

# **T. Flavius Vespasianus Augustus (Vespasian) - The Lives Of The Twelve Caesars, Volume 10.**

C. Suetonius Tranquillus

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by C. Suetonius Tranquillus

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THE LIVES  
OF  
THE TWELVE CAESARS

By  
C. Suetonius Tranquillus;

To which are added,

HIS LIVES OF THE GRAMMARIANS, RHETORICIANS, AND POETS.

The Translation of  
Alexander Thomson, M.D.

revised and corrected by  
T.Forester, Esq., A.M.

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## T. FLAVIUS VESPASIANUS AUGUSTUS.

(441)

I. The empire, which had been long thrown into a disturbed and unsettled state, by the rebellion and violent death of its three last rulers, was at length restored to peace and security by the Flavian family, whose descent was indeed obscure, and which boasted no ancestral honours; but the public had no cause to regret its elevation; though it is acknowledged that Domitian met with the just reward of his avarice and cruelty. Titus Flavius Petro, a townsman of Reate [721], whether a centurion or an evocatus [722] of Pompey's party in the civil war, is uncertain, fled out of the battle of Pharsalia and went home; where, having at last obtained his pardon and discharge, he became a collector of the money raised by public sales in the way of auction. His son, surnamed Sabinus, was never engaged in the military service, though some say he was a centurion of the first order, and others, that whilst he held that rank, he was discharged on account of his bad state of health: this Sabinus, I say, was a publican, and received the tax of the fortieth penny in Asia. And there were remaining, at the time of the advancement of the family, several statues, which had been erected to him by the cities of that province, with this inscription: "To the honest Tax-farmer." [723] He afterwards turned usurer amongst the Helvetii, and there died, leaving behind him his wife, Vespasia Pella, and two sons by her; the elder of whom, Sabinus, came to be prefect of the city, and the younger, Vespasian, to be emperor. Polla, descended of a good family, at Nursia [724], had for her father Vespasius Pollio, thrice appointed (442) military tribune, and at last prefect of the camp; and her brother was a senator of praetorian dignity. There is to this day, about six miles from Nursia, on the road to Spoletum, a place on the summit of a hill, called Vespasiae, where are several monuments of the Vespasii, a sufficient proof of the splendour and antiquity of the family. I will not deny that some have pretended to say, that Petro's father was a native of Gallia Transpadana [725], whose employment was to hire workpeople who used to emigrate every year from the country of the Umbria into that of the Sabines, to assist them in their husbandry [726]; but who settled at last in the town of Reate, and there married. But of this I have not been able to discover the least proof, upon the strictest inquiry.

II. Vespasian was born in the country of the Sabines, beyond Reate, in a little country-seat called Phalacrine, upon the fifth of the calends of December [27th November], in the evening, in the consulship of Quintus Sulpicius Camerinus and Caius Poppaeus Sabinus, five years before the death of Augustus [727]; and was educated under the care of Tertulla, his grandmother by the father's side, upon an estate belonging to the family, at Cosa [728]. After his advancement to the empire, he used frequently to visit the place where he had spent his infancy; and the villa was continued in the same condition, that he might see every thing about him just as he had been used to do. And he had so great a regard for the memory of his grandmother, that, upon solemn occasions and festival days, he constantly drank out of a silver cup which she had been accustomed to use. After assuming the manly habit, he had a long time a distaste for the senatorian toga, though his brother had obtained it; nor could he be persuaded by any one but his mother to sue for that badge of honour. She

at length drove him to it, more by taunts and reproaches, than by her entreaties (443) and authority, calling him now and then, by way of reproach, his brother's footman. He served as military tribune in Thrace. When made quaestor, the province of Crete and Cyrene fell to him by lot. He was candidate for the aedileship, and soon after for the praetorship, but met with a repulse in the former case; though at last, with much difficulty, he came in sixth on the poll-books. But the office of praetor he carried upon his first canvass, standing amongst the highest at the poll. Being incensed against the senate, and desirous to gain, by all possible means, the good graces of Caius [729], he obtained leave to exhibit extraordinary [730] games for the emperor's victory in Germany, and advised them to increase the punishment of the conspirators against his life, by exposing their corpses unburied. He likewise gave him thanks in that august assembly for the honour of being admitted to his table.

III. Meanwhile, he married Flavia Domitilla, who had formerly been the mistress of Statilius Capella, a Roman knight of Sabrata in Africa, who [Domitilla] enjoyed Latin rights; and was soon after declared fully and freely a citizen of Rome, on a trial before the court of Recovery, brought by her father Flavius Liberalis, a native of Ferentum, but no more than secretary to a quaestor. By her he had the following children: Titus, Domitian, and Domitilla. He outlived his wife and daughter, and lost them both before he became emperor. After the death of his wife, he renewed his union [731] with his former concubine Caenis, the freedwoman of Antonia, and also her amanuensis, and treated her, even after he was emperor, almost as if she had been his lawful wife. [732]

(444) IV. In the reign of Claudius, by the interest of Narcissus, he was sent to Germany, in command of a legion; whence being removed into Britain, he engaged the enemy in thirty several battles. He reduced under subjection to the Romans two very powerful tribes, and above twenty great towns, with the Isle of Wight, which lies close to the coast of Britain; partly under the command of Aulus Plautius, the consular lieutenant, and partly under Claudius himself [733]. For this success he received the triumphal ornaments, and in a short time after two priesthoods, besides the consulship, which he held during the two last months of the year [734]. The interval between that and his proconsulship he spent in leisure and retirement, for fear of Agrippina, who still held great sway over her son, and hated all the friends of Narcissus, who was then dead. Afterwards he got by lot the province of Africa, which he governed with great reputation, excepting that once, in an insurrection at Adrumetum, he was pelted with turnips. It is certain that he returned thence nothing richer; for his credit was so low, that he was obliged to mortgage his whole property to his brother, and was reduced to the necessity of dealing in mules, for the support of his rank; for which reason he was commonly called "the Muleteer." He is said likewise to have been convicted of extorting from a young man of fashion two hundred thousand sesterces for procuring him the broad-stripe, contrary to the wishes of his father, and was severely reprimanded for it. While in attendance upon Nero in Achaia, he frequently withdrew from the theatre while Nero was singing, and went to sleep if he remained, which gave so much (445) offence, that he was not only excluded from his society, but debarred the liberty of saluting him in public. Upon this, he retired to a small out-of-the-way town, where he lay skulking in constant fear of his life, until a province, with an army, was offered him.

A firm persuasion had long prevailed through all the East [735], that it

was fated for the empire of the world, at that time, to devolve on some who should go forth from Judaea. This prediction referred to a Roman emperor, as the event shewed; but the Jews, applying it to themselves, broke out into rebellion, and having defeated and slain their governor [736], routed the lieutenant of Syria [737], a man of consular rank, who was advancing to his assistance, and took an eagle, the standard, of one of his legions. As the suppression of this revolt appeared to require a stronger force and an active general, who might be safely trusted in an affair of so much importance, Vespasian was chosen in preference to all others, both for his known activity, and on account of the obscurity of his origin and name, being a person of whom (446) there could be not the least jealousy. Two legions, therefore, eight squadrons of horse, and ten cohorts, being added to the former troops in Judaea, and, taking with him his eldest son as lieutenant, as soon as he arrived in his province, he turned the eyes of the neighbouring provinces upon him, by reforming immediately the discipline of the camp, and engaging the enemy once or twice with such resolution, that, in the attack of a castle [738], he had his knee hurt by the stroke of a stone, and received several arrows in his shield.

V. After the deaths of Nero and Galba, whilst Otho and Vitellius were contending for the sovereignty, he entertained hopes of obtaining the empire, with the prospect of which he had long before flattered himself, from the following omens. Upon an estate belonging to the Flavian family, in the neighbourhood of Rome, there was an old oak, sacred to Mars, which, at the three several deliveries of Vespasia, put out each time a new branch; evident intimations of the future fortune of each child. The first was but a slender one, which quickly withered away; and accordingly, the girl that was born did not live long. The second became vigorous, which portended great good fortune; but the third grew like a tree. His father, Sabinus, encouraged by these omens, which were confirmed by the augurs, told his mother, "that her grandson would be emperor of Rome;" at which she laughed heartily, wondering, she said, "that her son should be in his dotage whilst she continued still in full possession of her faculties."

Afterwards in his aedileship, when Caius Caesar, being enraged at his not taking care to have the streets kept clean, ordered the soldiers to fill the bosom of his gown with dirt, some persons at that time construed it into a sign that the government, being trampled under foot and deserted in some civil commotion, would fall under his protection, and as it were into his lap. Once, while he was at dinner, a strange dog, that wandered about the streets, brought a man's hand [739], and laid it under the table. And another time, while he was at supper, a plough-ox throwing the yoke off his neck, broke into the room, and after he had frightened away all the attendants, (447) on a sudden, as if he was tired, fell down at his feet, as he lay still upon his couch, and hung down his neck. A cypress-tree likewise, in a field belonging to the family, was torn up by the roots, and laid flat upon the ground, when there was no violent wind; but next day it rose again fresher and stronger than before.

He dreamt in Achaia that the good fortune of himself and his family would begin when Nero had a tooth drawn; and it happened that the day after, a surgeon coming into the hall, showed him a tooth which he had just extracted from Nero. In Judaea, upon his consulting the oracle of the divinity at Carmel [740], the answer was so encouraging as to assure him of success in anything he projected, however great or important it might be. And when Josephus [741], one of the noble prisoners, was put in chains, he confidently affirmed that he should be released in a very

short time by the same Vespasian, but he would be emperor first [742]. Some omens were likewise mentioned in the news from Rome, and among others, that Nero, towards the close of his days, was commanded in a dream to carry Jupiter's sacred chariot out of the sanctuary where it stood, to Vespasian's house, and conduct it thence into the circus. Also not long afterwards, as Galba was going to the election, in which he was created consul for the second time, a statue of the Divine Julius [743] turned towards the east. And in the field of Bedriacum [744], before the battle began, two eagles engaged in the sight of the army; and one of them being beaten, a third came from the east, and drove away the conqueror.

(448) VI. He made, however, no attempt upon the sovereignty, though his friends were very ready to support him, and even pressed him to the enterprise, until he was encouraged to it by the fortuitous aid of persons unknown to him and at a distance. Two thousand men, drawn out of three legions in the Moesian army, had been sent to the assistance of Otho. While they were upon their march, news came that he had been defeated, and had put an end to his life; notwithstanding which they continued their march as far as Aquileia, pretending that they gave no credit to the report. There, tempted by the opportunity which the disorder of the times afforded them, they ravaged and plundered the country at discretion; until at length, fearing to be called to an account on their return, and punished for it, they resolved upon choosing and creating an emperor. "For they were no ways inferior," they said, "to the army which made Galba emperor, nor to the pretorian troops which had set up Otho, nor the army in Germany, to whom Vitellius owed his elevation." The names of all the consular lieutenants, therefore, being taken into consideration, and one objecting to one, and another to another, for various reasons; at last some of the third legion, which a little before Nero's death had been removed out of Syria into Moesia, extolled Vespasian in high terms; and all the rest assenting, his name was immediately inscribed on their standards. The design was nevertheless quashed for a time, the troops being brought to submit to Vitellius a little longer.

However, the fact becoming known, Tiberius Alexander, governor of Egypt, first obliged the legions under his command to swear obedience to Vespasian as their emperor, on the calends [the 1st] of July, which was observed ever after as the day of his accession to the empire; and upon the fifth of the ides of the same month [the 28th July], the army in Judaea, where he then was, also swore allegiance to him. What contributed greatly to forward the affair, was a copy of a letter, whether real or counterfeit, which was circulated, and said to have been written by Otho before his decease to Vespasian, recommending to him in the most urgent terms to avenge his death, and entreating him to come to the aid of the commonwealth; as well as a report which was circulated, that Vitellius, after his success against Otho, proposed to change the winter quarters of the legions, and remove those in Germany to a less (449) hazardous station and a warmer climate. Moreover, amongst the governors of provinces, Licinius Mucianus dropping the grudge arising from a jealousy of which he had hitherto made no secret, promised to join him with the Syrian army, and, among the allied kings, Volugesus, king of the Parthians, offered him a reinforcement of forty thousand archers.

VII. Having, therefore, entered on a civil war, and sent forward his generals and forces into Italy, he himself, in the meantime, passed over to Alexandria, to obtain possession of the key of Egypt [745]. Here having entered alone, without attendants, the temple of Serapis, to take

the auspices respecting the establishment of his power, and having done his utmost to propitiate the deity, upon turning round, [his freedman] Basilides [746] appeared before him, and seemed to offer him the sacred leaves, chaplets, and cakes, according to the usage of the place, although no one had admitted him, and he had long laboured under a muscular debility, which would hardly have allowed him to walk into the temple; besides which, it was certain that at the very time he was far away. Immediately after this, arrived letters with intelligence that Vitellius's troops had been defeated at Cremona, and he himself slain at Rome. Vespasian, the new emperor, having been raised unexpectedly from a low estate, wanted something which might clothe him with divine majesty and authority. This, likewise, was now added. A poor man who was blind, and another who was lame, came both together before him, when he was seated on the tribunal, imploring him to heal them [747], and saying that they were admonished (450) in a dream by the god Serapis to seek his aid, who assured them that he would restore sight to the one by anointing his eyes with his spittle, and give strength to the leg of the other, if he vouchsafed but to touch it with his heel. At first he could scarcely believe that the thing would any how succeed, and therefore hesitated to venture on making the experiment. At length, however, by the advice of his friends, he made the attempt publicly, in the presence of the assembled multitudes, and it was crowned with success in both cases [748]. About the same time, at Tegea in Arcadia, by the direction (451) of some soothsayers, several vessels of ancient workmanship were dug out of a consecrated place, on which there was an effigy resembling Vespasian.

VIII. Returning now to Rome, under these auspices, and with a great reputation, after enjoying a triumph for victories over the Jews, he added eight consulships [749] to his former one. He likewise assumed the censorship, and made it his principal concern, during the whole of his government, first to restore order in the state, which had been almost ruined, and was in a tottering condition, and then to improve it. The soldiers, one part of them emboldened by victory, and the other smarting with the disgrace of their defeat, had abandoned themselves to every species of licentiousness and insolence. Nay, the provinces, too, and free cities, and some kingdoms in alliance with Rome, were all in a disturbed state. He, therefore, disbanded many of Vitellius's soldiers, and punished others; and so far was he from granting any extraordinary favours to the sharers of his success, that it was late before he paid the gratuities due to them by law. That he might let slip no opportunity of reforming the discipline of the army, upon a young man's coming much perfumed to return him thanks (452) for having appointed him to command a squadron of horse, he turned away his head in disgust, and, giving him this sharp reprimand, "I had rather you had smelt of garlic," revoked his commission. When the men belonging to the fleet, who travelled by turns from Ostia and Puteoli to Rome, petitioned for an addition to their pay, under the name of shoe-money, thinking that it would answer little purpose to send them away without a reply, he ordered them for the future to run barefooted; and so they have done ever since. He deprived of their liberties, Achaia, Lycia, Rhodes, Byzantium, and Samos; and reduced them into the form of provinces; Thrace, also, and Cilicia, as well as Comagene, which until that time had been under the government of kings. He stationed some legions in Cappadocia on account of the frequent inroads of the barbarians, and, instead of a Roman knight, appointed as governor of it a man of consular rank. The ruins of houses which had been burnt down long before, being a great desight to the city, he gave leave to any one who would, to take possession of the void ground and build upon it, if the proprietors should hesitate to perform the work

themselves. He resolved upon rebuilding the Capitol, and was the foremost to put his hand to clearing the ground of the rubbish, and removed some of it upon his own shoulder. And he undertook, likewise, to restore the three thousand tables of brass which had been destroyed in the fire which consumed the Capitol; searching in all quarters for copies of those curious and ancient records, in which were contained the decrees of the senate, almost from the building of the city, as well as the acts of the people, relative to alliances, treaties, and privileges granted to any person.

IX. He likewise erected several new public buildings, namely, the temple of Peace [750] near the Forum, that of Claudius on the (453) Coelian mount, which had been begun by Agrippina, but almost entirely demolished by Nero [751]; and an amphitheatre [752] in the middle of the city, upon finding that Augustus had projected such a work. He purified the senatorian and equestrian orders, which had been much reduced by the havoc made amongst them at several times, and was fallen into disrepute by neglect. Having expelled the most unworthy, he chose in their room the most honourable persons in Italy and the provinces. And to let it be known that those two orders differed not so much in privileges as in dignity, he declared publicly, when some altercation passed between a senator and a Roman knight, "that senators ought not to be treated with scurrilous language, unless they were the aggressors, and then it was fair and lawful to return it."

X. The business of the courts had prodigiously accumulated, partly from old law-suits which, on account of the interruption that had been given to the course of justice, still remained undecided, and partly from the accession of new suits arising out of the disorder of the times. He, therefore, chose commissioners by lot to provide for the restitution of what had been seized by violence during the war, and others with extraordinary jurisdiction to decide causes belonging to the centumviri, and reduce them to as small a number as possible, for the dispatch of which, otherwise, the lives of the litigants could scarcely allow sufficient time.

XI. Lust and luxury, from the licence which had long prevailed, had also grown to an enormous height. He, therefore, obtained a decree of the senate, that a woman who formed an union with the slave of another person, should be considered (454) a bondwoman herself; and that usurers should not be allowed to take proceedings at law for the recovery of money lent to young men whilst they lived in their father's family, not even after their fathers were dead.

XII. In other affairs, from the beginning to the end of his government, he conducted himself with great moderation and clemency. He was so far from dissembling the obscurity of his extraction, that he frequently made mention of it himself. When some affected to trace his pedigree to the founders of Reate, and a companion of Hercules [753], whose monument is still to be seen on the Salarian road, he laughed at them for it. And he was so little fond of external and adventitious ornaments, that, on the day of his triumph [754], being quite tired of the length and tediousness of the procession, he could not forbear saying, "he was rightly served, for having in his old age been so silly as to desire a triumph; as if it was either due to his ancestors, or had ever been expected by himself." Nor would he for a long time accept of the tribunitian authority, or the title of Father of his Country. And in regard to the custom of searching those who came to salute him, he dropped it even in the time of the civil war.



XIII. He bore with great mildness the freedom used by his friends, the satirical allusions of advocates, and the petulance of philosophers. Licinius Mucianus, who had been guilty of notorious acts of lewdness, but, presuming upon his great services, treated him very rudely, he reproved only in private; and when complaining of his conduct to a common friend of theirs, he concluded with these words, "However, I am a man." Salvius Liberalis, in pleading the cause of a rich man under prosecution, presuming to say, "What is it to Caesar, if Hipparchus possesses a hundred millions of sesterces?" he commended him for it. Demetrius, the Cynic philosopher [755], (455) who had been sentenced to banishment, meeting him on the road, and refusing to rise up or salute him, nay, snarling at him in scurrilous language, he only called him a cur.

XIV. He was little disposed to keep up the memory of affronts or quarrels, nor did he harbour any resentment on account of them. He made a very splendid marriage for the daughter of his enemy Vitellius, and gave her, besides, a suitable fortune and equipage. Being in a great consternation after he was forbidden the court in the time of Nero, and asking those about him, what he should do? or, whither he should go? one of those whose office it was to introduce people to the emperor, thrusting him out, bid him go to Morbonia [756]. But when this same person came afterwards to beg his pardon, he only vented his resentment in nearly the same words. He was so far from being influenced by suspicion or fear to seek the destruction of any one, that, when his friends advised him to beware of Metius Pomposianus, because it was commonly believed, on his nativity being cast, that he was destined by fate to the empire, he made him consul, promising for him, that he would not forget the benefit conferred.

XV. It will scarcely be found, that so much as one innocent person suffered in his reign, unless in his absence, and without his knowledge, or, at least, contrary to his inclination, and when he was imposed upon. Although Helvidius Priscus [757] was the only man who presumed to salute him on his return from Syria by his private name of Vespasian, and, when he came to be praetor, omitted any mark of honour to him, or even any mention of him in his edicts, yet he was not angry, until Helvidius proceeded to inveigh against him with the most scurrilous language. (456) Though he did indeed banish him, and afterwards ordered him to be put to death, yet he would gladly have saved him notwithstanding, and accordingly dispatched messengers to fetch back the executioners; and he would have saved him, had he not been deceived by a false account brought, that he had already perished. He never rejoiced at the death of any man; nay he would shed tears, and sigh, at the just punishment of the guilty.

XVI. The only thing deservedly blameable in his character was his love of money. For not satisfied with reviving the imposts which had been repealed in the time of Galba, he imposed new and onerous taxes, augmented the tribute of the provinces, and doubled that of some of them. He likewise openly engaged in a traffic, which is discreditable [758] even to a private individual, buying great quantities of goods, for the purpose of retailing them again to advantage. Nay, he made no scruple of selling the great offices of the state to candidates, and pardons to persons under prosecution, whether they were innocent or guilty. It is believed, that he advanced all the most rapacious amongst the procurators to higher offices, with the view of squeezing them after they had acquired great wealth. He was commonly said, "to have used them as sponges," because it was his practice, as we may say, to wet them when

dry, and squeeze them when wet. It is said that he was naturally extremely covetous, and was upbraided with it by an old herdsman of his, who, upon the emperor's refusing to enfranchise him gratis, which on his advancement he humbly petitioned for, cried out, "That the fox changed his hair, but not his nature." On the other hand, some are of opinion, that he was urged to his rapacious proceedings by necessity, and the extreme poverty of

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