

**SIR JOHN LUBBOCK'S
HUNDRED BOOKS 3.
THE MEDITATIONS
OF MARCUS AURELIUS**

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Sir John Lubbock's Hundred Books 3. The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius by Marcus Aurelius & Jeremy Collier

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MARCUS AURELIUS & JEREMY COLLIER

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SIR JOHN LUBBOCK'S HUNDRED BOOKS

3

THE MEDITATIONS OF
MARCUS AURELIUS

TRANSLATED FROM THE GREEK

BY JEREMY COLLIER

REVISED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES,

BY ALICE ZIMMERN

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INTRODUCTION

BY

THE RIGHT HON. SIR JOHN LUBBOCK, BART., M.P.,
F.R.S., D.C.L., LL.D.

IN the year 1886 I gave an address on "Books and Reading" at the Working Men's College, which in the following year was printed as one of the chapters in my "Pleasures of Life."

In it I mentioned about one hundred names, and the list has been frequently referred to since as my list of "the hundred best books." That, however, is not quite a correct statement. If I were really to make a list of what are in my judgment the hundred greatest books, it would contain several—Newton's "Principia," for instance—which I did not include, and it would exclude several—the "Koran," for instance—which I inserted in deference to the judgment of others. Again, I excluded living authors, from some of whom—Ruskin and Tennyson, Huxley and Tyndall, for instance, to mention no others—I have myself derived the keenest enjoyment; and especially I expressly stated that I did not select the books on my own authority, but as being those most frequently mentioned with approval by those writers who have referred directly or indirectly to the pleasure of reading, rather than as suggestions of my own.

I have no doubt that on reading the list, various names of books which might well be added would occur to almost any one. Indeed, various criticisms on the list have appeared, and many books have been mentioned which it is said ought to have been included. On the other hand no corresponding omissions have been suggested. I have referred to several of the criticisms, and find that, while 300 or 400 names have been proposed for addition, only half a dozen are suggested for omission. Moreover, it is remarkable that not a single book appears in all the lists, or even in half of them, and only about half a dozen in more than one.

But while, perhaps, no two persons would entirely concur as to all the books to be included in such a list, I believe no one would deny that those suggested are not only good, but among the best.

I am, however, ready, and indeed glad, to consider any suggestions, and very willing to make any changes which can be shown to be improvements. I have indeed made two changes in the list as it originally appeared, having inserted Kalidasa's "Sakuntala."

or *The Ring*," and Schiller's *William Tell*"; omitting Lucretius, which is perhaps rather too difficult, and Miss Austen, as English novelists were somewhat over-represented.

Another objection made has been that the books mentioned are known to every one, at any rate by name; that they are as household words. Every one, it has been said, knows about Herodotus and Homer, Shakespeare and Milton. There is, no doubt, some truth in this. But even Lord Iddesleigh, as Mr. Lang has pointed out in his *"Life,"* had never read Marcus Aurelius, and I may add that he afterwards thanked me warmly for having suggested the *"Meditations"* to him.* If, then, even Lord Iddesleigh, "probably one of the last of English statesmen who knew the literature of Greece and Rome widely and well," had not read Marcus Aurelius, we may well suppose that others also may be in the same position. It is also a curious commentary on what was no doubt an unusually wide knowledge of classical literature that Mr. Lang should ascribe—and probably quite correctly—Lord Iddesleigh's never having had his attention called to one of the most beautiful and improving books in classical, or indeed in any other literature, to the fact that the emperor wrote in "crabbed and corrupt Greek."

Again, a popular writer in a recent work has observed that "why any one should select the best hundred, more than the best eleven, or the best thirty books, it is hard to conjecture." But this remark entirely misses the point. Eleven books, or even thirty, would be very few; but no doubt I might just as well have given 90, or 110. Indeed, if our arithmetical notation had been duodecimal instead of decimal, I should no doubt have made up the number to 120. I only chose 100 as being a round number.

Another objection has been that every one should be left to choose for himself. And so he must. No list can be more than a suggestion. But a great literary authority can hardly perhaps realize the difficulty of selection. An ordinary person turned into a library and sarcastically told to choose for himself, has to do so almost at haphazard. He may perhaps light upon a book with an attractive title, and after wasting on it much valuable time and patience, find that, instead of either pleasure or profit, he has weakened, or perhaps lost, his love of reading.

Messrs. George Routledge and Sons have conceived the idea of publishing the books contained in my list in a handy and cheap form, selecting themselves the editions which they prefer; and I believe that in doing so they will confer a benefit on many who have not funds or space to collect a large library.

JOHN LUBBOCK,

HIGH ELMS,
DOWN, KENT,
30 March, 1891.

* I have since had many other letters to the same effect.

MARCUS AURELIUS.

“**U**NTIL philosophers are kings, and the princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, cities will never cease from ill—no, nor the human race, as I believe—and then only will our state have a possibility of life, and see the light of day.” “The truth is, that the state in which the rulers are most reluctant to govern is best and most quietly governed, and the state in which they are most willing is the worst.”

Thus writes Plato in his Republic, laying down the conditions, which even to him appear impossible, under which a state may be wisely governed. The ruler must be a philosopher as well as a king; and he must govern unwillingly, because he loves philosophy better than dominion. Once in the history of the world these conditions were fulfilled: in Marcus Aurelius we find the philosopher king, the ruler who preferred the solitude of the student to the splendour of the palace, the soldier who loved the arts of peace better than the glory of war. It is with no small interest that we turn to the records of history to see what was the outward life led by this king, but even more willingly do we open the precious record of

his own thoughts, which reveal to us the inner life of the philosopher.

Marcus Aurelius Antoninus was the adopted son of the Emperor Antoninus Pius, who died in 161 A.D. He had been brought up with the utmost care by his adoptive father, and received the best instruction in poetry and rhetoric, at that time the staples of a liberal education. But his favourite study was philosophy, and when only eleven years old he assumed the philosophers' simple dress, adopted their mode of life; and finding that his inclination was chiefly towards Stoicism, he attached himself to this—the strictest of the philosophic schools. A discipline of monastic severity, that bade its followers disregard all bodily comfort, all that is commonly called pleasure, and care for nought but virtue, was indeed a strange training for one destined for the imperial purple, and it hardly appeared to be a fitting preparation for the cares of what was then the one great Empire of the world. True, the Stoics loved to call themselves citizens of the world, and to inculcate that cosmopolitanism that is broader and nobler than mere patriotism; but while they maintained in theory that the wise man should take part in politics, in practice there was always something in the existing state of things which made his doing so unadvisable. But Marcus Aurelius could not choose his own lot. Destined for the throne already by the Emperor Hadrian, associated in the empire even in his adoptive father's lifetime, he could but accept his lot, and in striving to practise the noble principles he had learnt, pay to his Stoic teachers the truest tribute.

His was a troubled reign. The Roman Empire, which in the vigorous days of the Republic had been gradually but surely extending its boundaries, had been consolidated,

and newly administered by Julius Caesar and Augustus. On the death of the latter it extended from the Atlantic on the west to the Armenian mountains and Arabian deserts on the east. On the south the African deserts had alone stopped the conquering arms, while on the north a line of natural boundaries was traced by the English Channel, Rhine, Danube, Black Sea, and Mount Caucasus. Warned by the ill-success that attended the later campaigns of his generals on the Lower Rhine, Augustus had cautioned his successors to aim at preserving rather than increasing their dominions. Thus it came about, that between the years 14 and 161 A.D., when Marcus Aurelius succeeded to the throne, only two fresh conquests had been made; Britain, a source of more trouble than profit to the empire, and Dacia, conquered by Trajan in 106 A.D.

Natural boundaries and Roman legions kept peace and security for many years within the circle of Roman dominion. But there were two weak points on these borders. On the north the hardy German tribes on the Danube and Upper Rhine, themselves hard pressed by Slavonian intruders from Russia, threatened to invade the Roman dominion; on the east the "insolent Parthian," long the terror of the Roman arms, was a constant source of trouble and danger. The peace-loving Marcus Aurelius was obliged to cope with both these enemies. The arms, or rather the army, of the insolent and profligate Lucius Verus for a time subdued the Parthians, but no lasting peace was destined Marcus Aurelius. He himself conducted the campaigns on the Danube, and again and again beat back the northern enemy in wars, of which the chief interest to us now consists in the scant notes in the *Meditations*—"This among the Quadi," "this at Carnuntum," showing how these precious records of a pure and