THE EMPEROR MARCUS AURELIUS

John C. Joy

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“He spoke to them of the vanity of life.” *Page 98.*

The Emperor Marcus Aurelius

A STUDY IN IDEALS

BY

JOHN C. JOY, S.J.

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Even in a palace, life may be led well!
So spake the imperial sage, purest of men,
Marcus Aurelius. But the stifling den
Of common life, where, crowded up pell-mell.

Our freedom for a little bread we sell,
And drudge under some foolish master's ken
Who rates us if we peer outside our pen—
Matched with a palace, is not this a hell?

Even in a palace! On his truth sincere
Who spake these words, no shadow ever came
And when my ill-schooled spirit is aflame

Some nobler, ampler stage of life to win,
I'll stop and say, "There were no succour here,
The aids to noble life are all within."

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

The Emperor Marcus Aurelius

CHAPTER I
PRELUDE

“Marcus Aurelius is perhaps the most beautiful figure in history. He is one of those consoling and hope-inspiring marks which stand for ever to remind our weak and easily discouraged race how high human goodness and perseverance have once been carried and may be carried again. The interest of mankind is peculiarly attracted by examples of signal goodness in high places; for that testimony to the worth of goodness is the most striking which is borne by those to whom all the means of pleasure and self-indulgence lay open, by those who had at their command the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. Marcus Aurelius was the ruler of the grandest of Empires and he was one of the best of men. Besides him history presents one or two other sovereigns eminent for their goodness, such as Saint Louis and Alfred. But Marcus Aurelius has for us Moderns this great superiority of interest over Saint Louis or Alfred, that he lived and acted in a state of society modern by its essential characteristics, in an

epoch akin to our own, in a brilliant centre of civilisation. Trajan talks of ‘our enlightened age’ just as glibly as The *Times* talks of it. Marcus Aurelius thus becomes for us a man like ourselves, a man in all things tempted as we are. Saint Louis inhabits an atmosphere of medieval Catholicism which the man of the nineteenth century may admire, indeed, and passionately wish to inhabit, but which, strive as he will, he cannot really inhabit. Alfred belongs to a state of society half barbarous. Neither Alfred nor Saint Louis can be morally and intellectually as near to us as Marcus Aurelius.”

These are the words of a writer in the highest degree representative of modern thought—Matthew Arnold. As such they will serve as a text for this study, and, I hope, as a justification for including it amongst the publications of the Catholic Truth Society. They will be a text since they touch on the points of greatest interest in the life of Marcus Aurelius; his high natural ideals; his fidelity in great part to those ideals; the contrast thus presented between him and his surroundings. This quotation from such a writer will also perhaps justify the appearance of this study in the good company of the C.T.S. catalogue, since it proves the interest which this pagan Emperor of Rome has for the men of our own time, whatever their opinions. For Christians there is the additional interest afforded by the contrast between his ideals and those of the martyrs—the ideals of nature and those of grace. Incidentally, a study of his life and age shows, as Mr. F. H. Myers well points out, how futile are the neo-pagan theories, so much in fashion in our own times, of the self-sufficiency of nature; and also, as Mr. Myers does not point out, how essential for heroic virtue is the indwelling of the Spirit of God, the supernatural aid of grace.

The life of Marcus Aurelius has had a fascination for those in all ages who are interested in the strivings of human nature after the ideal—and these are, I suppose, most men of culture (*humani* the Romans rightly called them). The early Christians took the same interest in him which they took in all the nobler pagans, in Plato and in Socrates, in Vergil, Seneca, and Epictetus; they praised his virtue and found in it a spur to higher things. If unregenerate nature could do so much, how ought not the regenerate blush for their tepidity? This was the sentiment also of that Cardinal Barberini who translated the Meditations which Marcus has left us. He dedicated the translation to his own soul "in order to make it redder than his purple at the sight of the virtues of this gentile." Marcus' contemporaries of all shades of opinion—Christians no less than pagans—bore testimony to the integrity of his life and, on the whole, the wisdom and justice of his rule. Long after his death his bust might be found amongst the household gods all over the Empire. In our own age when men are losing hold of the supernatural and trying to live without it, the high attainments of a mere pagan are held up for admiration. Dilettanti are in love with a moral code which brings with it no shocking sanctions; a generation sick unto death with scepticism seeks peace in an undogmatic philosophy of life: but it is all oil and no wine; therefore it heals not.

Yet honour where honour is due; we have no wish to detract from the greatness of the good Emperor—a greatness which is only realised by contrast with the surroundings in which he lived.

Rome, when Marcus came to rule over it, was the centre of a vast Empire and no capital has ever

surpassed it in immorality. It had all the viciousness of Paris without its grace, the gross materialism of London enhanced by a system of slavery which brutalised master as well as slave, and all this joined to the superstition of Pekin. It had not improved, but rather the reverse, since St. Paul saw it delivered over to a reprobate sense. It was the spoiled child of its Empire. All Europe except Germany and Russia owned its sway and ministered to its desires; so did Asia Minor and Syria as far East as the Euphrates; so too did Egypt and the whole northern part of Africa. The wealth of all these provinces was borne by fleets of merchantmen to its port of Ostia; and not of these alone but the wealth also of India and China. But besides wealth they gave her something which she needed more: they gave her life. She must long ago have perished of corruption, did not the fresh pure blood of Britain, Gaul and Spain come throbbing through the Empire to give health to its diseased heart. Only when the heart itself became surcharged with corruption and poured its foulness back into the system did the Empire decay. But this was not yet. More than two centuries had to pass after the reign of Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 160-181) before the final rot set in: such was the strange vitality of that Empire, the greatest the world has ever seen.

From time to time the Emperors made desperate efforts to stem the rising tide of immorality. As practical men they recognised what Napoleon and even Voltaire recognised, that there could be no morality for the masses without religion; but they did not realise so clearly that there could be religion, especially pagan religion, without morality. This was indeed what came about in the second century, especially during the reigns of Marcus Aurelius and his predecessor. There was a great revival in religion

but no corresponding improvement in morals. Nor was this strange. The gods themselves were represented as grossly immoral beings; religion was merely a business transaction with them—a *quid pro quo*—and under the code of honour which too often marks such transactions. Hence, if you safely could, it was quite the thing to cheat the gods; you took your chance, but the probability was that you would get the worst of it, since the gods were the more dexterous sharpers.

Such were the old Græco-Roman gods; but just at this time there was new and better blood introduced into the Pantheon. The gods of Egypt and the East—Mithra and Isis—strange mystic deities, began to be in high honour all over the Empire. In these new cults there was much that was higher and nobler than the old Roman religion—in every religion, as St. Augustine says, there is something good and true—but mixed with this good there was gross immorality officially sanctioned.

It is strange to think of Marcus as a devotee of all these superstitions; yet such he was. The intellectual and the cultured usually were sceptical about the tales of the gods; but few of them forbore paying them the customary homage. They looked on religion as a political and social duty and went through its functions as such. Marcus took the ceremonies more seriously than did the usual Roman of high rank; but even his faith in the old myths wavered. He was content, however, not to pry into high matters, and adopted the Stoic attitude towards them. These philosophers interpreted the legends, often by Procrustean methods, to suit their own doctrine, but in reality thought their truth or falsehood of little practical importance. For them the chief thing was to

live a life of virtue, relying on one's own strength. He who lived such a life they held to be better than the gods; and in fact many of them did lead admirable lives, as far as we can judge. Their virtue, if mingled most frequently with an unlovely and repellant pride, was at all events a relief amidst the universal corruption of pagan Rome.

When we consider his pagan surroundings we marvel at the virtue of Marcus Aurelius; but, great as this was, Rome had now something greater far. There were at this time many silent figures who passed with downcast eyes and modest mien through her polluted streets; they met in strange places and celebrated strange rites; they did good to all; and all about them breathed a purer air, a fragrance of Heaven unknown before. These were they beside whose God-given strength of soul the strugglings of the Stoic Emperor were but the feeble gropings of an infant. Christianity was fast spreading over the Empire. Already the Catacombs were extending in a maze of net-work beside Rome. All was ready for the greatest persecution the Church had yet endured; this time it was to come from the hands of the well-meaning but narrow and unfortunate Marcus. In Rome itself the Christians were multiplying fast; converts were made amongst the nobility; long before they had penetrated even into "Cæsar's household." It was about this time that Tertullian wrote his well-known words: "We are but of yesterday and yet we fill every place—your cities, your houses, your fortresses, your *municipia*, councils, camps, tribes, decurias, palace, senate, forum; we leave you your temples." And he adds, in words in which we must allow for rhetorical exaggeration: "Were we to detach ourselves from

you, you would be scared by your solitude and by the silence, which would be like that of a dead world."

Though Marcus must have known from the police authorities the great numbers of the Christians, he understood little of their ideals. It is the tragedy of his noble life. To quote Arnold again: "What an affinity for Christianity had this persecutor of the Christians! The effusion of Christianity, its relieving tears, its happy self-sacrifice, were the very element one feels for which his spirit longed; they were near him, he touched them, he passed them by.... What would he have said to the Sermon on the Mount? ... What would have become of his notions of the *exitiabilis superstitio* (the deadly superstition), of 'the obstinacy of the Christians'? Vain question! Yet the greatest charm of Marcus Aurelius is that he makes us ask it. We see him wise, just, self-governed, tender, thankful, blameless; yet with all this agitated, stretching out his arms for something beyond, *tendentemque manus ripae ulterioris amore*."

Of the details of the external life of Marcus Aurelius we know very little. It is his internal life which interests us most, and that is recorded for us by his own hand in his book of Meditations. They are notes, meant probably for no eyes but his own, of his efforts after virtue—the record of his soul. That the ruler of the Roman Empire should have thought such thoughts and, in great part, lived up to them; that at the same time he, who represented the best that paganism could produce, should have fallen far short of the heroism shown by Christian slave-girls; that his life and meditations prove in the concrete how vast is the gulf between the natural and the supernatural: in these facts lie the various

fascinations which the Emperor Marcus Aurelius has had for Pagan and Christian, for Atheist and Theist, for the Positivist, who would fain be rid of the supernatural, and the Mystic for whom the supernatural is everything.

The author desires once for all to acknowledge his debt to numerous writers dealing with the life and period of Marcus Aurelius. It is hardly necessary to mention the names of Dill, Pater, and Renan.

CHAPTER II
THE BOY STOIC

Annius Verus, known to the world by his adopted name as the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, was born at Rome in A.D. 121. His father, also Annius Verus, was descended from a Spanish family which a few generations before had settled in Rome. Of him we know little; but what we do know is favourable. Marcus tells us that “from his reputation and remembrance” he learned “modesty and a manly character.” His mother’s memory he always recalled with veneration and love. She it was that taught him “piety and beneficence and abstinence not only from evil deeds but even from evil thoughts; and, further, simplicity in my way of living far removed from the habits of the rich.”

When Marcus was born the reigning Emperor was Hadrian. Hadrian was himself a Spaniard and inclined to favour those of Spanish descent. Thus the family of Annius Verus came into prominence; and before Marcus was yet more than eight years of age the Emperor took a special interest in him.

The boy even at this early age was not quite as the other children who passed to and fro in the Imperial palace. All through life his health was imperfect; yet

even as a child he had begun to practise the Stoic austerities. He slept on a plank bed and was abstemious at table, and only at his mother's request did he relax these practices. His biographer tells us that "he was grave from his first infancy." In later years he himself thanked the gods "that he had never been hurried into any offence against them," though, with his wonted candour, he adds, that he "had the disposition, which, if opportunity had offered, might have led him to do something of the kind; but, through their favour, there never was such a concurrence of circumstances as put me to the trial." The candour of the child was so transparent that Hadrian used to call him not *Verus* (true) but *Verissimus* (exceedingly true).

It was not strange that Hadrian should have been interested in this grave, pensive, unworldly child. He was a keen observer of human nature, and regarded with curiosity and a certain reverence a character so superior to its surroundings and withal the very antithesis of his own. He himself was a strange mixture of the Greek and the Roman. Roman in his legislative and administrative ability, he was Greek and modern in his love of novelty, his eager curiosity, his frivolous attitude towards life's greatest problems—the problems of God and the soul. This last aspect of his character is enshrined for ever in his dying address to his soul:—

> Animula, vagula, blandula,
> Hospes comesque corporis,
> Quae nunc abibis in loca;
> Pallidula, rigida, nudula—
> Nec, ut soles, dabis iocos?

which Merivale thus translates,

"Soul of mine, pretty one, flitting one,
Guest and partner of my clay,
Whither wilt thou hie away;
Pallid one, rigid one, naked one—
Never to play again, never to play."

Candour, simplicity, purity, gravity: these were the old Roman virtues of the days of Cato; but they were little in fashion in the heyday of the Empire. However, they were interesting as antiquities; and Hadrian loved everything old because he was so modern himself: they had the charm of the *rus in urbe*, of innocence in high life, and were grateful to one who loved freshness; and so, while he was in Rome, Hadrian always had the boy near him. Hadrian and Marcus; the agnostic and the devotee; the lover of life and the boy Stoic; Greek frivolity and Roman *gravitas*: it is an interesting contrast.

Already Marcus had the ritual instinct which marked him in later life and at the age of eight Hadrian appointed him chief of the College of Salii; a boy bishop of boy priests devoted to Mars, the god of War. In this office, in the early days of March, he led the patrician youth in their religious dances through the streets and presided at the Saliarian banquets. He was scrupulously exact in the fulfilment of these duties. He already knew by heart the antiquated formulas, couched in barbarous Latin, whose meaning most men had forgotten. In the complex ceremonies he never needed a prompter; such was his knowledge of their rubrics. In one of these rites the boys threw chaplets at the head of a reclining statue of Mars; but Marcus alone succeeded in crowning the god. It was an omen of the wars which later were to break in upon his peace.

At the age of eleven Marcus adopted the *pallium* or

cloak of the Stoics—thus consecrating his life to divine philosophy. Hadrian knew Greek and loved Greek thoughts and Greek ways; he knew Plato and Plato's ideal—the Philosopher-King. Here was an opportunity of realising the ideal; why not make Marcus Emperor? His fanciful mind would have a keen delight in speculating on the future of the Empire under such a rule. After me the deluge; and he resolved to let posterity have the benefit of the experiment, and lay the blame or merit of the result not on him but on Plato.

He at first had adopted as his successor Lucius Verus, the handsome and dissolute father of the equally handsome and dissolute Lucius Verus, who was afterwards Marcus' colleague as Emperor. But Lucius died before Hadrian, and he then chose a worthier successor. This was the best of Senators—a Roman of Cato's school but free from the absurdities of that school—Antoninus Pius.

In making this second choice Hadrian provided for the succession of the boy Marcus in due time. He ordered Antoninus to adopt as his sons and successors Marcus and the younger Lucius Verus. Thus began the lifelong attachment between Antoninus and Marcus—the rulers of the Golden Age —the most admirably virtuous, though far from being the ablest of the Roman Emperors.

Beyond these few facts about his early boyhood scarcely anything has been handed down to us of his doings till his seventeenth year. What little we do know we owe to the famous first book of his Meditations. This he wrote one evening in his tent "among the Quadi, at the Granua," a tributary of the Danube, during a lull in the war against the barbarians of the North. The troubles of his reign had

made his later years a martyrdom that sorely tried his Stoic spirit, and on that evening his mind sought rest in thinking of his childhood and early youth. The book was written by an invalid amidst strife and hate and hardship; yet its ever-recurring note is the note of gratitude struck on the chords of love. He recalls with affection all who had been good to him—good in the truest sense; for they had moulded his soul to virtue.

"To the gods," he says, "I am indebted for having good grandfathers, good parents, a good sister, good teachers, good associates, good kinsmen, and friends, nearly everything good." From the example or precept of each he learned some special virtue: from his grandfather Verus "good morals and the government of my temper"; from his director "to be neither of the green nor of the blue party at the games in the circus, not a partisan either of the Palmularius or the Scutarius at the gladiators' fights; to endure labour and to want little; to work with my own hands, and not to meddle with other people's affairs, and not to be ready to listen to slander." Luxury, divorce, and slavery by this time had brought Roman family life to its lowest ebb of morality, and it is pleasing to find the harder and purer ideals of older times still honoured in at least some of the nobler households.

Marcus was educated altogether by private teachers in his own home; he did not attend the public schools—a fact which he recalls with gratitude; and he had reason to be grateful. These schools had multiplied under the generous patronage of the Emperors; no expense was spared in securing for them the best possible teachers; but in them the theory of virtue was acquired, if acquired at all, at

the cost of its practice. The *pædagogus* or slave who accompanied each boy to and from school usually taught him a more insinuating and acceptable code of morality than the Stoic asceticism taught at times in the schools; though some even of the teachers seem to have vied with the slaves in the inculcation of immorality; hence these schools were hot-beds of vice and in ill-repute amongst parents who had a care for their children's virtue. It is scarcely possible that the keen edge of Marcus' moral nature should not have been blunted in such surroundings; even his passion for perfection could scarcely have kept him unscathed. As it was, he had the best teachers that could be procured, mostly belonging to the Stoic School, and in the first book of the Meditations he traces his development under their direction:—

"From Diognetus I learned not to busy myself about trifling things, and not to give credit to what was said by miracle-workers and jugglers about incantations and the driving away of demons and such things"—perhaps an allusion to the Christians —"and to have desired a plank bed and whatever else of this kind belongs to the Grecian discipline." Rusticus, a famous Stoic philosopher—the same who afterwards as Prefect of Rome condemned St. Justin to death,—taught him to avoid sophistry, rhetoric, poetry, and fine-writing, then much in fashion; "not to walk about the house in my outdoor dress, nor to do other things of that kind"; to shun vindictiveness; to read deeply, not superficially; and, greatest benefit of all, he made him acquainted with the discourses of Epictetus. These discourses henceforth became his à Kempis and suggested the writing of his own Meditations. Apollonius—the most rigid of Stoics—impressed on him the great Stoic virtue "to look at nothing else, not even for a moment, except to

reason; and to be always the same, in sharp pains, on the occasion of the loss of a child and in long illness." This last sentence is full of suppressed pathos in view of his long life of ill-health and the early death of most of his children. He seems to struggle against the sense of the tears of things and the mortal woes that touch even the Stoic heart; but he is conscious that here at least he is too much a man to be a sage; for in his letters to Fronto we see the most tender solicitude for his delicate children, a mother's anxiety as to every sign of their declining or returning health.

As Diognetus had taught him austerity; Rusticus, sincerity; Apollonius, self-suppression; so it was a grandson of Plutarch's, Sextus of Chaeronea, who taught him affection. From Alexander the grammarian, Fronto his tutor and intimate friend, and Alexander the Platonic he learned other graces of thought and manner out of which was woven that inexplicable thing, the character of the perfect gentleman, Nature's saint. Catulus, though a Stoic, urged him "to love his children truly"; Severus, "to love my kin, to love truth and to love justice"; to know and honour the Stoic heroes and martyrs, Thrasea, Helvidius, Cato, Dion, Brutus; to have as his ideal "a polity administered with equal rights and equal freedom of speech, and a kingly government, which respects most of all the freedom of the governed." But of all his teachers none can have had so beneficial an effect on his too rigid nature as Maximus. His character is that of the natural man at his best.

With Maximus he closes the list of his teachers. His minute observation of their characteristics, remembered through a troubled life, paralleled only

by the minuteness of his self-analysis, testifies to his intense desire for virtue. So intense indeed was this desire that it became a moral disease which to some extent paralysed his power for action. But, despite its excess, we must pay homage to this thirst of the soul, this torture of the spirit, those

> "High instincts, before which our mortal nature
> Did tremble, like a guilty thing surprised."

Fully to slake that thirst, to alleviate that torture, Marcus should have shared the love-feasts of the Christians, the morning sacrifices, the homilies and the ceremonies of the Catacombs. But he knew not the sublime secrets, the treasure, hidden beneath the earth he daily trod.

Hadrian died in A.D. 138, when Marcus was seventeen years of age. Antoninus Verus, better known as Antoninus Pius, succeeded as Emperor, betrothed Marcus to his beautiful daughter Faustina, and had them both to live with him during the rest of his life in the Imperial household. Henceforth Marcus and Antoninus were bound by the closest ties of friendship. Marcus revered Antoninus with an almost superstitious reverence. Antoninus' word was law for him, and afterwards in the rule of the Empire he sought to avoid the least deviation from his predecessor's rule of action. In this he was wise, if we are to judge by the picture he himself has left us of Antoninus. He says:—"In him I observed mildness of temper, constancy and contempt of honours; a love of labour and readiness to listen to the advice of others; strict justice; a knowledge of the time for vigorous action and for remissness. He considered himself no more than a citizen. His disposition was to keep his friends, and not to be soon tired of them,

nor yet to be extravagant in his affection; to be contented, cheerful and provident; to shun flattery and display; to be watchful over the affairs of the Empire and to be economic in expenditure. In regard to the gods, he avoided superstition; as to philosophy, he was not a sophist or a pedant, but honoured true philosophers; not however reproaching pretended philosophers nor yet being their dupe. In society he was easy and agreeable and free from all petty jealousy. After his paroxysms of headaches he came immediately fresh and vigorous to his usual occupations. His secrets were not many but very few and very rare, and these only about public matters. He was a man who looked to what ought to be done, not to the reputation which is got by a man's acts. That saying might be applied to him which is recorded of Socrates, that he was able both to abstain from and to enjoy those things which many are too weak to abstain from and cannot enjoy without excess. To be strong both to bear the one and to be sober in the other is the mark of a man who has a perfect and invincible soul, such as he showed in the illness of Maximus."

In many respects the character of Antoninus was more admirable than that of his successor, whose glory has eclipsed his. He was an abler ruler because he was not so good a Stoic. He had more of human sympathy and a more varied interest in life because he was not so much engrossed in the study of his own soul. He was simple, kind, and genial, whereas Marcus was cold, reserved, self-conscious. As Renan says: "Antoninus was a philosopher without boasting of it, almost without knowing it. Marcus Aurelius was a philosopher of admirable temperament and sincerity, but he was a philosopher by reflection." Of the two, the more attractive is the philosopher by

nature, who knows not that he is so. The philosopher by reflection is always a difficult person and on occasion may be terrible. Had Antoninus written a book of Meditations they would probably have shown a less thorough analysis of the human soul in all its varying moods, a less gnawing desire for perfection, but they would present a character more pleasing to and imitable by those whose ways are the ways of men and not of the abstraction of a man—which is what the Stoic "wise man" would be.

Antoninus loved all the innocent pleasures of life. But most of all he loved the joys of rural life—the joys of sea and air and wood and blue Italian sky, the ardour of the chase and the mirth of the harvest home. He lived most of his life in this simple way at his villa at Lorium with his own household and Marcus Aurelius. The letters of Marcus to his tutor Fronto give us a vivid picture of this life. When the correspondence begins, Marcus was about eighteen years of age. He writes during the vintage season:—

"My Dearest Master,—I am well. To-day I studied from three till eight in the morning after taking food. I then put on my slippers, and from eight till nine had a most enjoyable walk up and down before my chamber. Then, booted and cloaked—for so we were commanded to appear—I went to wait upon my lord the Emperor. We went a-hunting, did doughty deeds, heard a rumour that boars had been caught, but there was nothing to be seen. However, we climbed a pretty steep hill and in the afternoon returned home. I went straight to my books. Off with my boots, down with my cloak! I spent a couple of hours in bed. I read Cato's speech on the property of Pulchra and another in which he impeaches a tribune. Ho, ho! I hear you cry to your man, off with you as fast

as you can and bring me those speeches from the library of Apollo. No use to send; I have these books with me too. You must get round the Tiberian librarian; you will have to spend something on the matter; and when I return to town I shall expect to go shares with him. Well, after reading those speeches, I wrote a wretched trifle destined for drowning or burning. No, indeed, my attempt at writing did not come off at all to-day; the composition of a hunter or a vintager whose shouts are echoing through my chamber, hateful and wearisome as the law-courts. What have I said? Yes, it was rightly said, for my master is an orator. I think I have caught a cold, whether from walking in slippers or from writing badly, I do not know. I am always annoyed with phlegm, but to-day more than usual. Well, I will pour oil on my head and go off to sleep. I don't mean to put one drop in my lamp to-day, so weary am I from riding and sneezing. Farewell, dearest and most beloved master, whom I miss, I may say, more than Rome itself."

I shall have so much to say of the virtue of Marcus Aurelius, and it is such a rare thing to get a saint or an emperor off his guard, putting on his slippers, grumbling at the noise outside his windows or catching a cold and sneezing—though I am sure they do those things—that I cannot refrain from quoting another letter; it tells us more about this cold, and is the only place in literature, as far as I know, where it is recorded that a philosopher, a saint, or an emperor took a bath and snored. He writes to Fronto:—

"MY BELOVED MASTER,—I am well. I slept a little more than usual on account of my slight cold, which seems to be well again. So I spent my time from five till nine in the morning partly in reading Cato's

agriculture, partly in writing, not quite so badly as yesterday indeed. Then after waiting upon my father I soothed my throat with honey-water, ejecting it without swallowing. Then I attended my father as he offered sacrifice. Then to breakfast. What do you think I ate? Only a little bread, though I saw others devouring beans, onions, and sardines! Then we went out to the vintage and got hot and merry, but left a few grapes still hanging, as the old poet says, 'atop on the topmost bough.' At noon we got home again; I worked a little but it was not much good. Then I chatted a long time with my mother as she sat on her bed. My conversation consisted of, 'What do you suppose my Fronto is doing at this moment?' to which she answered, 'and my Gratia, what is she doing?' and then I, 'and our little darling, the younger Gratia?' And while we were talking and quarrelling as to which of us loved all of you best, the gong sounded, which meant that father had gone across to the bath. So we bathed, and dined in the oilpress room. I don't mean that we bathed in the press room; but we bathed and then dined and amused ourselves with listening to the peasants' banter. And now that I am in my own room again, before I roll over and snore, I am fulfilling my promise and giving an account of my day to my dear tutor; and if I could love him better than I do, I would consent to miss him even more than I miss him now. Take care of yourself, my best and dearest Fronto, wherever you are. The fact is that I love you, and you are far away."

So far we have seen only the edifying—almost priggish—side of Marcus' character. The monotony of his perfection is relieved by the following incident, which shows that at this time he had just enough mischief in him—though it be but little—to make

him amiable. He writes:—"When my father returned home from the vineyards, I mounted my horse as usual, and rode on ahead some little way. On the road was a herd of sheep, standing crowded together as though the place were a desert, with four dogs and two shepherds but nothing else. Then one shepherd said to another on seeing the horsemen: 'I say, look at these horsemen; they do a deal of robbery.' On hearing this, I clap spurs to my horse and ride straight for the sheep. They scatter in consternation—hither and thither they are fleeting and bleating. A shepherd throws his fork and the fork falls on the horseman who came next to me. We make our escape."

Thus the days went happily at Lorium in the companionship of Pius, itself "a school of all the virtues." For twenty-three years Marcus studied in this school, but like all good things this sweet discipleship too had an end. In A.D. 161 Antoninus died a death as peaceful as his life had been. Feeling the end nigh he put his affairs in order and commanded that the golden statue of Fortune, the symbol of Empire, which had ever to stand in the Emperor's state apartments, should be borne to Marcus' chamber. To the tribune on duty he gave the password *Æquanimitas* (peace of soul) as the watchword of the night,—the night of his own soul; then turning about, he seemed to fall asleep: his own peaceful spirit had passed away; "κατ'ἰσὸν ὑπνῷ μαλακωτάτῳ as if in gentlest sleep."

The sceptre passed into the hands of Marcus, then forty years of age. For him it was the beginning of sorrows. Æschylus would have said that the gods were jealous of his too great prosperity. In his private life they were good to him on account of his

virtues, but it were unmeet that with such virtues mortal man should join the sovereignty of the world; for such a one might justly claim more homage than the questionable individuals who inhabited Olympus with the title of “gods.” The lot of men also had been too happy in the Golden Age of the Antonines: it would exceed all measure were Marcus, the ideal philosopher-king, to rule with such favour from above as his predecessors had enjoyed. So might Æschylus have prophesied truly after the event, as is the way with moralists. Thenceforth the glory of that age waned. To the philosopher by nature had succeeded the philosopher by reflection. We shall see the result of the change.

CHAPTER III
A PHILOSOPHER ON THE THRONE

Plato had said that the world would never enjoy happiness until a philosopher should become king or until a king should become a philosopher. With the accession of Marcus the rule of the philosopher-king was an accomplished fact; according, to Gibbon, “the happiness of the subject was the one object of government,” and all the good effects anticipated by Plato were brought about. “If a man were called on,” says he, “to fix the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus” (thus including the reigns of Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus and Marcus Aurelius). But later historians have reversed this verdict on the Golden Age. They have shown that the reign of Marcus Aurelius was one of singular disasters to the State. And indeed Marcus himself had no such faith in the magical power of philosophy on the throne; he did not believe in the possibility of realising the Ideal State. “Do not,” he says, “expect Plato’s Republic: but be content if the smallest thing goes on well, and

consider such an event to be no small matter. For who can change men's principles? and without a change of principles what else is there than the slavery of men who groan while they pretend to obey? Simple and modest is the work of philosophy. Draw me not aside to insolence and pride."

But if Marcus despaired of establishing the reign of Philosophy as the Queen of Men, he, at any rate, secured the rule of the Philosophers. Already under Antoninus they had been in high honour; but under Marcus they filled all the great offices of State. Sophists and rhetoricians were elevated to the senate, and became consuls and proconsuls merely because they preached renunciation and had been Marcus' tutors. He placed their images amongst his household gods and their statues in the forum and the senate-house. They were rulers in the provinces, judges in the law-courts, leaders in the senate. And on the whole they acquitted themselves well; though amongst their number there were not a few impostors, long beards, asceticism and rough cloaks became the fashion and profitable. "His beard is worth ten thousand sesterces to him," was the remark passed on one of them; "come, we shall have to pay goats a salary next!" Marcus distinguished between "true philosophers" and "pretended philosophers," and learnt from Antoninus to esteem the former and to show indulgence to the latter, yet "without permitting himself to be their dupe."

When it got to court, Stoicism put away its primitive roughness. "Plain living and high thinking" became the accepted creed among the brilliant society of which Faustina was the centre and the exemplar; just as now in England ritualism and "the Rome-ward movement" become from time to time the tone

amongst elegant blue-stockings of both sexes. But of course in Rome, as in London, it would have been bad taste to take seriously what was, with them, at least, merely an interesting sentiment. Society now turns out to hear the newest preacher on the newest theology, or the fashionable and good-looking preacher on any or no theology. So, too, then; Faustina and the Roman ladies came in all the glory of flowered silk and rare jewels to the Temple of Peace, there to hear Rusticus or Fronto, or the Emperor Aurelius himself, lecturing on the vanity of vanities, the shortness of life, the blessedness of renunciation. Great families had each its philosopher —a kind of family chaplain; and the great ladies came in their sedan chairs to consult their philosophical director on the latest freaks of their fancy.

This interest in philosophy was partly the cause, partly the effect, of a general movement towards more humane views. The hard pagan world was beginning to soften; and this humanity was the greatest glory of the Golden Age. The Stoics preached the brotherhood of man, and sympathy with men, as men. Hence charity too became part of the Time-Spirit and showed itself in milder legislation and in beneficent institutions. The great ones of the world at last took notice of the weak and the outcast; the stern rule of might and the pitiless destruction of the “unfit” at last yielded to altruistic sentiments. The slave, the orphan, and woman were no longer to be the prey of society.

In his legislation in favour of the oppressed Marcus Aurelius did but carry on the work begun by Antoninus and his excellent council of jurists. Their first care was to make easier the lot of the slave.

Seneca had said: “All men, if you only go back to their beginnings, have the gods for their fathers”; and Epictetus: “The slave like you is the son of Zeus”; and it was in this spirit of reverence for his fellow-man as his brother and his equal that Marcus sought to confer on him, in addition to a theoretical fraternity and equality, the third of the trinity—freedom. The master was no longer allowed absolute power of life and death over his slaves; the slave was recognised as having rights; and enfranchisement was encouraged. As the condition of the slave, so too that of women and orphans was improved. The inhuman position of woman under old Roman law, by which she was practically excluded from recognition as a member of the family, was altered by laws conferring on her rights of property; while orphans were provided for by numerous charitable institutions.

The first of these institutions endowed by public funds had been founded by the Emperors Nerva and Trajan. They were multiplied and developed by Antoninus and still further by Marcus. On the death of the elder Faustina, Antoninus had founded an institution for orphan girls—called the *puellae Faustinianæ* (the little maidens of Faustina); and on the death of the younger Faustina, Marcus, faithful in this as in all else to the example of Antoninus, founded a similar orphanage. These charitable works and many others he was enabled to carry out by the large fortune, amounting to twenty-two million pounds, which Antoninus had bequeathed to him.

Yet all his financial policy was not so wise. His good nature and easy-going attitude towards money matters may have been good Stoicism, but it was bad statesmanship. On his accession he gave each of the

soldiers of the Praetorian guard a largess of £160 and to the other soldiers a proportional sum. He frequently distributed free corn to the mob, and, towards the end of his reign, remitted large debts due to the Treasury; and ordered that in all cases of prosecution on behalf of the treasury, the benefit of the doubt was to be given in favour of the defendant. This was all very well while Antoninus' legacy lasted; but the season of leanness soon came, and war and the plague left the public finances in so desperate a condition that he had to sell his own personal property and debase the coinage.

The result of this generosity had been to make him the idol of the unthinking mob, though we have every reason to believe that this popularity was not sought for. Of the wise man he says: "As to what any man shall say or think about him or do against him, he never even thinks of it, being himself contented with these two things: with acting justly in what he now does, and being satisfied with what is now assigned to him; and he lays aside all distracting and busy pursuits, and desires nothing else than the straight course through the law, and, by accomplishing the straight course, to follow God." He showed his indifference to the praise of the groundlings in a practical way in his legislation as regards the games. He put restrictions on the gladiatorial contests, and limited the rates of allowance to the stage performers.

In the eyes of the Roman people the magnificence of the games and public shows was the one test of munificence. Hence it was something to have checked those degrading spectacles, but here, as afterwards in his persecution of the martyrs, he yielded complaisance to conventional views. He

lacked the strength of will to enforce his own ideals; and perhaps it was as well that he recognised his deficiency and did not attempt what was, for one of his calibre, the impossible. On great occasions, to please his colleague Lucius or his wife Faustina, or in deference to the popular wishes, he used to attend these shows in state. But when he was present there was to be no shedding of human blood, at any rate by a fellow-man, though he seems to have allowed the fights with the beasts. Dion Cassius records this fact: “The Emperor Marcus was so far from taking delight in spectacles of bloodshed, that even the gladiators in Rome could not obtain his inspection of their contests, unless, like the wrestlers, they contended without imminent risk; for he never allowed the use of sharpened weapons, but universally they fought before him with weapons blunted.”

He himself, even when presiding, took little interest in the contests. He spent his time in reading or writing or transacting official business, giving audiences or signing State papers, much to the disgust of the populace. They hated such superior refinement and would have preferred a sportsman to a philosopher as their ruler. They looked on the Emperor as a milksop, not altogether without reason, though the right reason was not their reason. He showed his contempt for their opinions on one occasion in a most emphatic manner. A lion, trained by a slave to devour human beings, acquitted himself so well in one of these spectacles in the Emperor’s presence that the whole amphitheatre rang with applause, and on every side a shout was raised that a slave who had served the people’s pleasures so well, deserved freedom. The Emperor, angered at the brutality which he could not prevent, had averted his

eyes, and now replied, “The man has done nothing worthy of liberty.” Another anecdote shows his care for even the most outcast of his subjects—those whom the ordinary Roman valued and heeded less than the beasts of burden. He was present one day at an exhibition of rope-dancing, when suddenly one of the performers—a boy—missed his footing, fell into the arena and was hurt. Thereupon the Emperor ordered that nets and mattresses should always be spread beneath the rope-walkers.

Despite these attempts—feeble they seem and few—at amelioration and at instilling a higher view of human nature, the amphitheatre still remained “the great slaughter-house.” When we look at Marcus’ statue high in the Pantheon of the Positivists, we must remember another figure, cold and abstracted indeed, but thus all the more convicted of feebleness, under the awning and the perfume sprays and flowers of the Roman amphitheatre looking on with impassive tolerance at the spectacle of human and animal suffering, the daily bread of the most brutal of all populaces. True, he could soothe his soul by a Stoic aphorism on the nothingness of pain, or some other such mockery of human misery—the necessary refuge of those who had no certainty of a larger hope. For mockery truly must any solution of the problem of evil be, and vain comfort, which was not written on Calvary. That Marcus could look on such suffering unmoved; that he could order it for his fellow-man when the turn of the Christians came; this removes him from what Christians look for in their leaders to the land of Promise. It mattered little that he did not take the delight and interest which Faustina, seated by strange irony among the Vestal Virgins, robed in all the magnificence which the Via Nova could produce, took in her favourite gladiators;

or which Commodus, the centre of the fastest group of young Roman nobles, manifested at every thrust, eager for the day when he himself could enter the arena as Emperor and fight with the beasts. The mere fact that he could countenance such brutality condemns him to the level of conventional mediocrity.

As Pater says: “Those cruel amusements were, certainly, the sin of blindness, of deadness and stupidity.... Yes! what was needed was the heart that would make it impossible to witness all this; and the future would be with the forces that could beget a heart like that.... Surely evil was a real thing, and the wise man wanting in the sense of it, where not to have been, by instinctive election, on the right side was to have failed in life.”

The humanity of the age, though unable to effect any appreciable reform of the amphitheatre, did much for the relief of the sick. The great plague brought back from the East by Lucius Verus and his troops was ravaging the Empire. It has been compared to the great plague of Athens, which will live for ever in Thucydides’ vivid phrases, and to the Black Death of the 14th century. Niebuhr says that it was a disaster from which the old world never recovered. Asia Minor, Greece, Italy, and Gaul were darkened by its passing; and in Rome itself, so Dio, a Roman senator, tells us, two thousand men were buried every day. A Golden Age! An age of peace and happiness indeed! Rather an age whose glory is that it was an age of hospitals, of funeral clubs and orphanages; of relief of suffering rather than freedom therefrom.

The temples of Æsculapius, the god of healing, had long been used as a kind of hospital for the sick, but never before to such an extent as in the Antonine

age. The priests of this god were initiated into a secret medical lore. His temples could vie with the great medieval monasteries in the scenic beauty and salubrity of their surroundings. The excellence of the climate, the traditional lore, the healthy diet and more healthy abstinence, the careful nursing and the freshness and brightness of the surroundings, were really efficacious remedies. Thus, those who laboured under any illness came far and near to the most famous shrines, such as that of Epidaurus, whose ruins still remain as a silent witness of its whilom greatness. Their hope was that they would be favoured with a dream or vision from the kindly god as to the remedy for their disease. The career of Aristeides, wandering for thirteen years with fanatical enthusiasm from shrine to shrine till finally he was cured, shows to what extremes superstition carried some of those devotees. On one occasion while suffering from a fever, he thought he had a vision of the god bidding him bathe in the ice-cold water, and then run a mile, and he carried out this and many other such assuredly unearthly remedies despite the dissuasions of the priests. These priests, the *neocoroi*, used to interpret the dream, and the prescriptions were carried out by medical men and attendants. The belief in the efficacy of these dream-sent prescriptions was not confined to the vulgar. Marcus Aurelius believed that he himself had been cured thus; and his wise physician, Galen, trusted them. Readers of *Marius, the Epicurean*, will not easily forget Pater's description of Marius' stay in the Temple, nor the words of thanksgiving addressed to the heaven-sent dreams which he puts on his lips at parting; they are from the Asclepiadæ of Aristeides: "O ye children of Apollo! who in time past have stilled the waves of sorrow from many people,

lighting up a lamp of safety before those who travel by sea and land, be pleased, in your great condescension, though ye be equal in glory with your elder brethren, the Dioscuri, and your lot in immortal youth be as theirs, to accept the prayer, which in sleep and vision ye have inspired. Order it aright, I pray you, according to your loving kindness to men. Preserve me from sickness, and endue my body with such a measure of health as may suffice it for the obeying of the spirit, that I may pass my days unhindered and in quietness."

Thus charity and culture progressed under the Antonines. So, too, did industry and trade, which brought with them prosperity and its attendant luxury until the advent of plague and famine. We are told that each year the treasures of the East were brought by a fleet of one hundred and twenty vessels to the ports of the Red Sea, to be transferred thence through Alexandria to Rome. The silks of China, the spices and perfumes of India and Arabia, pearls and diamonds, which were to glitter on the togas of young nobles or round the necks of fair ladies in the Vicus Tuscus, formed the precious cargo. In return for these Rome sent annually three-quarters of a million pounds—worth several times that amount now. "The coast of Malabar and the island of Ceylon grew rich as trade emporia for the luxuries of Rome and Roman merchants penetrated the East as consuls of sensuality for the senators and the 'friends' of Cæsar."

All this led to softening and decadence in the army and in the nation. With the blessings of peace there came also its vices; the advances in prosperity and humanity, such as it was, was not accompanied by any improvement in morals, but perhaps the reverse.

The results of Marcus' reign did not justify Plato's expectation from the philosopher-king. What Marcus might have accomplished under less unfavourable circumstances we cannot surmise; he certainly had not the strength of mind or body necessary for carrying out far-reaching reforms in such an Empire. As it was, he was singularly unfortunate in his public life: war, plague and famine—a trinity which no State could resist—rendered him powerless. His reign left little outward impress on the Roman State; his greatest legacy to Rome and to the world was the development of humane legislation, the reverence for mind above matter, and the example of a disinterested and noble ruler.

CHAPTER IV
LIFE IN THE PALACE

There is much truth in the saying, “No man is a hero to his valet”—be his reputed heroism either of the physical or the moral type. Humanity, even at its best, is an imperfect thing, much in need of the kindly haze which mostly veils its withered ruggedness; and many an angel of sweetness and light reveals the serpent’s tail on too close inspection; but I have no such revelation to offer in this chapter. Indeed, it is in his intimate domestic life that Marcus appears to best advantage. His presence in the palace brought with it a sense of restfulness, of serenity and calm, of mutual forbearance and love. It was as if some pale glimmer of the Christian love-light played about him and diffused itself over all that came within the charmed round. His household was known as the *Sacra Domus*—“the sacred house.” Thus the *Pax Romana*—the peace that was the gift of the Antonines—though lost to the Empire, was never interrupted in the Emperor’s home; and to Marcus is due the credit.

All through life it was his lot to consort with persons having sadly different views from his own on the meaning of existence, the value of virtue; yet he was

kind and sociable with all. In this he did but follow the example of the gods: “They are not vexed because, during so long a time, they must tolerate men, such as they are, and so many of them bad; and besides this they also take care of them in all ways. But thou, who art destined to end so soon, art thou wearied of enduring the bad, and this, too, when thou art one of them?” This tolerance towards the failings of others had its source in his peculiar gospel of resignation:—or should we say, fatalism? “That is good for each thing which the universal nature brings to each. And it is for its good at the time when nature brings it. ‘The earth loves the shower,’ and ‘the solemn æther loves,’ and the Universe loves to make whatever is about to be. I say then to the Universe: ‘I love as thou lovest.’” In this spirit he bore the trials of his domestic, as of his public, life; keen griefs coming from without and from within; and the keenest of all for one of his affectionate nature were those of his own household.

Apollonius had taught him “to be always the same in sharp pains, and on the occasion of the loss of a child and in long illness.” He learnt the theory of indifference to natural affection; but, fortunately, never the practice. The severe light of Stoicism was softened and suffused in passing through the medium of his gentle nature; he trusted the reasons of the heart, more than those of the pure intellect. If Stoic cosmopolitanism would have him care for men in inverse proportion to their nearness to him, he must depart from type in this. To his wife Faustina, to his children, to his tutor Fronto and to Fronto’s children, especially “little Gratia,” he was genuinely devoted.

The correspondence with Fronto, if too effusive for our taste, yet shows both in their best light. It is full

of tender references to the "little ones," their joys and their ailments. Fronto writes to the Emperor: "I have seen the little ones—the pleasantest sight of my life; for they are as like yourself as could possibly be. It has well repaid me for my journey over that slippery road and up those steep rocks: for I behold you, not simply face to face before me, but, more generously, whichever way I turned, to my right and to my left. For the rest, I found them, Heaven be thanked, with healthy cheeks and lusty voices. One was holding a slice of white bread, like a king's son; the other a crust of brown bread, as becomes the offspring of a philosopher. I pray the gods to have both the sower and the seed in their keeping, to watch over this field wherein the ears of corn are so kindly alike. Ah! I heard, too, their pretty voices, so sweet that in the childish prattle of one and the other I seemed to be listening—yes! in that chirping of your pretty chickens—to the limpid and harmonious notes of your own oratory. Take care! You will find me growing independent having those I could love in your place;—love, on the surety of my eyes and ears." The Emperor replies with equal affection: "I, too, have seen my little ones in your sight of them: as also I saw yourself in reading your letter. It is that charming letter which forces me to write thus." Alas! Apollonius; what has become of the Stoic ἀπάθεια which you inculcated with such great pains? The spirit indeed was willing, but the flesh was weak; and so the good Emperor cared more for the slender breath of life that kept soul and body together in his little Annius Verus than for all the sublime mysticity of the Weltseele—the world-soul of the Stoic creed. All the sadder was the early death of his children, one after another; one son alone being left to him—Commodus, his successor in the Empire—assuredly

not the fittest to survive. “Better that he had never been born,” anyone had said, except he who had most right of all to say it. But for Marcus, whatever was, was right; the gods, if gods there were, determined all things, and they could do no wrong. Commodus, bright, handsome, impulsive, wayward, fond of gladiators and low life, found the teaching of Fronto and his father little to his taste. He was more at home in the circus and the amphitheatre than in the lecture-room; with the actors, the archers and the gladiators and the “smart set,” which Faustina gathered round her, than with the bearded and hooded sophists and rhetoricians who talked ἐγκράτεια (self-restraint) and αὐτάρκεια (self-sufficiency) in the palace gardens.

Bitter as must have been his disappointment at his ill-success with Commodus, there was another which thrust home deeper. Ill-fame had long been gathering round the name of his wife Faustina—the most beautiful woman in the Empire. One of her vivacious temperament, more Parisian than Roman, was assuredly ill-mated with the Stoic Emperor, whose days were spent in introspection; their union was “the great paradox of the age.” She knew no law but the law of the senses: while he was ever guided by the admirable but unamiable call of duty, cold as the beckoning of a star, not soft and warm as the sunlight of devotion. No modern belle of the season had more zest in the life of the moment than she had; whilst he lived always in the shadow of the wings of Death. “Since it is possible that thou mayest depart from life this very moment, regulate every act and thought accordingly.” Every act was to be done “with forethought, as if it were the last of thy life.” Yet, different as they were, by a whole heaven’s breadth in character, it is to the credit of both that

they loved one another. The rumours that assailed her name were probably in great part the exaggerations of prurient gossips, though with sufficient foundation to make them credible. Whatever their truth, the Emperor did not hearken to them. Even when they became the property of the stage and he himself was ridiculed in connexion with them, he paid no heed. In the first book of the Meditations, written a few years before the death of Faustina, he thanks the gods that he had such a wife, "so obedient, so affectionate, so simple." He, too, must have felt at times that Cæsar's wife should be above suspicion, but his kindly nature was ever disposed to take the most charitable view of things, and he minded little the slanderous tongues of men.

"Does a man gather figs from thistles, or grapes from thorns?"—this was the keynote to his philosophy of life—a strange fatalist philosophy it too often was; but it served to lay the gibbering spectres that haunted the palace of the Cæsars. After all, Faustina, associating with sailors and gladiators (even if the worst were true), and Commodus, already giving free reign to his passions over all the paths of license, were but acting in accordance with nature, "just as the fruit trees" or the beasts of the forest. Thus, in the loneliness of his spirit, would Aurelius reason, with an indulgence to the shortcomings (or worse) of others, which we must condemn as weakness. But perhaps it was owing to his tact and consideration that her untamed restlessness carried her to no greater excesses, and that Pater's words are true, "the one thing quite certain about her, besides her extraordinary beauty, is her sweetness to himself."

One of his biographers, writing under the Emperor Diocletian, has this pious reflection on the story:

"Such is the force of daily life in a good ruler, so great the power of his sanctity, gentleness, and piety, that no breath of slander or invidious suggestion from an acquaintance can avail to sully his memory. In short, to Antonine, immutable as the heavens in the tenor of his own life, and in the manifestations of his own moral temper, and who was not by possibility liable to any impulse or movement of change, on any alien suggestion, it was not eventually an injury that he was dishonoured by some of his connexions; on him, invulnerable in his own character, neither a harlot for his wife, nor a gladiator for his son, could inflict a wound. Then as now, O sacred lord Diocletian! he was reputed a god; not as others are reputed but specially and in a separate sense, and with a privilege to such worship from all men as is addressed to his memory by yourself, who often breathe a wish to heaven that you were or could be such in life and merciful disposition as was Marcus Aurelius."

We saw that even Marcus' integrity could not shield his household from the taint of scandal, ever mingling with the divinity that doth hedge a king; yet the life of that household was of the simplest kind. The Emperor's tastes were mostly domestic—philosophy, the fine arts and intercourse with the learned world around him. The palace was a museum of all the curious and choice things of every land gathered together by Hadrian and preceding Emperors; the precious and luxurious were strewn all around in Oriental magnificence; but not for long. The Emperor had learnt from Antoninus to be a king without the trappings; and in his later life he set an example truly Platonic to all future monarchs of private detachment for the sake of the public good. At that time distress became universal; the treasury

was exhausted; and yet money was wanted for the wars in the North. In these circumstances, in order to avoid all further taxation, Marcus put all the treasures of his Roman palaces and country villas into the public market. Jewels, pictures, furniture of rare workmanship; dinner-services of gold and crystal; murrhine vases; the rich hangings and sumptuous apparel of the imperial household, including even the wardrobe of silken robes, interwoven with gold, which had been his wife's before her death: all these objects, made sacred by long use in the home of the divine Cæsars, were put under the hammer and fetched fabulous prices. The auction lasted two months. The *novi homines*—the Roman equivalent for our *nouveaux riches*—were as keen as would be a group of Americans at an auction of the Vatican contents. Thus the historic palace of the Cæsars was despoiled; but Marcus was content while the neighbouring library in the temple of Apollo remained intact, with Fronto and Rusticus to come at morning and evening and walk with him amidst the shrubberies of the Palatine discoursing on the great Greek schools of Ionia, of Athens, and of Elea; of Democrites, of Plato, Zeno and Pythagoras and his favourite Epictetus.

In his home, as in public, he was devoted to the old religious practices. The *lararium*—or family shrine—contained statues of his favourite gods, one of his own *Genius* (or spiritual counterpart) and those of his favourite philosophers and teachers. Here he would offer the morning sacrifice with flowers and lights and incense, and beg the favour of the gods for himself and for the Empire. There he would utter a prayer for the wayward Commodus and Faustina, and for the courage to persevere to the end on his own steep path. "Every morning I pray for Faustina,"

he writes; and again: “My mother’s illness leaves me not a moment’s rest; and now Faustina’s confinement is approaching. Well, we must trust in the gods.” In all this, how strange the mixture of truth and falsehood; of crude superstition and a higher light breaking through; of matter and spirit; perhaps even of nature and grace; for it is hard not to see the special handiwork of God in these fair works of the spirit world—who will set limits to His mercy and power? or who will nicely disentangle the strands of that strange mesh-work, a human soul? St. Clement of Alexandria and St. Augustine saw in those pagan heroes those who were to prepare the way of the Lord and make straight His paths. “Paganism saw at least the road from its hill-top,” said Augustine. We too may say that they were not far from the Kingdom of God.

Christo iam tum venienti,
Crede, parata via est.

“Believe me even then the path was made straight for Christ already on His way.” So sang the Christian Prudentius; and we sing, Amen! Even so, Lord Jesus.

CHAPTER V
ON THE DANUBE

A prince of peace, Marcus Aurelius was destined by the irony of fate to live most of his days as a leader of battles. The low rumbling of war from the provinces mingled discordantly with the acclamations which proclaimed him Princeps, Rome's chief citizen and lord. The disturbances in Britain and on the Rhine were easily quelled; but not so in Parthia or on the Danube.

Parthia was Rome's great rival in the old world. More than once had the captains of that mysterious Eastern kingdom plucked the laurels from Roman brows; the Roman eagle had brooded in captivity in Parthian dungeons; and had been released not by steel but by gold. On the succession of Marcus, King Vologeses, a man with all the spirit and ambition of his race, determined to secure for himself the neighbouring kingdom of Armenia. The Romans resisted and their first army was annihilated. This defeat was quickly followed by another; the Eastern legions were demoralised, and things looked grave for Rome.

It was at this crisis that Marcus entrusted to his

consort, Lucius Veras, the command in the East: a foolish choice, scarcely less foolish than the first folly of making him his consort. For Lucius had neither ability nor morality; he spent his days amidst the pleasant groves, the flowers and the perfumes and the sensuous society of Antioch. He committed the campaign to the care of his generals, the chief of them, Avidius Cassius, a soldier tried and true; whilst he himself frittered away his hours in soft dalliance amidst the ill-famed groves of Daphne, which made Antioch the lodestone of voluptuaries from all parts of the world. Avidius Cassius with Priscus and Martius Veras ended the war within a few years; and Lucius Verus with a heavy heart turned his face towards the West, to celebrate a triumph and receive high titles in Rome for his great achievements. But Rome paid dearly for the conquest; for with the army came the plague which devastated the capital and Italy.

In the desolation which surrounded him, the Stoic Emperor recognised the need for something more inspiring than the maxims of his masters, Zeno and Chrysippus. The futility of such chamber philosophy and religion was borne home to him with fearful intensity by the human misery he saw on every side, the stench of the unburied dead, the haggard looks and demoniacal cries of the living. He recognised, then, that a syllogism never soothed an aching heart; that for life's tragic moments we need a living, breathing, throbbing, thrilling, religion, a religion of the whole man. Hence he called on all the gods, old and new, Roman, Grecian, Eastern and Egyptian, to aid the suffering State. Every altar reeked with the incense of sacrifice; great nobles marched in procession bearing the statues of the gods; noble ladies might be seen, half-naked, standing beneath

the platform from which the hot blood of the slain bull poured down upon them, enduring this baptism of the Great Mother, by which they were to be "reborn for eternity"; at eventide a wanderer in the Campus Martius might hear the vesper song of Isis, and entering her shrine might see dark Egyptians holding up the water of the Nile for adoration; or, descending into a subterranean chapel, he might see the slave, the soldier, and the senator, side by side, attending at the strange mystic initiations of Mithra, the Unconquered One, the god of light, the strong young god in Phrygian cap and loose flowing mantle caught by the sculptor in the symbolic slaying of the bull. No extravagance of superstition, however fantastic, was omitted, not even the greatest extravagance of all, the cry of "the Christians to the lions." If Aurelius had but known; if Rome in its desolation could have seen; if modern Europe and its rulers could but realise the secret healing of Christ's religion of sorrow, how much the world, laboured and heavy-burdened, would be refreshed! But Marcus did not know this healing. He prayed and he sacrificed: but the plague did not pass, nor were his people comforted. The ancient world never recovered from the blow, Niebuhr says. While it yet raged, another call to arms came, this time from the Danube.

It was the severest onset of the barbarians which the Roman Empire had yet endured. All the tribes from the Rhine to the Don, Teutonic and Slavonic, seemed in league against it. These wild Northmen, chaste and strong of limb, had hurled themselves on the Danube frontier and broken into the sacred precincts of the *Pax Romana*. The Danube passed, Pannonia, Dacia, Greece were overrun. The prints of Northern hoofs were on the plains of Rhætia and Noricum; and

the wild Marcomanni were seen in the streets of Venice and Padua. Well might the Romans fear that it would be with them now as it was in the days of Hannibal. Aye, and even worse; for the Romans of the second century of the Empire were not the Romans of the second or third century before the fall of the Republic; and to replace a Scipio and a Marcellus, they had for leader not a Vespasian or a Trajan, but a sickly "Greekling," "a philosophical old woman," as Avidius Cassius used to call him. This was their Emperor Aurelius, and in these wars on the Danube he was amply to refute these taunts of the men of rougher mould. His was the great task of stemming the first inflow of those nomadic tribes which, two centuries later, swept in full flood-tide over the Empire; and he performed it well if not greatly.

The heralds of the revolt found him at his work of peace and legislation, of charity and self-culture in the capital. Now came the test of his principles of devotion to duty. Would he face the loneliness, spiritual and intellectual, the barbarity, the long-drawn desolation of a campaign in the dull plains of Hungary? Would he be a leader to his people? or would he, like certain selfish souls, wrap himself in himself and seek his own advancement towards the sapiency of the perfect Stoic at the cost of his people? It was the test of a man; and he answered well to it. He elected to lead the troops in person.

This was in the year A.D. 167. The Romans were just then busy burying their plague-stricken, but the call to arms would brook no delay; and to arms they went. War, the plague, and the Emperor's charities had exhausted the treasury; hence the difficulty in raising supplies and a force. It was then that he sold

by auction the treasures of the palace and his villas and thus secured the required funds. To swell the numbers of his troops he compelled the gladiators to serve. This was the most unpopular act of his reign as it was one of the most creditable. “He wants to steal our amusements from us,” cried one; “Aye, to compel us to be philosophers,” cried another of the mob, who cared for nothing but the *panem et circenses*, the public dole of food and the public games. The sporting set, the loungers, the fast young men about town, the brutalised rabble, almost created a revolt against the act. They cared little for the Empire, if they could but get their meed of blood; the gladiators were better spent in glutting their evil eyes than in checking the onrush of those Wandering Nations, who were one day to sit in those amphitheatres and exult over fallen Rome, having changed the history of Europe and the world.

The two Emperors led the troops in all the glory of warlike array through the streets of Rome to the Northern gates. Aurelius, as he rode in all the Imperial adornment, yet with sad, wistful look and countenance sickled o’er with the pale cast of thought, contrasted ominously with the splendour of the pageant of which he was the centre. He seemed to be far away from it all—far away, yes, in the depths of his own soul. On one side of him rode Lucius Verus, resplendent and gay, the hero of levees and banquets; on the other, Faustina, now as ever outshining all in the great functions of state, her beauty making her the darling of the mob. Throughout the war she abode with Marcus faithfully and was called by the army the *Mater castrorum*, the mother of the camp; and the Emperor thanked the gods for the solace her fidelity brought to him.

The army reached Venice in A.D. 168. Such had been the energy of their preparations that a panic seized the barbarian invaders. They begged for peace; but Marcus had determined that there should be no peace or a lasting one; the barbarians must be taught a lesson; and he set about subjugating the tribes one by one. In this he was for a time successful, thanks mainly to his able generals Pompeianus and Pertinax. The Quadi were compelled to restore the 60,000 Roman prisoners they had taken; and in A.D. 169 the Emperors felt justified in returning to Rome, leaving the completion of the war to their generals. On the way Verus died and this left Marcus sole ruler. At Rome he paid the highest honours, civil and religious, to his colleague's questionable memory.

His stay there was, however, abruptly cut short as, owing to the acuteness of the war with the Marcomanni and Jazyges, he had to return again to the fighting line. The Romans once more met with severe defeats. Two commanders fell; and it was not till A.D. 172 that the tide of victory turned. In that year the Marcomanni suffered an overwhelming defeat and the Emperor assumed the title *Germanicus*. But in the meantime the Quadi had rebelled and driven out their king, who was a friend of the Romans, and elected one opposed to Rome. Marcus then turned his attention to these: he set a price of 1,000 pieces of gold on the head of the rebel king; and on his being betrayed sent him to Alexandria.

During one of these campaigns against the Quadi occurred the incident of the "thundering legion"—a story famous in the early Church and much controverted. It is interesting as bringing Marcus and the Christians face to face for the first time.

It was during the hot summer months that a legion

containing many Christians was surrounded by the Quadi in a wooded and hilly country. They were cut off from all means of getting water, and suffered terribly from the heat and thirst. In these straits, the story goes on to say, the Christians in the legion knelt and prayed for release; and lo! suddenly the whole heavens became overcast; a storm gathered and broke over the opposing forces; rain fell abundantly and the Romans gathered it in their helmets and in the hollows of their shields, and drank eagerly and gave to drink to their horses. The barbarians saw that they must now attack before the Romans recovered strength. But the rain which had refreshed the Romans turned to blinding hail against their foes; and the rain and the lightning "burnt them like oil insomuch as they wounded one another to extinguish the fire with blood." Many, seeing such evident favour from heaven for the Roman cause, went over to their side; and Marcus Aurelius received them mercifully.

There are many controverted points in connexion with the details of this story, and the use made of it by the Christian apologists, into which this is not the place to enter. Certain it is that this Danube legion got the title of *Fulminata*, at least for some time; even though the twelfth legion, to whom it properly belonged since the time of Augustus, were at this time at the Euphrates. It is certain, too, that everyone, pagan and Christian, regarded the incident as a miracle. Some attributed it to the prayers of the Emperor himself, and this view was commemorated in bas-reliefs of the Antonine column, erected after death to his memory and to be seen to this day. There one sees represented in the air the winged figure of an old man with streaming hair and beard, the god of rain, Jupiter Pluvius; while the Romans

with helmets and shields receive the torrents of rain, and their enemies lie transfixed to the ground by the hail and lightning. Marcus Aurelius himself was represented in pictures with hands uplifted and praying, with strange forgetfulness of his barbarities against the Christians, “Jove to thee do I lift this hand, which hath never shed blood.” Others attributed this miracle to the Egyptian magician Arnouphis, who accompanied the army.

That there were Christians “in Cæsar’s household” and round Marcus Aurelius is certain. That there were many Christians in this legion cannot reasonably be denied. But the great import of the event for Tertullian and other Christian apologists, before and after him, was based on a letter undoubtedly apocryphal, which Marcus Aurelius was supposed to have written to the Senate, acknowledging that he had been saved by Christian prayers and forbidding their further persecution.

The truth is that Marcus’ attitude to the Christians was in no way changed for the better by this incident, but rather for the worse. As Renan says: “In three or four years the persecution reached the highest pitch of fury it knew before Decius.” In Africa persecution was widespread and furious; Sardinia was crowded with Christian exiles; in Byzantium nearly the whole population was put to death with torture; while in Asia, where the Christians were especially numerous, officials vented all their fury on them, interpreting the laws in a way in which they had never been intended to be applied. “Truly,” to quote Renan again, “these repeated persecutions were a bloody contradiction to a century of humanity.” Marcus was not directly responsible for all this cruelty; he was probably for

the most part passive and indifferent. Some of the Christian apologists certainly looked on him as friendly, as, for instance, Melito, who wrote to him: "As for yourself, who cherish the same kind of feeling for us [as the other good Emperors], with a heightened degree of philanthropy and philosophy, we rest assured that you will do what we ask you." But the confidence of the Christians in Marcus' humanity and friendship for them and in his ability to restrain the pagan mob or his own more brutal officials was ill-founded. This passing incident in the Danube campaign was of little importance in the history of the Empire, but its interest will never die as a picturesque detail in the great world-battle of the spirit then in its acutest stage.

In A.D. 175 Marcus followed up his reduction of the Quadi by that of the Jazyges. This practically ended the war. Marcus intended securing the fruit of his conquest by establishing two more Roman provinces; but a new danger had appeared in the East, and he had to conclude a hasty peace with the barbarians and to hurry with all speed to Syria.

These victories in the North stirred in him no pride. Here is his sadly disillusioned comment on the whole campaign: "A spider is proud when it has caught a fly, and a hunter when he has caught a poor hare, and another when he has taken a little fish in a net, and another when he has taken wild boars, *and another when he has taken Sarmatians. Are not these robbers, if thou examinest their principles?*"

He can scarcely have been an inspiring general who took this view of war; and such sentiments have caused many active spirits to find him a very dull person indeed. After this we can scarcely wonder at the remark of one of his generals: "The soldiers don't

understand you; they don't know Greek." In the frieze on the Antonine column which represents him on horseback, surrounded by banners and triumphant soldiers, receiving the submission of the kneeling Germans, there is the same disenchantment in his eyes, the same firm lines of duty on the lips; there is no flash of enthusiasm, no gloating over the fallen. He seems absorbed in the thought that all is vanity, and the vanquished look at him with a puzzled, interested look which has something of affection in it.

CHAPTER VI
THE BOOK OF MEDITATIONS

It was in the midst of this active strife that Marcus wrote one of the most introspective and peaceful of books—his Thoughts About Himself (τὰ εἰς ἑαυτὸν βιβλία)—the twelve books of his Meditations. Few books have had such influence over men's lives, and its influence still abides; and for all students of humanity it will ever be a priceless document illustrative of one great phase of human thought, and one great thinker. Surely Stevenson, testifying to the moulding force of this little book on his own life, did not exaggerate in saying: "The dispassionate gravity, the noble forgetfulness of self, the tenderness of others that are there expressed, and were practised on so large a scale in the life of its writer, make this book a book quite by itself. No man can read it and not be moved.... When you have read, you carry away with you a memory of the man himself; it is as though you had touched a loyal heart, looked into brave eyes and made a noble friend; there is another bond on you thenceforward, binding you to life and to the love of virtue."

The secret of this charm and influence is in the candour and utter absence of self-consciousness of

the book. It reveals the author as he wished himself to live, a sincere and open life, “lived on the mountain top—a naked soul more visible than the body which clothed it,” a soul whose thoughts may be read “as the beloved one reads all things in the lover’s eyes.” These jottings were the fruit of his frequent searchings of the heart, the outward expression of the inner life of one who seemed to live all within, with now and then some golden gleanings from his favourite moralists. These thoughts he meant to be his strength against the beggarly elements in his weaker moments. They, with the *Discourse of Epictetus*, were to be his mainstay. This latter book—a noble book too—was his à Kempis, and to it he owed the suggestion of gathering together his own thoughts. Having these he bore his cloister always with him.

“Men seek retreats for themselves, houses in the country, sea-shores and mountains; and thou too art wont to desire such things very much. But this is altogether a mark of the most common sort of men, for it is in thy power, whenever thou shalt choose, to retire into thyself. For nowhere either with more quiet or more freedom from trouble does a man retire than into his own soul, particularly when he has within him such thoughts that, by looking into them, he is immediately in perfect tranquillity; and I affirm that tranquillity is nothing else than the good ordering of the mind. Constantly then give to thyself this retreat and renew thyself; and let thy principles be brief and fundamental, which, as soon as thou shalt recur to them, will be sufficient to cleanse the soul completely, and to send thee back free from all discontent with the things to which thou returnest.”

“For with what art thou discontented?” he asks

himself. The badness of men? The lot that is assigned to thee out of the universe? The clinging of corporal things still to thee? The desire of the thing called fame? Thou hast maxims that will alleviate all these. "This then remains. Remember to retire into this little territory of thine own, and above all do not distract or strain thyself, but be free and look at things as a man, as a human being, as a citizen, as a mortal. But amongst the things readiest to thy hand to which thou shalt return, let there be these, which are two: One is that *things* do not touch the soul, for they are external and immovable; but our perturbations come only from the *opinion* which is within. The other is that all these things which thou seest change immediately and will no longer be; and constantly bear in mind how many of these changes thou hast already witnessed. The Universe is transformation; life is opinion."

In these last sentences we have the kernel of the Stoic doctrine of resignation.

> "The mind is its own place, and in itself
> Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."

The mind can weave its own Universe; and with it it rests to weave it a fairyland of ordered goodness and beauty. All things without are fleeting and unstable, shadows that will pass, mists that disappear at dawn. "There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so." "The aids to nobler life are all within." Man is but part of the Universe, and his best wisdom is to live in accord with its beautiful harmony, which disposes all things sweetly for the good of all. It would be contrary to the Divine Kosmos, the ordering of the great world-spirit, if what were for the good of all were not for the good of each:

"If the gods have determined about me and about the

things which must happen to me, they have determined well, for it is not easy even to imagine a deity without forethought; and as to doing me any harm, why should they have any desire towards that? For what advantage would result to them from this, or to the whole, which is the special object of their providence? But if they have not determined about me individually, they have certainly determined about the whole at least, and the things which happen by way of sequence in this general arrangement I ought to accept with pleasure and to be content with them. But if they determine about nothing, which it is wicked to believe, or if we do believe it, let us neither sacrifice, nor pray, nor swear by them, nor do anything else which we do as if the gods were present and lived with us—but if, however, the gods determine about none of those things which concern us, I am able to determine about myself, and I can inquire about that which is useful; and that is useful to each man which is conformable to his own constitution and nature. But my nature is rational and social; my city and country so far as I am Antoninus is Rome, but so far as I am a man it is the world. The things then that are useful to these cities are alone useful to me."

All this is very beautiful; it is admirable; but it is not human. An abstract idea never ministered to a mind diseased or healed a broken heart; and when all is said the Stoic Weltanschauung is a sad one. As Arnold felt many have felt: "It is impossible to rise from reading Epictetus or Marcus Aurelius without a sense of constraint and melancholy, without feeling that the burden laid upon man is well-nigh greater than he can bear." But we must add with him: "Honour to the sages who have felt this, and yet have borne it." For ourselves we feel a need of

something more personal, something with more love and sympathy and appeal. How chilling are the maxims of the Porch beside the glowing verses of the Apostle of Love, which express the essence of Christianity—an intense personal love for God, an acceptance of all trials from a motive of love, and a love of our neighbour like unto the love God bears them.

This was the Christian answer to all the ancient philosophies—the solution of the world-problem by love; and neither in Marcus Aurelius nor Plotinus nor any of the great pagans do we find anything at once so human and divine, anything which so responds to the noblest aspirations of the human soul without losing sight of its weakness.

But it is not the formal doctrine of the book of the Meditations which gives it its attraction; it is the spirit of the author it reveals so intimately. Rarely do we get from philosophers such familiar self-revelation as this from the beginning of the fifth book: interesting, even though it suggests a lack of humour and sense of proportion:

“In the morning when thou risest unwillingly, let this thought be present—I am rising to the work of a human being. Why then am I dissatisfied if I am going to do the things for which I exist and for which I was brought into this world? Or have I been made for this, to lie in the bed-clothes and keep myself warm? But this is more pleasant—Dost thou exist then to take thy pleasure and not at all for action or exertion? Dost thou not see the little plants, the little birds, the ants, the spiders, the bees, working together to put in order their several parts of the Universe? And art thou unwilling to do the work of a human being, and dost thou not make haste to do

that which is according to thy nature?" Imagine the sight of a spider rousing a sluggard!

And again in the same book:

"Thou sayest, Men cannot admire the sharpness of thy wits. Be it so; but there are many other things of which thou canst not say, I am not formed for them by nature. Show those qualities then which are altogether in thy power, sincerity, gravity, endurance of labour, aversion to pleasure, contentment with thy portion and with few things, benevolence, frankness, no love of superfluity, freedom from trifling magnanimity. Dost thou not see how many qualities thou art immediately able to exhibit, in which there is no excuse of natural incapacity and unfitness, and yet thou still remainest voluntarily below the mark? or art thou compelled through being defectively furnished by nature to murmur, and to be stingy, and to flatter and to find fault with thy poor body, and to try to please men, and to make great display, and to be restless in thy mind? No, by the gods; but thou mightest have been delivered from these things long ago. Only if in truth thou canst be charged with being rather slow and dull of comprehension, thou must exert thyself about this also, not neglecting it nor yet taking pleasure in thy dullness."

Stoic optimism can scarcely be said to have solved the mysteries of evil and the unrest of the soul, or satisfied the craving for happiness, for guidance and support which is deep down in every heart. Yet the followers of that school were a good influence on a corrupt world. We feel in all the book of the Meditations a calm strength, a forbearance, a perseverance despite failure in good resolutions, which does all honour to its author living in the most sensual surroundings. And in Marcus this stern

character is relieved by touches of tender affection and gratitude constantly recurring. They reveal a character far inferior to that of the Christian Saint; nobody except some of our neo-pagan paradoxists will look for such perfection in him; the marvel is that he so often reminds us of them and approaches them even afar. In none of those pagan heroes do we find that blending of strength and humility, of austerity and gentlest love, that touch of the Light Divine and that reflex of Christ, which remove a St. Francis de Sales or a St. Vincent de Paul a whole heaven's breadth from them and make it an irreverence to compare the one to the other.

But we do find wonderful things in them. Take, for instance, the nine considerations which Marcus proposed for himself as an aid to bearing with those who had offended him; they are given in the eleventh book, and the second of them well shows the imperfection inseparable from pagan virtue, even the highest: (1) All men are born for one another. (2) Consider the private vices of those that have offended thee. (3) If they do wrong it is involuntarily and in ignorance. (4) Thou also doest many things wrong, and thou art a man like others; and even if thou dost abstain from certain faults still thou hast the disposition to commit them, though either through cowardice or concern about reputation or some such mean motive thou dost abstain from such faults. (5) You may be judging them rashly. (6) "Man's life is only a moment, and after a short time we are all laid out dead." (7) Your annoyance is due not to those acts but to your own impressions. (He says elsewhere: "How easy it is to repel and to wipe away every impression which is troublesome or unsuitable, and immediately to be in all tranquillity.") (8) Anger and vexation are a greater

evil than the thing which causes them. (9) One of the most amiable passages in the Meditations: “Consider that benevolence is invincible if it be genuine, and not an affected smile and acting a part. For what will the most violent man do to thee if thou continuest to be of a benevolent disposition towards him, and if, as opportunity offers, thou gently admonishest him and calmly correctest his errors at the very time when he is trying to do thee harm, saying, Not so, my child: we are constituted by nature for something else: I shall certainly not be injured, but thou art injuring thyself, my child—and show him with gentle tact and by general principles that this is so, and that even bees do not do as he does, nor any animals, which are formed by nature to be gregarious. And thou must do this neither with any double meaning nor in way of reproach, but affectionately and without any rancour in thy soul; and not as if thou wert lecturing him, nor yet that any by-stander may admire, but when he is alone.” Again he asks himself what have the evil deeds of others to do with the intellect’s abiding pure, self-possessed, temperate, and just. Nothing at all: “Even as if one standing by a sweet and transparent fountain were to utter abuse against it, and it ceased not to pour forth its salutary waters. And if one cast mud or filth therein, it would speedily dissipate and wash it away, and would in no wise be stained by it. How shalt thou be an ever-flowing spring, and not a cistern? Grow every hour into freedom, united with gentleness, simplicity and modesty.”

The view of his fellow-men which Marcus expresses is a curious mixture of charity, pity, and contempt. He frequently strengthened himself against human respect by considering that the evil lives of other men made their opinion contemptible. These

passages seem to reveal a nature tinged with spiritual pride and aloofness. He insists time and again on the fellowship of men, as fellow-citizens of one great polity: but he has a profound sense of their folly and baseness too. Yet his lonely nature craved for friendship with kindred souls, though seemingly fastidious in its friendship. With his detached attitude towards his fellow-men it is little wonder that he had but few friends; and he was conscious of it. In a letter to Fronto he mentions this and also in a passage from the Meditations: “Solace your departure with the reflection: I am leaving a life in which my own associates, for whom I have so strived, prayed, and thought, themselves wish for my removal, their hope being that they will perchance gain in freedom thereby.”

This note of world-weariness and disillusion as regards everything men prize recurs again and again in the course of the Meditations: it runs through his doctrines of resignation, of charity and forbearance, of self-restraint and peace. Its recurrence in the many —perhaps too many—quotations in this chapter may have wearied the reader: yet I do not regret that I have made it prominent, for it was the most intense idea in the Emperor’s mind, and surely strange enough to be interesting when found in the ruler of the greatest of Empires at the height of its civilisation. I hope, too, that these quotations will initiate the reader into the spirit of the great Stoic. There was no question of giving an exact account of the system expounded in the Meditations: for there is no such system; Marcus Aurelius was more interested in virtue than in learning; he would rather feel compunction than know its definition.

CHAPTER VII
LAST DAYS IN ROME

The hasty summons to the East which interrupted Marcus' northern campaign was due to the revolt of one of his best generals, Avidius Cassius.

Cassius until now had been loyal to the Emperor and had served him well in the war against the Parthians. In that war the worthless debauchee Lucius Verus, Marcus' colleague, had been nominally in command, but really confined his campaigns to the voluptuous groves of Daphne, while Cassius bore the brunt of the fight. Further, Cassius had by iron discipline restored the efficiency of the Eastern legions. At first, like all reformers, he was cordially hated; this hatred found expression in mutiny; but, on this being suppressed, gave place to respect and even to popularity. It were well for Cassius had he confined his zeal for reform to the army; but he wished to reform the Emperor and the court also. His murmurings became public property, and Lucius Verus wrote to Marcus warning him against him: "I would you had him closely watched. For he is a general disliker of us and of our doings; he is gathering together an enormous treasure, and he makes an open jest of our literary pursuits. You, for

instance, he calls a philosophising old woman, and me a dissolute buffoon and a scamp. Consider what you would have done. For my part I bear the fellow no ill-will; but again I say take care that he does not do mischief to you and to your children."

The answer of Marcus gives a most searching insight into his character. Steeped in the most obstinately logical fatalism, it is yet generous and noble and "breathes the very soul of careless magnanimity reposing upon conscious innocence":—

"I have read your letter, and I will confess to you I think it more scrupulously timid than becomes an Emperor, and timid in a way unsuitable to the spirit of our times. Consider this—if the Empire is destined to Cassius by the decrees of Providence, in that case it will not be in our power to put him to death, however much we may desire to do so. You know your great-grandfather's saying, 'No prince ever killed his own heir'; no man, that is, ever yet prevailed against one whom Providence had marked out as his successor. On the other hand, if Providence opposes him, then, without any cruelty on our part, he will fall spontaneously into some snare prepared for him by destiny.... For Cassius, then, let him keep his present temper and inclinations, and the more so, being (as he is) a good general, austere in discipline, brave, and one whom the State cannot afford to lose. For as to what you insinuate, that I ought to provide for my children's interests, by putting this man judiciously out of the way, very frankly I say to you, 'Perish, my children, if Avidius shall deserve more attachment than they, and if it shall prove salutary to the State that Cassius should triumph rather than that the children of Marcus should survive.'"

Gradually Cassius had been strengthening his forces;

and at length in A.D. 175 openly raised the standard of revolt against the reign of the philosophers. His manifesto shows how deeply the military party resented the ascendancy of men who seemed to have no qualification for office except their long beards and eccentric life. Jibes such as this were common: "His beard is worth ten thousand sesterces to him; come, we shall have to pay goats a salary next!" Avidius admits that Marcus is a worthy man, but he is letting the State go to ruin, while "hungry blood-suckers batten on her vitals." He longs for the old strict regime of Cato. "Marcus Antoninus is a scholar; he enacts the philosopher; and he tries conclusions concerning the four elements and upon the nature of the soul; and he discourses learnedly upon the *Honestum*; and concerning the *Summum Bonum* he is unanswerable. Meanwhile, is he learned in the interests of the State? Can he argue a point upon the public economy?" And he adds: "You see what a host of sabres is required, what a host of impeachments, sentences, executions, before the commonwealth can resume its ancient integrity!"

A rumour that Marcus was dead hastened the outbreak of the revolt and won support for Cassius. But it was quickly contradicted; and this caused the collapse of his forces. Officers and men deserted him, and he was at length assassinated by one of his own followers.

Meanwhile Marcus was coming with all haste from the Danube, accompanied by Faustina. When they reached Cappadocia, at the foot of Mount Taurus, Faustina died, to his great grief, and the tongues of the slanderers were silent at length. The last accusation against her was that she had been privy to this very revolt, and had promised to marry Cassius

in the event of its success. But to all these charges we must give a verdict of “not proven”; they are for the most part unreliable gossip of the most gossiping of historians. But even though she was not guilty of all that was laid to her charge, yet she seems to have wearied of the over-wisdom of Marcus and his friends: she lived a different life and had different tastes from his. Yet even after her death Marcus cherished her memory. He had a temple built to her honour on the spot where she died, and at his request the Senate decreed her deification. The visitor to Rome may still see in the Capitoline Museum a bas-relief in which she is represented being borne up to heaven by Fame, while Marcus follows her from the earth with that look of tender, wistful pathos which characterises most of the representations of him. In decreeing these honours, as also in establishing an institute for orphans to be called *Faustinianæ*, after her name, he was but following step by step the action of his father Antoninus on the death of the elder Faustina.

When Marcus reached Antioch the revolt was already ended. One of the assassins, hoping for reward, brought the head of Cassius to the Emperor; but he put him from him with indignation and loathing. His one regret was that he had been deprived of the pleasure of pardoning his enemy.

But the good deed was done, if not to Cassius, at any rate to his wife and relatives. Many urged him to wreak his vengeance on them. Faustina, before her death, had insisted that he “should show no mercy to men that showed none to you, nor would have shown any to me or my sons in case they had gained the victory”; she would have had him punish the army also severely as accomplices. Marcus replied

that he admired her zeal for their family, but said that he would spare Cassius' wife and children and son-in-law and commend them to the mercy of the Senate. As to his other relatives: "Why should I speak of pardon to them, who indeed have done no wrong, and are blameless even in purpose." The Senate granted his requests, and the household of Cassius was amply provided for by the generosity of the Emperor.

We are wont to think of the forgiving to seventy times seven times as the peculiar and most characteristic virtue of Christianity as it assuredly is the most beautiful of the natural virtues. Yet it was a virtue familiar to the wise ones of the Stoics, and perhaps not a difficult virtue to those who adopted their philosophy of life. If nothing matters and all is in very truth but vanity of vanities and the soul is steeped in this conviction, the disposition to look on life's worries, whatever their sources, as but petty and trifling, is natural and spontaneous. For one with the Stoic temperament hard things are but the whetstone of the will, and herein precisely lies the danger of that temperament from the Christian point of view. The Stoic will, if not well-ordered, is a harsh grinding thing which sucks in and crushes the beautiful things of life as grist beneath its wheels. It exults in its strength with a forbidding and unlovely pride, so different from the beautiful diffidence of Christian strength, which loves not the beauty of the creatures less, but the beauty of the Creator more, and with a kind of supernatural Epicureanism renounces the beauty of the fleeting for the sake of the beauty of which it is but an image far removed, the beauty of Him whose beauty is older than the hills and will abide when they have crumbled away.

It is to the credit of Marcus Aurelius that even in this he avoided to a great extent the faults of his virtues; it is the touch of emotion in his writings and in those of the other later Stoics of the Empire which gives them their charm beyond the earlier members of the school. We have many indications that his soul was open to the ἀπορροὴ τοῦ κάλλους, the inflow of beauty from sensible things, while his correspondence with Fronto shows that his nature was affectionate. Throughout the Meditations also we see the reflection of the constant struggle which he had with his own nature. One who did not feel deeply would never have insisted so much on the necessity for control of the feelings. It is a fallacy to think that the Stoic is necessarily dead to humanity. In a sense, and in theory at least, he is the truest lover of man and the human. His sole vocation in life is the good of the whole; the *caritas generis humani* (love for his fellow-men), if not the central point of their system and far from the Christian ideal of charity in beauty and efficacy, yet was present and active in them. The Stoic must check his feelings but not suppress them. It suffices that the barrier of the will be raised and strengthened day by day and then the feelings may surge up behind it, ready for right use; but as servants not as masters. Thus the paradox is true that those have often the strongest emotions whose emotions are most in check.

On his way back from the East the Emperor passed through Athens. There he found much that attracted him and much that repelled. The schools of philosophy were his chief interest, but he liked not their sophisms and disputations, and the irresponsibility which seemed irreverent towards the true philosophy whose end was life. When he thinks of the dialecticians of his day he thanks the gods that

he did not make more proficiency in rhetoric, poetry, and the other studies "in which I should perhaps have been completely engaged, if I had seen that I was making progress in them." He thinks with gratitude of Rusticus as having taught him "not to be led astray to sophistic emulation, nor to writing on speculative matters, nor to delivering little hortatory orations, nor to showing myself off as a man who practises much discipline or does benevolent acts in order to make a display; and to abstain from rhetoric and fine-writing." "*Quid tibi de generibus et speciebus?*" said à Kempis.

But though the spirit of the schools was repugnant to his sincerity, yet, true to his leading principle of fostering culture, he founded several chairs in what we may call the University of Athens.

While at Athens he was also initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries. This act was not with him merely an act of State-policy, an act of condescension to an alien religion such as other Emperors often showed; nor was it, as it was with Hadrian, the outcome of a restless desire to pry into the novel and the mysterious. With Marcus Aurelius it was probably a sincere act of religion. There was much in the symbolism and ritual of the mysteries, its hymns and processions and dramatic representations resembling the mystery plays of the Middle Ages, in its fasting and nightly torchlight processions by the sea-shore and through the plain, which would appeal to his ritualistic nature. The doctrines of expiation and a future life, the καλαὶ ἐλπίδες—the fair hopes of Eleusis, must have had an especial attraction for him.

As to his own religious views, he certainly was not the Agnostic which Renan would have him be. "In

every time and place," he says, "it rests with thyself to use the event of the hour religiously: at all seasons worship the gods." He asserts that it is impious to deny the existence of the gods, and he rests his theories of right and wrong on the supposition of their existence. True, as Renan points out, he often holds out to himself the alternative of their non-existence, but even then it is only to assert the existence of the Divinity in another form. He says that if they did not exist, yet truth to our own nature would be a sufficient motive for right action; but our nature is for him but a part of the nature which is Divine, and derives its sanction from its participation in this supreme nature. His religion was a strange mixture of monotheism, polytheism, and pantheism; but to atheism he never really consents. Strictly speaking, he had no philosophy or theology; for he was not interested in systems as such. Yet he never wavered in his loyalty to the national religion, however much or little of it he really believed when he stood at the sacrificial altar in pontifical robes and chanted the ancient hymns and formularies, all of which he knew by heart.

Indeed, he was more deeply interested in the practical than in the pure reason; and conduct was more for him than dogma: hence it is that his thoughts are so intensely human and universal in their appeal. His nature, however, had little in common with the light and frivolous agnosticism of Renan and the dilettanti; and only a very subjective interpretation of the Meditations can eliminate from them the "supernatural" element. Renan recognises this element to a certain extent, and accounts it a blemish "which, however, does not affect the marvellous beauty of the work as a whole." It is for him, as for Matthew Arnold, the gospel of those who

walk by sight and not by faith, “who have no faith in the supernatural”; and it “will never grow old because it affirms no dogma.”

It is useless to inquire further into the nature of his religious beliefs. He would have been at a loss to define them himself. The great salient feature is here as elsewhere the tragedy of a great moral nature in the throes of superstition, of a beautiful life deprived of its fit setting: a tragedy too common in our own days filling wide spaces with spiritual waste and hopeless sighs, and making hearts desolate for that their light is gone out or flickers low.

On his return to Rome, Marcus celebrated a splendid triumph, shared in by Commodus, over the conquered German peoples. It was against his own better feelings and in concession to Roman vulgarity that he endured this ordeal. He often expresses his disgust for these functions and, as we have seen, regarded conquerors as no better than robbers. The shouts of the mob, the long train of captives, the reeking public banquets were little to his taste; and for him there was no need of the attendant who usually stood behind the conqueror on the triumphal car to remind him that he was a man lest he should perhaps bring down on himself the wrath of the gods by an unseemly arrogance.

There was less need than ever on this day; for with Commodus by his side a great sorrow overshadowed him. He had nominated Commodus as his successor to avoid a worse evil—the evil of civil war, which would certainly have arisen had he chosen one more worthy from his own philosophic circle. Yet Commodus, though still a youth, had already given full reign to his passions; and Marcus can scarcely have failed to foresee the disaster which he was to

bring upon the Empire. The shadow of this sorrow and of the great loneliness which was his during his later years, grows darker and darker over the last books of the Meditations.

As Renan has remarked, they have but one thought, that of passing as gently as may be from the world. In the earlier books he gathers strength for the struggle of life; now all is preparation for death.

The evil plight of public affairs also justified this world-weariness. The signs of decay were already visible in Rome: the handwriting had been seen on the walls of the Capitol. Even Renan has to admit that “in reality the progress effected during the reigns of Antoninus and Marcus Aurelius had been merely superficial. It had been limited to a varnish of hypocrisy and external professions, which people assumed in order to be in harmony with the two wise Emperors. The masses were grossly materialistic; the army was decaying; the laws alone had been changed for the better.” Plague, famine, and war had done their work of death. Marcus did all he could to alleviate the misery; but bad finance had left him helpless to cope with such universal disaster. And to fill his cup of bitterness news was brought that his old enemies on the Danube were in arms again. He must needs, ill and heartsick though he was, gird himself once more and prepare to leave Rome for the wild North—this time never to return.

CHAPTER VIII
"THE END OF THE OLD WORLD"

The peace hastily made in A.D. 175 was broken two years later. The local commanders again proved incompetent to drive back the barbarian hordes, and Marcus had once more to assume the command in person. This time he decided to take with him Commodus, in the hope perhaps that, like so many of the Roman nobles, worthless at home, he might develop in the provinces those powers for government and war which were innate in that race of rulers; or, at the very least, in the hope of strengthening him against effeminate influences by the hard northern winters and the privations of camp life.

Before leaving Rome the Emperor gave a pitiful exhibition of his powerlessness to diffuse the light of his own philosophy amongst his subjects; or else of the strange grip, growing stronger as the shades drew round him, which the pagan superstitions had upon his soul. For seven days before his departure the city was the scene of the wildest religious extravagances. The older gods of the West shared the honours with their lighter brethren from the East and South. The number of white steers sacrificed was so

great that some of the wits circulated an epigrammatical petition from them to the Emperor: "The white oxen to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius: If you return as conqueror, that will be the end of us." Sumptuous feasts were prepared before every temple at which the statues of the gods reclined: and Rome reeled in mad revel. Quacks from all parts of the Empire gathered in Rome and flourished during those days.

Lucian has left us a vivid picture of one of these. This was Alexander of Abonoteichos, the prince of impostors. He had started a new religion in Paphlagonia with mysteries and rites based on those of Eleusis. This had quickly spread over the East; and with the other Eastern impostures found a welcome at Rome. Rutilianus, a Roman senator of consular rank, became its patron and zealous advocate. The new mysteries were celebrated during three days with scenes of wild excitement and immorality. Even the friends of Marcus and Marcus himself were deceived. During the Northern wars, at a word from Alexander's sacred serpent, Marcus had solemnly presided in the robes of the Pontifex Maximus over a most ridiculous ceremony. The Romans were assured that if they cast two lions alive into the Danube they would be victorious over the enemy arrayed against them on the opposite bank. The lions were cast in with all ceremony; but, unfortunately for Alexander's reputation and Marcus' credulity, they were beaten to death on reaching the other bank, and the Romans, when they crossed, fared no better.

The Emperor went through a ceremony at this time which must have been no less revolting to him than it is to us. This was the ancient ceremony of the casting of the dart, a ceremony almost as old as

Rome itself. The Emperor went in procession to the temple of Bellona, surrounded by a mob of fanatics, who cut into their living flesh with knives and whips and then lapped the streaming blood—to honour and placate their Goddess of War! Arrived at the Temple he hurled the dart towards the North—where his enemies were already pressing his armies hard.

When he had done all that he considered necessary to appease the gods or to soothe the superstitious fears of his subjects, Marcus at length set out for the scene of war in A.D. 178. Of this war very little is known. The dream of Augustus and many of the other Emperors, given up as hopeless by them—the extension of the Roman frontier to the Elbe and the consolidation of Roman power in the North—was almost realised. But the Dark Shadow which had crossed Marcus' path so often before drew nigh once more and for the last time. On the eve of a great and, it would seem, a final conquest, illness and death conquered the Conqueror.

It was in the spring of A.D. 180 that the plague which had taken off half the population of the Empire came to claim the life of the Emperor. He fell ill, probably at Vienna, on the 10th of March. His constitution had never been robust and the hardships of the last years had still further weakened it. Hence he recognised immediately that this illness was to be unto death; and is said to have at once welcomed its approach. Continual disappointment had killed all hope within him, and with hope the pain of hope unfulfilled; and so he had no regrets now that that strange spirit which had ever dogged him once more passed by at midnight over the dreary northern plains and entering into his tent dashed the cup of victory from his lips. He asked Commodus as a last

request to complete the war and then prepared for the end. For seven days the illness lasted. On the sixth he bade farewell to his friends. He spoke to them of the vanity of life and the easiness of death; commended to them the interests of the State and Commodus, “if he should prove worthy”; and all this with a great calm. On the seventh day he would see nobody except Commodus, and him only for a short time, with a last despairing hope perhaps of inspiring at least one noble sentiment into that monster of brutality. Then he seemed to sleep; and his sleep deepened into death.

It was a death free from pomp, lonely and detached as his life had been. But death, in whatever form it came, seems to have had no terrors for him. He had often faced the thought of it and always to persuade himself that in it there was nothing to fear, but perhaps much to hope for.

His confidence in facing death sprang from no sure hope of personal immortality. He believed in an immortality for both soul and body and that the gods would care for both; but whether the life beyond would be a continuance of the personal life of time, or whether this human soul should be swallowed up in the great world-soul he knew not. “You have embarked upon life: when you have made your voyage debark without more ado. If you happen to land in another world there will be gods to take care of you there; but if it be your fortune to drop into nothingness, why then you will be no more solicited with pleasure and pain. Then you will have done drudging for your outer covering, which is the more unworthy in proportion as that which serves it is worthy: for the one is all soul, intelligence and divinity, whereas the other is dirt and corruption.”

Yet elsewhere, though admitting the possibility of the absorption of the human soul into the world-soul he rejects the possibility of utter annihilation. “What is sprung from earth dissolves to earth again and heaven-born things fly to their native seat.” But again he adds: “When a man dies, and the spirit is let loose into the air, it holds out for some time, after which it is changed, diffused, or knotted into flame, or else absorbed into the generative principle of the Universe.” This is the best he can promise us: yet how miserable a mockery of human aspirations it is! how unsatisfying to the longings of the soul, which seeks in the spiritual for the most truly and intensely real and in the spiritual and the spiritualised, thus truly real, for the truest beauty!

A philosophy which takes the brightness out of both lives, here and beyond, reducing both to a dull grey mist, can never be a spiritual force, and, if it prevailed, must result in the reversal of all ordinary judgments of value. This was a conclusion frankly accepted by the Stoics, and they carried it even to the extent of the abnegation of man’s most absorbing desire—the will to live. A man may even deny this: for adequate cause he may, nay, even *should*, take away his own life. In ordinary circumstances man should stand at his post till dismissed by his commander; he should play out the tragedy of life to the end as arranged by the dramatist: for just cause he may quit the stage before his part is played out. The reason is that between life and death there is nothing to choose; they are but successive stages of one and the same natural process. Marcus held that man may quit life if he finds it intolerable. True, he says that life ought not to be intolerable: it is our own fault if it is. But supposing that through weakness we cannot bear it, then “we may give it the

slip"; and again because death is not the serious thing men imagine it to be: "What great matter is this business of dying? If the gods exist, you can suffer nothing, for they will do you no harm; and if they do not, or if they take no care of us mortals—why, then a world without gods or providence is not a world worth a man's while to live in. But in truth the being of the gods and their concern in human affairs is beyond dispute." If a man is of such a character or placed in such circumstances that for him a virtuous life is morally impossible, then Marcus says he has just cause for suicide, "for reason would rather that you were nothing than that you were a knave." "You may live now, if you please, as you would choose to do if you were near to dying. But suppose people will not let you—why, then, give life the slip, but by no means make a misfortune of it. If the room smokes, I leave it, and there is an end; for why should one be concerned at the matter?"

Thus did he try by force of argument, often the merest sophistry, to conjure away the dread realities of human existence. But when death called for one after another of his children, he realised how futile his doctrine was. Yet it was the best he could adhere to, and he did but share in the cruel disenchantment that comes sooner or later to all who follow a false philosophy of life. The self-deception which makes these systems plausible in the abstract vanishes at the cold touch of death or at a thrill of love from a kindred heart. All that is most sacred in life, its morality and its ideals, the foundations of society and the aspirations of the individual; the problems that vex men as to the ultimate grounds of obligation, beauty and love; the problems of freedom, of evil and of immortality; the need of the human heart for guidance and support can receive

no adequate explanation except in the acceptance of integral Christianity—namely Catholicism. Hence the folly of our neo-pagan revival. Paganism was tried and is dead with the souls and the hopes it slew; the future lies with a vigorous fighting Catholicity. It is vain to attempt to resurrect the corpse which Constantine prepared for burial. Wisdom and duty bid us follow the system which our whole nature cries out for: reason alone or sentiment alone is a blind guide; truth lies in the leading of the whole man.

Yet the moral greatness which Marcus had attained in spite of all the limitations of his system was made very clear by the universal grief and reverence which was expressed at his death. When his body was brought to Rome the whole city went into mourning. Henceforth we are told men spoke of him no longer by his imperial titles, but old men spoke of him as "Marcus, my son"; young men, as "Marcus, my father"; and men of his own age, as "Marcus, my brother"; such was the affection of all for him. The decreeing of divine honours was not in his case, as it was in that of so many of the Emperors, a formality or a burlesque: it was from the heart; the *vox populi* proclaimed him "propitious god" before the Senate passed the formal decree. And, truly, as St. Augustine said of Plato, we might well pardon the pagans if they raised a temple to him rather than to the gods they honoured. For more than a century after his death his statue was to be seen amongst the household gods in the hearth-shrines of the whole Western Empire, and men looked askance at a chance defaulter to this cult. He was the model of succeeding Emperors, and Christian writers vied with pagans in their praises of him. Even in our own time that strange, melancholy figure is dear to all that

know him: there is a pathos and an interest in his life and thoughts which is unique: “Everyone of us wears mourning in his heart for Marcus Aurelius as though he died but yesterday.”

Renan was right in this; but we cannot admit his further statement that “the day of the death of Marcus Aurelius can be taken as the decisive moment at which the ruin of ancient civilisation was decided.” It was decided long before; perhaps it would be nearer the truth to say that the day of Marcus’ accession was the first day of decadence, as it was the last of the old type of Roman rule. But in truth the fate of empires never hangs on a single day or a single ruler. They grow and they decay over long centuries: the seed of life and the rot of death is working long before its effects appear without; and in the reign of Marcus the Empire was already doomed. The old Roman virtues—those especially which form the *morale* of an imperial race—strict probity, sacrifice of individual interests to the good of the State, initiative, enterprise and the fighting qualities were all dissolving. In their place was being developed the citizen, who is ever the product of centralisation—the man without originality, devotion, or virtue; who is interested in subtlety rather than in truth; wrapped up in his own petty world, incapable of heroism or sacrifice.

In the midst of this death there was a strange stirring of life in the North and in the East—a life which was to feed on the death of the Empire. The forbears of Alaric and his Goths had already knocked at the gate and announced his coming. The eloquent pleadings of the Christian apologists addressed to Marcus himself told of a new stirring in the spiritual and intellectual world—of a new vision which he and his

friends could not or would not see; and the brave words and noble deeds of the martyrs told that there was life in this new creed—yes! life and love to conquer Stoic apathy and pagan death.

CHAPTER IX
THE MARTYRS OF CHRIST

In reading the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius we frequently are struck by the almost Christian spirit which permeates them. Mr. F. H. Myers has well said: “Whatever winds of the Spirit may sweep over the sea of souls the life of Marcus will remain for ever the high-water mark of the unassisted virtue of man.” So sublime and seemingly preternatural is his spirit that men in all ages have asked and answered in various ways the questions: “Has Christianity anything better to offer us? and if so, in what precisely does it consist?” It is as an answer to these questions that I introduce this brief reference to the story of the Martyrs, preferably a few of the many that suffered under Marcus himself.

During his reign the Church endured a persecution severer than any it had yet known. How far he was personally responsible for this we cannot tell. He was not wholly guilty nor yet wholly innocent. He certainly ordered the torture and execution of the Martyrs of Lyons; his most intimate friend sentenced St. Justin to death at Rome; and his most trusted lawyer condemned St. Felicitas and her sons; but, on the other hand, many of the persecutions were due to

the anger of the mob, and withal he knew not what he did. The Christians were to him merely an uncultured and fanatical sect without a single redeeming virtue. In the only passage in the Meditations where he mentions them he attributes their constancy in death to sheer perverseness. After expressing his admiration for a soul, "which is ready, if at any moment it must be separated from the body, to be extinguished, or dissolved, or to continue to exist," he adds, "but this readiness must come from a man's own judgment, not from mere obstinacy as with the Christians, but with considerateness, with gravity, so as to be persuasive without tragic show." With such a view of the Christian character it is not strange that he felt no qualms in sanctioning, though he did not instigate, the first persecution that bore the semblance of being universal and systematic.

Furthermore, Roman tradition was law for him; and Roman tradition was very clear as to the treatment which Christians deserved. The superstitious pagans attributed all public calamities to the wrath of their gods, and this wrath to the contempt which the Christians showed for the pagan idols. As Tertullian puts it: "The Christians are the cause of all disasters, of all public calamities. If the Tiber floods Rome, if the Nile does not flood the plains, if the heavens are closed, if the earth trembles, if a famine takes place or a war or a plague, immediately a cry is raised 'The Christians to the lions! to death with the Christians!'" Now, the reign of Marcus was one of singular calamities, all the more aggravating because unforeseen and irresistible and devastating the city and the Empire at the culminating point of their prosperity. The reign opened with wars and rumours of wars on the frontiers; the Tiber overflowed Rome; there had been a plague and a famine. Here truly

was the anger of the gods against the Roman welfare —the *deorum ira in rem Romanam* of Tacitus. The mob howled for Christian blood; and Marcus was too weak or too little concerned to resist. Antoninus, Hadrian, Trajan had consented to the torture of the fanatics, though they had not shared the popular prejudices against them; many of the lawyers and philosophers had counselled it for the good of the State; why should he say no? His better nature probably revolted from such brutality, but it is the misfortune of diffident conventionalists, such as he, that they sacrifice their better instincts to the received views of ruder natures.

The first victims of the superstition of the Romans and the conventionality of their Emperor were St. Felicitas and her sons. Their trial and death forms a celebrated episode in the history of the martyrs. It well illustrates the spirit of the martyrs[A] and the great things which the Church was doing for the weak ones of the world; how that out of the mouths of babes and sucklings she was perfecting praise through the strong love of Christ which was the inheritance of her children.

> [A] This is admitted even by those scholars who regard, and rightly it would seem, these Acts as a historical romance, *but founded on facts*. Since the main facts are true, and my concern is to illustrate the spirit of the martyrs, this testimony seemed sufficient justification for quoting the Acts.

The Act tells us that “owing to indignation amongst the Pontiffs, Felicitas, a woman of high rank, was struck down with her seven most Christian sons.” Her life had been a source of great edification to her fellow-Christians, and the Pontiffs “seeing that, thanks to her, the good repute of the Christian name

was growing, spoke of her to Augustus Antoninus (i.e., Marcus Aurelius), saying: 'This widow and her sons are outraging our gods to our great peril. If she does not pay homage to the gods, your majesty must know that they will be so angry that they cannot be appeased.' Then the Emperor ordered the Prefect of the City to compel her and her sons to appease the wrath of the gods by sacrifice."

This Prefect of the City was Publius Salvius Julianus, the most distinguished and trusted of Roman lawyers; and before him Felicitas was now brought for trial. He attempted first by blandishments, then by threats, to persuade her to sacrifice. She replied: "You cannot entice me by blandishments nor frighten me by threats, for I have within me the Holy Spirit, Who keeps me from being conquered by the devil: this is my ground for assurance, that living I shall overcome thee and when dead I shall triumph still more." "At least let your children live." "My children live if they do not sacrifice to idols; but if they commit such a crime, they shall go to eternal death." Thus ended this first interview between Publius, a Roman of the old school, with a strong sense of justice as he understood it, but understanding it only as identified with Roman law, and this Roman matron of noble birth, who had left the darkness for the light.

Next day she and her sons were again brought before the Prefect. "Have pity on your sons," said he, "those fine young fellows yet in the flower of their youth." Felicitas replied: "Your pity is impious and your advice cruel." Turning to her children she added: "Lift up your eyes to heaven, my children, look aloft where Christ awaits you with His saints. Do battle for your souls and show yourselves faithful in the love of

Christ." At this Publius ordered her to be buffeted. "Darest thou in my presence counsel contempt for the Emperor's orders!"

Then he called each of the seven sons in turn. He cajoled; he threatened; but to no avail. The first, Januarius, replied: "The wisdom of the Lord sustains me and will enable me to overcome all." He was beaten and sent back to prison, but the second was not cowed: "We adore one only God," he replied, "to Whom we offer the sacrifice of a pious devotion. Think not that you can separate me or any of my brothers from the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even under the threat of blows and your unjust designs our faith cannot be conquered or changed." To the third son, Philip, the Prefect said: "Our Lord, the Emperor, has ordered that you sacrifice to the all-powerful gods." The boy replied: "They are neither gods nor all-powerful but worthless, wretched, insensible images, and those who sacrifice to them will incur eternal risk." Silvanus made a similar reply and then Alexander was sent forward. Him the judge tried to win by kindness: "Have pity on thine age and on thy life, still in the prime of its youth. Be not obstinate but do what most will please our Sovereign: sacrifice to the gods that you may become one of the friends of Cæsar and gain both your life and the good-will of the Emperors." The privilege of being "a friend of Cæsar" was a great one. These *amici Cæsaris* formed a narrow circle round the Emperor, and the honour was coveted even by the highest in Rome. But it was no temptation to the Christian youth; he had a higher title: "I am the servant of Christ; I confess Him with my lips; I remain devoted to Him with my heart; I adore Him unceasingly. My years, so weak, as you see, have yet the prudence of old age and adore one only God. Thy

gods and their adorers shall perish." The two remaining children were equally unyielding, equally ardent in their love for Christ. They were all sent back to prison and Publius drew up a report of the process and sent it to the Emperor. What were Marcus' thoughts on reading it, if he read it at all.

Whatever his thoughts, he ordered the martyrs different tortures under various officials in different parts of the city. The first child died under the lash shod with lead, the second and third under the bludgeon; the fourth was hurled from a precipice, while the remaining three and Felicitas herself were mercifully beheaded. The reason for the severity and variety of the sentences may have been, as Allard suggests, the Emperor's desire to strike the imagination of the people and cause them to believe that the gods had had enough of victims. He must have abhorred such cruelty, but he was too weak to resist the clamour of the priests and mob of Rome as Pilate had been in presence of other priests and another mob. Interpret his conduct as we will, mere natural virtue and the maxims of the philosophers show ill beside the folly of the Cross. Children and a weak woman put to shame this paragon of virtues; but, if they did so, the glory was not theirs but Christ's; it was His love that nerved them to brave the lash, the bludgeon and the axe; He Who bade them be His witnesses to the ends of the earth, was in them, and suffered for them, because they suffered for Him. It is mockery and sophistry to think that such strength could come from frail humanity.

St. Felicitas and her sons fell victims to the

prejudices of the priests and the mob. The martyrdom of St. Justin and his companions was due to another force that was strongly to resist the advance of Christianity—namely, the opposition of the philosophers. The priests and the mob hated the Christians for the contempt with which they treated the State religion. The philosophers had an additional motive for hatred in their jealousy of the influence of the new teachers. “You see we profit nothing: the whole world is gone after Him.”

St. Justin, like many of the great Christian apologists, had come to the Church through the Greek schools. He had searched for truth in all the beaten paths of Greek philosophy and found it not. “Nobody had such faith in Socrates as to die for his doctrines,” he tells us; and it was the eloquence of the martyrs’ sufferings which converted him. The voice of Christ said “Come,” and the heart of the pagan said “Come, Lord Jesus.” He became a Christian and devoted to the cause of making Christ known the whole ardour of heart and intellect with which he had sought and found Him. This Christian Socrates would walk in his philosopher’s dress, which he still retained, through the public places of the city—the porches of the temples, the colonnades, and porticoes and baths, where the *élite* of Rome used to lounge each day discussing the latest society scandal, the news from the provinces, the elections or the games, and in these places he would converse and dispute with all comers. He had in this way inflicted severe humiliations on many of the pagan philosophers, who went about denouncing the Christians, and earned their thorough hatred. One especially was bitter against him. This was Crescens, a Cynic, whom Justin long expected would denounce him and who did so at length.

Justin and six of his disciples were arrested and brought before the Prefect of the City, Junius Rusticus, the Emperor's most trusted and intimate friend. The dialogue between these two men, both trained in the Greek schools of philosophy but now completely alienated, is typical of the conflict between old and new which marks the age of the Antonines.

"To begin," said the Prefect, "obey the gods and do what the Emperors command." Justin replied: "We cannot be accused or blamed for obeying the precepts of Our Saviour Jesus Christ." "What doctrines do you profess?" "I have studied all doctrines in turn and have settled in that of the Christians, although it is disliked by the advocates of error." "What dogma is that?" "The doctrine which we Christians devotedly follow, the only true doctrine, is the belief in one only God, Creator of all things, visible and invisible, and the confession of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Whom also the prophets announced, Who is to judge the race of man, the Herald of Salvation, and the Teacher of all those who have good-will to be taught by Him. And I consider myself, being but man, incapable of speaking worthily of His Infinite Deity. That is the work of the prophets. They for centuries, inspired from on high, announced the coming amongst men of Him Whom I have said is the Son of God." Here was a revelation to the devotee of Epictetus, one of the best of pagans; but he paid no heed. "Where do you Christians meet?" he asked. "The God of the Christians is not confined to any place; He fills Heaven and earth with His invisible presence; in every place the faithful adore and praise Him." "You are then a Christian?" "Yes, I am a Christian." Turning to Justin's companions he asked the same

question and got the same reply. To the slave Euelpistus, he said: “And you, what are you?” “I am a slave of Cæsar, but also a Christian, and I have got my freedom from Christ; by His goodness, through His grace, I have one hope with these.”

Here for the first time was realised the equality of man in its truest sense. Rusticus might well have recalled the words of his master Epictetus: “The slave, like you, derives his origin from Jupiter himself; he is his son like you; he is born of the same divine seed.” But he gave no token of sympathy. The winged word of Euelpistus: “a slave of Cæsar but a freedman of Christ” passed like an arrow through his mind and left not a trace of its passage.

Turning again to Justin he said: “Listen to me, you who are called learned, and think that you have the true doctrine; if I get you scourged and beheaded, think you that you must needs go up to Heaven?” “I hope,” answered Justin, “to receive the reward destined for those who keep the commandments of Christ, if I suffer the tortures you promise me. For I know that those who have lived thus will keep the Divine favour to the end of the world.” “You think, then, that you will mount up to Heaven, there to receive your reward,” said the judge with a sneer. “I do not think it, I know it, I am certain of it without a doubt.” This assurance of a future life of happiness fell strangely on the ears of the Stoic philosopher. His heart craved for it but at best he could hope for immortality only, “if it were best for the whole Kosmos that it should be so.” He gave his final command to sacrifice to the idols and received a final refusal; and all were immediately sent to execution.

More famous than either the martyrdom of St. Felicitas or of St. Justin was the martyrdom at Lyons of forty-eight Christians, afterwards known as the martyrdom of the Maccabees. It is typical of the persecutions in the provinces as the others were of those in Rome, and fortunately we still possess the beautiful letter of the churches of Lyons and Vienne to the churches of Asia which gives a full account of it. It took place in A.D. 177, when Marcus Aurelius had already reigned for sixteen years and within three years of his death. He was then grappling with the barbarians on the Danube frontier and the plague was working havoc in the provinces as in Rome and Italy. Superstition broke out on all sides with renewed force and with especial intensity at Lyons, the religious capital of the Three Gauls. The old calumnies against the Christians were revived. They were accused of infanticide and incest, of treachery to the State, of secret conspiracy, and of contempt for the gods and hatred of mankind. To them was due the anger of the gods; and by their blood alone could it be satiated.

The persecution began by a social ostracism of the Christians from all intercourse with their fellow-citizens in the baths, the forum and the other public places of the city, and even in private houses. If they violated this order they were beaten and stoned in the streets. So violent did this persecution become that the magistrates had at last to arrest all known to be Christians and examine them before the people. All confessed to the faith and were thrown into prison to await the arrival of the Imperial legate.

Immediately on his arrival the formal trial began. By a strange travesty of justice the prisoners were first cruelly tortured. Stirred by this a young nobleman,

Vettius Epagathus, stood out from the crowd and demanded to be allowed to plead their cause. He was already a Christian of ascetic life and loved by his brethren as “a gracious disciple of Christ following the Lamb whithersoever He went.” “Are you a Christian?” the legate asked him. “I am a Christian,” in his boldest tones. He was immediately put amongst the accused. “Behold the Christian’s advocate,” jeered the judge.

In this trial ten of the accused, weaker and worse prepared than the rest, denied Christ. This was a matter of far keener anguish to the faithful than their own sufferings. But the ranks thus broken were soon filled up by others, amongst them their aged Bishop, Pothinus. Meanwhile the slaves of Christian masters had been arrested, and tortured and bribed into swearing to all the current charges. Their evidence lashed the mob to still greater fury. No torture was now to be spared. A second time the Christians were placed at the gentle mercies of the torturers; this repetition of the torture in such cases having been legalised by Marcus. But nothing could break the spirit of these warriors; they rejoiced to be accounted worthy to suffer something for Him they loved. How intense was the nerving power of love in the souls of Sanctus the deacon and the slave-girl Blandina!

Sanctus when questioned again and again did but answer: “I am a Christian.” Even when the white-hot plates of brass were applied to his body and his flesh hissed and seared beneath them, in all his agony, his one relief was to proclaim again and again: “I am a Christian.” “Bathed and refreshed,” his brethren tell us, “in the heavenly well of living water which flows from the breasts of Christ,” every fresh torture was to him “a refreshment and a remedy rather than a

punishment."

But his courage was as nothing to that of Blandina. She was the bravest of the brave in the bravest of all armies—the "witnesses" of Christ. Her mistress and her fellow-Christians dreaded lest from her frail, sensitive frame she should give way, as ten stronger had done before. They misjudged, however, the power of love; the right hand of the Lord wrought strength in her. She had no words of surrender, no cry for mercy. From morning till evening she wearied out several sets of torturers, who retired baffled and amazed that she still lived. "I am a Christian and we do nothing wrong," was her cry again and again amidst her pains; and fresh and fresh with each repetition came new strength and courage. Renan rightly says of her: "As to the maid-servant Blandina, she proved that a revolution had been achieved. The true emancipation of the slave, emancipation by heroism, was in great measure her work. The pagan slave was supposed to be essentially wicked and immoral. What better way to rehabilitate and free him than to show him capable of the same virtues, the same sacrifices, as the freeman? How were these women to be treated with disdain, who had been seen acting with even more sublime heroism than their mistresses in the amphitheatre? The good Lyonese maid-servant had heard it said that the judgments of God are the overthrow of human appearances, and that God is often pleased to choose that which is humblest, ugliest, and most despised to confound that which seems beautiful and strong. Inspired by her rôle she called for the torture and burned with eagerness to suffer." It is the glory of Christianity to have raised the off-scourings of mankind to such sublimity. Galen acknowledged that the conduct of the ordinary Christian was as noble as

that of the most enlightened of the philosophers. He wrote as one who had been a contemporary of Epictetus and physician to Marcus Aurelius and intimate with the best lives which paganism produced. We who read the lives of the martyrs whole and appreciate the motives of their heroism know that it is an irreverence to compare with their virtue the virtue even of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. Yet it is well to have this testimony of an enlightened pagan contemporary to the elevating power of Christianity on the masses.

The final execution was spread over several days. The legate made the occasion a public holiday; and delegates from all Gaul, then present at Lyons for administrative and religious purposes, witnessed the spectacle.

Maturus, Sanctus, Attalus and Blandina were chosen to provide the first day's entertainment. Their tortures, we are told, saved the town the expense of a gladiatorial show. Christians were more novel game and cheaper than hired soldiers, lions and panthers. Blandina was bound all but naked to a pole at the end of the amphitheatre. She was to be at the mercy of the beasts; and the beasts proved more merciful than the yelling savage mob, who crowded tier over tier all around. That day none of them would touch the frail, delicate form that, bound as it was, recalled to the martyrs another form bound too by the Romans on a hill outside Jerusalem. She was reserved for another day, and meanwhile her fortitude gave courage to all.

Attalus was a Roman citizen well-known to the people. Hence they called for his torture as for a favourite actor or gladiator. He was forced to walk round the amphitheatre amid the jeers of the

spectators, preceded by a placard with the motto "This is Attalus, the Christian." But the rights of a Roman citizen were not to be outraged with impunity; and so the legate sent Attalus back to prison without torture, there to await the Emperor's orders.

No such rights protected Maturus and Sanctus; their bodies were already each a mass of wounds from their former tortures; and they would be well spent in making a people's holiday. A file of roughs lashed their naked, lacerated bodies as they passed into the arena. Their eyes fell on the instruments of torture—a gruesome array—along the centre; and then the awful moment came. A sullen growl and a roar from the farther end, and already the beasts were upon them. A thrill of mad excitement ran through the throng above. The beasts sank their teeth in the Christians' flesh and lapped the Christians' blood, and many a pagan envied them the feast. But, sure of their prey, they did not devour them at once; they tossed them to and fro in cruel sport and left them for the time. The mob were impatient; they wanted death; and called for the red-hot iron chair. Into this the martyrs were placed and the foul smell of the burnt flesh was incense to the nostrils of the holiday makers. But the Christians would not recant; the beasts would have no more of them; and it was slow sport watching this roasting process; so at a signal from the mob they received the *coup de grace*, the *finale* of all the people's pleasures.

Here as ever persecution did but beget fresh victims. The whole Christian population was aflame with desire to confess Christ; and even transgressed the wise rule of the Church, which forbade them to seek imprisonment. But in this moment of spiritual

intensity discretion were out of place; who can blame them for not standing meekly by when their brethren were writhing in torture and the name of Christ was being blasphemed? They can well afford to concede superiority in this always somewhat suspicious virtue of discretion to their arm-chair critics; they will have enough left to secure for themselves Heaven and the homage of mankind. The number of the accused increased day by day, especially the number of Roman citizens. This alarmed the legate, and he sent for instructions to the Emperor. After some weeks the reply came: those who recanted were to be released, the obstinate were to be put to death with torture. After all allowance has been made for the circumstances of the time and his own inevitable ignorance, this act remains a dark stain on the Stoic saint.

The last act of this long-drawn tragedy at last began. A final inquiry was held by the legate, this time chiefly in order to discriminate the Roman citizens from the non-citizens. The latter were to receive the full measure of torture; the former were to be beheaded outright—all except Attalus, who was reserved for the arena as a favour to the mob. In this last trial despite promises and threats not one, even of those who had before fallen, wavered. The executions continued for several days, owing to the great numbers of the martyrs. Each day from early morning the pagans thronged the amphitheatre. Attalus and Alexander were the next victims. They went through the whole gamut of pain without a word or a groan, their souls wrapped in prayer the while. Finally they were finished off by the sword when the mob tired of them. Blandina and Ponticus were subjected again to yet fiercer torments, ending in death—torments so cruel that the Gauls said one

to another: “Never in our country has woman endured so much.”

The whole proceedings are a terrible commentary on the rule of the philosopher-king and Gibbon’s picture of the Golden Age, “the happiest period of the world’s history, when the good of the subject was the one object of government.” Much may be admitted to palliate Marcus’ connivance, but assuredly he cannot be wholly excused. We can acquit him of monstrous brutality; but only at the cost of attributing to him narrow prejudice or pusillanimity. We can save his heart, but only at the expense of his intellect and will.

I have dwelt on a few of the many martyrdoms of his reign to show the conduct and the ideals of Christianity side by side with the conduct of the pagan philosophers. What reasonable being can read aright the story of this struggle and yet prefer the cold, negative, ineffectual ideals of Marcus and his friends to the warm throbbing life of love and the heroic death of Ponticus and Blandina, of Justin and Felicitas? Yet, if we are to believe Renan and Arnold, the Meditations of Marcus are the force which will transform the world when, to quote Renan, the Gospel and the *Imitation of Christ* have passed away, and on the hillside of Lyons where the martyrs died “a temple shall rise to the Supreme Amnesty and contain a chapel for all causes, all virtues, all martyrs.” Surely this is dilettanteism and paradox run wild, as untrue to psychology as it is to history and all sane and effective religion!

CHAPTER X
THE PAGAN À KEMPIS

The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius have often been compared with the *Imitation of Christ*. The comparison is interesting; and the analysis which it involves of one of the noblest and purest of pagan ascetics on the one hand, and of the great exponent of Christian asceticism on the other, cannot but strengthen belief in the divine origin of Christianity. Unfortunately, we cannot attempt anything like a complete analysis of the two books; and we must be content to call attention to a few points of resemblance and difference in the two ascetics; and estimate their respective values as salves to wounded souls.

The appraisers of “disinterested” and “undogmatic” morality have professed to find in the pagan book a surer guide to life. They find it more human, less scholastic, freer and fresher. Renan has voiced this view with his usual brilliance and fickle impressionism.

It is true of course that the *Imitation of Christ* is built on Christian dogma and steeped in Christian mysticism. But this is not matter of discredit to the *Imitation* but of glory to Christianity. It is because the

martyrs were strengthened by Christian dogmas and ideals that they alone surpassed Aurelius in that age. There is far less of rigid adherence to the letter of formulæ and infinitely more of spirit, of unction, of personal devotion in the *Imitation*. If dogma did not hinder but rather inspired a book which gives such freedom to the spirit, it is time to revise some of the current cant about the sterility of theology, its fettering of the spirit, and the witty definition of dogmatism as "puppyism grown big."

Those who have embraced Christianity and walked its peaceful paths can have no doubt as to the superiority of the *Imitation* in all that is beautiful, good and true. But even positivists, professing completely to reject the supernatural, find in à Kempis a unique charm. George Eliot, the best of them, has told us in inspired words what the *Imitation* was to her:—

"I suppose that is the reason why the small, old-fashioned book, for which you need only pay sixpence at a bookstall, works miracles to this day, turning bitter waters into sweetness; while expensive sermons and treatises newly issued leave all things as they were before. It was written down by a hand that waited for the heart's prompting; it is the chronicle of a solitary hidden anguish, struggle, trust and triumph—not written on velvet cushions to teach endurance to those who are treading with bleeding feet on the stones. And so it remains at all times a lasting record of human needs and human consolations; the voice of a brother, who, ages ago, felt and suffered and renounced—in the cloister, perhaps, with serge gown and tonsured head, with much chanting and long fasts, and with a fashion of speech different from ours—but under the same

silent far-off heavens, and with the same passionate desires, the same strivings, the same failures, the same weariness."

This is the opinion of one who has deprived the *Imitation* of its supernatural element. And even from the purely natural point of view, what more beautiful than the teachings of à Kempis on the true conduct of life? But this is not its characteristic charm, and one suspects that it is not the purely natural element in à Kempis that fascinates the positivist humanitarians; it is the supernatural element; and the attraction is but the strong cry of their spiritual nature revolting against the materialism to which their "positive" tenets lead; just as that same need for a religion led the best of them, even at the cost of inconsistency, to establish with much ritual and fantastic aberrations the cult of Humanity.

But there is no need to settle the question between the two books by authority. Were it necessary to do so, one need but recall the multitudes of all classes and creeds, from St. Francis Xavier and St. Ignatius to Leibnitz and Bossuet and thence to Wesley, George Eliot, Gladstone, and Gordon, for whom the *Imitation* has been a shining light and a guide upon their path second only to the Sacred Books themselves. To join that number one has but to take and read. The points of similarity between the two books consist in many maxims common to both, such as "that we ought not to regard the opinion of men"; "that we ought to keep the passions in restraint"; "that we ought to despise pleasures and endure hardship with patience"; "that we are not to be too much attached to life and to earthly things"; "that we ought to bear with the faults of others and return good for evil." This similarity is, however, to a great extent merely

verbal. The same words do not express the same spiritual attitude in the two writers. It is merely the resemblance which prevails between all the great ascetical writers, from Seneca and Epictetus to St. Francis, St. Ignatius and Bunyan, and thence to modern writers such as William James. They all study by introspection the same human soul with the same natural faculties and tendencies, strength and weakness, in all its varying moods of joy and sadness, perplexity and peace. Whereas the differences are measured only by the distance between the natural and the supernatural and show themselves in the whole spirit and atmosphere, tone and motive, of the two books.

I have already hinted in passing at the sympathy there is between à Kempis and Marcus Aurelius in their contempt of sophistry and vain learning. But this similarity of view does but bring out all the more strikingly the difference in motive and the manifest superiority of the Christian. Aurelius was glad that he had not made more proficiency in the rhetorical and sophistical training of the day; and for the praiseworthy motive that thus he might have more leisure to attend to the main work of life—his own perfection. But how cold is his analysis beside the glowing words of à Kempis. The pagan seeks leisure for an introspection too often morbid; the Christian wishes for silence of the schools that God Himself may speak within him, and in the ecstasy of this holy discipleship cries out:—

“Happy is he whom Truth teacheth by itself, not by figures and words that pass, but as it is in itself.... It is a great folly for us to neglect things profitable and necessary and willingly to busy ourselves about those which are curious and hurtful.... He to whom the

Eternal Word speaketh is set at liberty from a multitude of opinions.... O Truth, my God, make me one with Thee in everlasting love. I am wearied with often reading and hearing many things; in Thee is all that I will or desire. Let all teachers hold their peace; let all creatures be silent in Thy sight; speak Thou alone to me."

In passing, we may compare this prayer and the whole mystic rapture and personal heart-cries of the *Imitation* with Aurelius' idea of a perfect prayer: "A prayer of the Athenians: Rain, rain, O dear Zeus, down on the ploughed fields of the Athenians and on the plains. In truth we ought not to pray at all or we ought to pray in this simple and noble fashion." This simplicity was a great advance on the hypocrisy and verbiage which often marked Roman prayers and provided matter for satire to Horace and Juvenal; but, after all, it does not present us with any very lofty ideal. So, too, when he speaks of the objects which we ought to pray for: "Why dost thou not ask that the gods may give thee the faculty of not fearing any of the things thou fearest, or of not desiring any of the things thou desirest, or not being pained at anything rather than pray that any of these things should not happen or happen? One man prays thus: How shall I not lose my little son? Do thou pray thus: How shall I not be afraid to lose him. In fine, turn thy prayers this way, and see what comes." All this does Aurelius credit, but it is far from the outpouring of the soul to God, which is the essence of the Christian book.

Both books teach that peace must come through strife—strife without and strife within. The Stoic like the Christian teaches that life is a warfare; that safety lies in continual vigilance; in restraint over our lower

nature; in retirement and self-examination; in regarding all the things of time as of no account in themselves. “Look within,” says Aurelius, “within is the fountain of good, and it will ever bubble up, if thou wilt ever dig”; “the mind maintains its own tranquillity by retiring into itself”; “retire into thyself. The rational principle which rules has this nature, that it is content with itself when it does what is just and so secures tranquillity”; “the mind which is free from passions is a citadel, for man has nothing more secure to which he can fly for refuge and for the future be inexpugnable.” À Kempis also bids us “seek a proper time to retire into thyself” but this retirement is not into solitude; it is to the most sublime communion: “Shut the door upon thyself and call to thee Jesus thy beloved. Stay with Him in thy cell, for thou shalt not find so great peace anywhere else”; for “whosoever aims at arriving at internal and spiritual things must with Jesus go aside from the crowd”; “in silence and quiet the devout soul goes forward and learns the secrets of the Scriptures”; “for God, with His holy angels, will draw nigh to Him who withdraws himself from his acquaintances and friends.”

The ideal of à Kempis is by subjection of the passions to reach the interior freedom which begets all the Christian virtues until these in turn are concentrated into one strong glow of love by which the lover is united to his Beloved, heart to heart, and soul to soul. It is this love which makes his short sentences quiver and glow and pierce, especially in the beautiful chapter on the effects of Divine love, where he prays that he may cast off the human and put on God:—

“Free me from evil passions and heal my mind of all

disorderly affections, that being healed and well purified in my interior I may become fit to love, courageous to suffer, and constant to persevere. Love is an excellent thing, a great good indeed, which alone maketh light all that is burthensome and beareth with even mind all that is unequal.... The love of Jesus is noble and it spurreth us on to do great things and exciteth us to desire always that which is most perfect.... Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing stronger, nothing higher, nothing broader, nothing more pleasant, nothing more generous, nothing fuller, or better in heaven or earth; for love is from God and cannot rise but in God, above all things created."

It is scarcely necessary to say that the Stoic had no such ideal as this; for it is essentially a Christian ideal.

À Kempis soars on the wings of love through the spirit world at home amongst the angels; while the Stoic trudges drearily along the hard, bleak road of logic; and once more logic is convicted of futility as a complete guide to life. Follow reason, said the Stoic: reason tells you that you can guide your own destinies and mould your own inner life: rely on yourself, since you can rely on nobody else: be self-sufficient. This self-sufficiency was the parent of hardness and at times of an unlovely spiritual pride. Aurelius seems to thank God that he is not as the rest of men; he is better than the pharisee only in that he pities the publican and acknowledges that he himself has that within him which could lead him to lower depths did he cease to follow the Stoic ascesis; but his pity has frequently something of spiritual disdain and contempt in it. Yet he is not wholly proud; there is in him a certain modesty and self-suppression

which often in its expression reminds us of sayings of à Kempis; but he never learnt to think: “We are all frail; but do thou think no one more frail than thyself.” “If thou wouldst know and learn anything useful, love to be unknown and esteemed as nothing; this is the highest and most profitable lesson, truly to know and despise oneself”; or with St. Paul “who is weak and I am not weak.” But we should not expect unaided reason to reach these heights. À Kempis himself tells us that light comes to the soul only when reason is transcended by faith and love: “If thou reliest more upon thine own reason or industry than upon the virtue that subjects to Jesus Christ, thou wilt seldom and hardly be an enlightened man; for God will have us perfectly subject to Himself, and to transcend all reason by ardent love.” “Reason transcended by ardent love”: in this is expressed the whole relation between Christianity and all systems that rely on reason alone. The soul itself in all its aspirations is, as Tertullian said, naturally Christian, and it is only by a Procrustean torture that it can be forced into any other system.

The inadequacy of Aurelius’ teaching is brought out most clearly in the shallow optimism with which he tries to conjure away all the sufferings of life. Nothing can be more unreal than his attitude towards evil. We turn to à Kempis and at once we are struck by the contrast. Suffering and evil are for à Kempis an intense reality. He does not attempt to waive them away with the magic formula “Never mind.” No; it is because they are realities, often terrible realities, that they are the most precious things in life with the power to transmute the human into the Divine. He recognises that no ordinary motive can reconcile frail humanity to the trials of life; that many are ready to follow Jesus to the

breaking of bread but few to the drinking of the chalice of His passion; that only an ardent personal love and loyalty to Christ can induce men to take up their cross and follow Him, Who has gone before bearing His cross. When suffering is borne in this spirit it loses the unreasonableness which besets all other explanations of it. It becomes the greatest of blessings; it makes us indeed like unto God.

How ineffectual beside this spirit of suffering for love are the cold formularies with which, as by magic spells, the Stoic would benumb human pain. Take for instance the much-quoted passage from the end of the second book: “Of human life the duration is a point; the substance is fleeting; the perception is dull; and the fabric of the whole body subject to rottenness; the soul is an idle whirling and fortune hard to divine, and fame a thing devoid of judgment. In short, all that there is of the body is a stream and all that there is of the soul a dream and a vapour. Life is a warfare and a sojourning in a strange country, and after-fame is oblivion. What then is that which can conduct a man? One thing, and only one, philosophy.” But he himself found, as many have found, that sorrow is not banished nor the riddle of life solved by philosophy.

Thus we see the spirit of these two teachers of men. Further comparison would but illustrate more clearly that the Christian book, because it is in a sense divine, is intensely human, adequate to fulfil all that is best in man; while the pagan book, because it is merely human, does not satisfy the human soul, which always seeks for something better than itself. The one is centred in God and draws its inspiration from the inspired books themselves, concentrating all its efforts on the reproduction of Christ in the

Christian. The other, though it bids us to “love man and follow God,” means something quite different by this love of man and this following of whatever its author understood by “God.” For it is essentially centred in man, in self; and has no inspiration but the gropings of the unaided intellect. Nor can it propose to us any higher model for our imitation than the blind subjection to law which prevails in the inanimate and organic universe; the stones, a fig-tree, or the brutes. It is true that in the spirit of the Meditations there is something akin to the sayings of à Kempis; but the Christian time and again feels in the pagan book the sense of void, the vain strivings after ideals—ideals fully realised and expressed by the lowly brother of the Common Life. The humblest Christian has as his birthright truths which were the fruit of years of training and much struggle in the noble pagan soul; and he has more.

THE END

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