Late in 196 Severus turned westward, to reckon with Albinus. He was better born and better educated than Severus, but in capacity far inferior. As Severus was nearing Italy he received the news that Albinus had been declared emperor by his soldiers. The first counter-stroke of Severus was to affiliate himself and his elder son to the Antonines by a spurious and posthumous adoption. The prestige of the old name, even when gained in this illegitimate way, was evidently worth much. Bassianus, the elder son of Severus, thereafter known as Aurelius Antoninus, was named Caesar in place of Albinus, and was thus marked out as successor to his father. Without interrupting the march of his forces, Severus contrived to make an excursion to Rome. Here he availed himself with much subtlety of the sympathy many senators were known to have felt for Niger. Though he was so far faithful to the decree passed by his own advice that he put no senator to death, yet he banished and impoverished many whose presence or influence seemed dangerous or inconvenient to his prospects. Of the sufferers probably few had seen or communicated with Niger.

The collision between the forces of Severus and Albinus was the most violent that had taken place between Roman troops since the contest at Philippi. The decisive engagement was fought in February of the year 197 on the plain between the Rhone and the Saône, to the north of Lyons, and resulted in a complete victory for Severus.

Thus, released from all need for disguise, he “ poured forth on the civil population all the wrath which he had been storing up for a long time ” (Dio). He frightened the senate by calling himself the son of Marcus and brother of Commodus, whom he had before insulted. He read a speech in which he declared that the severity and cruelty of Sulla, Marius and Augustus had proved to be safer policy than the clemency of Pompey and Julius Caesar, which had wrought their ruin. He ended with an apology for Commodus and bitter reproaches against the senate for their sympathy with his assassins. Over sixty senators were arrested on a charge of having adhered to Albinus, and half were put to death. In most instances the charge was a pretence to enable the emperor to crush the forward and dangerous spirits in the senate. The murderers of Commodus were punished; Commodus himself was deified; and on the monuments from this time onward Severus figures as the brother of that reproduction of all the vice and cruelty of Nero with the refinement left out.

The next years (197-202) were devoted by Severus to one of the dominant ideas of the empire from its earliest days—war against the Parthians. The results to which Trajan and Verus had aspired were now fully attained, and Mesopotamia was definitely established as a Roman province. Part of the time was spent in the exploration of Egypt, in respect of which Dio takes opportunity to say that Severus was not the man to leave anything human or divine uninvestigated. The emperor returned to a well-earned triumph, commemorated to this day by the arch in Rome which bears his name. During the six years which followed (202-208) Severus resided at Rome and gave his attention to the organization of the empire. Severus had confided much of the administration of the empire to Plautianus, the commander of the reorganized Praetorians, who is described by the ancient historians as a second Sejanus. In 203 Plautianus fell, owing, it is said, to an intrigue set on foot by Caracalla, who had shortly before married the daughter of his victim.

Severus spent the last three years of his life (208-211) in Britain, amid constant and not very successful warfare, which he is said to have provoked partly to strengthen the discipline and powers of the legions, partly to wean his sons from their evil courses by hard military service. He died at York on the 4th of February 211. There are traditions that his death was in some way hastened by Caracalla. This prince had been, since about 197, nominally joint emperor with his father, so that no ceremony was needed for his recognition as monarch.

The natural gifts of Severus were of no unusual order. He had a clear head, promptitude, resolution, tenacity and great organizing power, but no touch of genius. That he was cruel cannot be ques- tioned, but his cruelty was of the calculating kind, and always

directed to some end. He threw the head of Niger over the ramparts of Byzantium, but merely as the best means of procuring a surrender of the stubbornly defended fortress. The head of Albinus he ex­hibited at Rome, but only as a warning to the capital to tamper no more with pretenders. The children of Niger were held as hostages and kindly treated so long as they might possibly afford a useful basis for negotiation with their father; when he was defeated they were killed, lest from among them should arise a claimant for the imperial power. Stern and barbarous punishment was always meted out by Severus to the conquered foe, but terror was deemed the best guarantee for peace. He felt no scruples of conscience or honour if he thought his interest at stake, but he was not wont to take an excited or exaggerated view of what his interest required. He used or de­stroyed men and institutions alike with cool judgment and a single eye to the secure establishment of his dynasty. The few traces of aimless savagery which we find in the ancient narratives are probably the result of fear working on the imagination of the time.

As a soldier Severus was brave, but he can hardly be called a general, in spite of his successful campaigns. He was rather the organizer of victory than the author of it. The operations against Niger were carried out entirely by his officers. Dio even declares that the final battle with Albinus was the first at which Severus had ever been present. When a war was going on he was constantly travelling over the scene of it, planning it and instilling into the army his own pertinacious spirit, but the fighting was usually left to others. His treatment of the army is the most characteristic feature of his reign. He broke with the decent conventions of the Augustan constitution, ignored the senate, and based his rule upon force. The only title he ever laid to the throne was the *pronunctamiento* of the legions, whose adherence to his cause he commemorated even on the coinage of the realm. The legions voted him the adopted son of Marcus Aurelius; the legions associated with him Caracalla in the government of the empire. Severus strove earnestly to wed the army as a whole to the support of his dynasty. He increased enormously the material gains and the honorary distinctions of the service, so that he was charged with corrupting the troops. Yet it cannot be denied that, all things considered, he left the army of the empire more efficient than he found it. He increased the strength of it by three legions, and turned the Praetorians, heretofore a flabby body without military experience or instinct, into a chosen corps of veterans. Their ranks were filled by promotion from all the legions on service, whereas previously there had been special enlistment from Italy and one or two of the neighbouring provinces. It was hoped that these picked men would form a force on which an emperor could rely in an emergency. But to meet the possibility of a legionary revolt in the provinces, one of the fundamental principles of the Augustan empire was abrogated: Italy became a province, and a legion was quartered at Alba Fucens under the direct command of the emperor. Further to obviate the risk of revolution, the great com­mands in the provinces were broken up, so that, excepting on the turbulent eastern frontier, it was not possible for a commander to dispose of troops numerous enough to render him dangerous to the government.

But, while the policy of Severus was primarily a family policy, he was by no means careless of the security and welfare of the empire. Only in one instance, the destruction of Byzantium, did he weaken its defences for his own ends—an error for which his successors paid dearly, when the Goths came to dominate the Euxine. The troublesome Danubian regions received the special attention of the emperor, but all over the realm the status and privileges of communities and districts were recast in the way that seemed likely to conduce to their prosperity. The administration acquired more and more of a military character, in Italy as well as in the provinces. Retired military officers now filled many of the posts formerly reserved for civilians of equestrian rank. The praefect of the Praetorians re­ceived large civil and judicial powers, so that the investment of Papinian with the office was less unnatural than it seems at first sight. The alliance between Severus and the jurisconsults had im- portant consequences. While he gave them new importance in the body politic, and co-operated with them in the work of legal reform, they did him material service by working an absolutist view of the government into the texture of Roman law. Of the legal changes of the reign, important as they were, we can only mention a few details. The emperor himself was a devoted and upright judge, but he struck a great blow at the purity of the law by transferring the exercise of imperial jurisdiction from the forum to the palace. He sharpened in many respects the law of treason, put an end to the time-honoured *quaestiones perpetuae,* altered largely that important section of the law which (defined the rights of the fiscus, and developed further the social policy which Augustus had embodied in the *lex Julia de adulteriis* and the *lex Papia Poppaea.*

Severus boldly adopted as an official designation the autocratic title of *dominus,* which the better of his predecessors had. renounced. During his reign the senate was powerless; he took all initiative into his hands. He broke down the distinction between the servants of the senate and the servants of the emperor. All nominations to office or function passed under his scrutiny. The estimation of the old consular and other republican titles was diminished. The growth of capacity in the senate was checked by cutting off the tallest of the poppy-heads early in the reign. The senate became a mere