardent and reckless character, though he had up until that point, taken no active part in public affairs. Sylla overlooked him for awhile but was about to put his name on the list of the condemned. Some of the nobles, who were friends both of Sylla and of Caesar too, interceded for the young man; Sylla yielded to their request, or rather, suspended his decision and sent orders to Caesar to repudiate his wife, the daughter of Cinna. Her name was Cornelia. Caesar absolutely refused to repudiate his wife. He was influenced in the decision partly by affection for Cornelia and partly by a sort of harsh and unyielding rebelliousness, which formed, from his earliest years, a prominent trait in his character and which led him, during all his life, to brave every possible danger rather than allow himself to be controlled. Caesar knew very well that, when his refusal was reported to Sylla, the next order would be for his destruction. And so he fled. Sylla deprived him of his titles and offices, confiscated his wife's fortune and his own father's estate, and put his name on the list of the public enemies. Therefore, Caesar became a fugitive and an exile. The adventures which took place in his wanderings will be described in the following chapter.

Sylla was now in the possession of absolute power. He was master of Rome and of all the countries over which Rome had dominion. Still he was not a magistrate, only a general returning victoriously from his Asiatic campaign, and putting to death, by a sort of martial law, persons

whom he found, as he said, disturbing the public peace. After having effectually disposed of the power of his enemies, he laid aside, from all outward appearances, the government of the sword and submitted himself and his future measures to the control of law. He pretended to place himself under the regulation of the city. They chose him dictator, which furnished him with absolute and unlimited power. He remained on this, the highest pinnacle of worldly ambition, a short time then resigned his power and devoted the remainder of his days to literary pursuits and pleasures. Monster as he was in the cruelties which he inflicted on his political foes, he was intellectually of a refined and cultivated mind and felt an enthusiastic interest in the promotion of literature and the arts.

The quarrel between Marius and Sylla, in respect to everything which can make such a contest great, stands in the estimation of mankind as the greatest personal quarrel which the history of the world has ever recorded. Its origin was in the simple personal rivalry of two ambitious men. It involved, in its consequences, the peace and happiness of the world. In their reckless struggles, the fierce combatants trampled on everything that came in their way and destroyed mercilessly, each in his turn, all that opposed them. Mankind has always denounced their crimes but has never ceased to admire the frightful and almost superhuman energy with which they committed them.