

**THE MEDITATIONS OF  
MARCUS AURELIUS  
ANTONINUS**

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The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus by Marcus Aurelius & Charles Bigg & John Jackson

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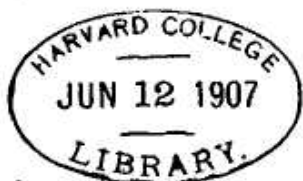
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JOHN JACKSON

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CHARLES BIGG

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## CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION. BY CHARLES BIGG . . . .	5
MEDITATIONS OF MARCUS AURELIUS ANTONINUS	
Book I . . . . .	51
Book II . . . . .	60
Book III . . . . .	68
Book IV . . . . .	78
Book V . . . . .	94
Book VI . . . . .	110
Book VII . . . . .	126
Book VIII . . . . .	142
Book IX . . . . .	158
Book X . . . . .	172
Book XI . . . . .	188
Book XII . . . . .	201
TRANSLATOR'S NOTES . . . . .	213
CRITICAL NOTES . . . . .	230

## INTRODUCTION

**I**N the year A.D. 135 the Emperor Hadrian adopted as his son and successor Lucius Ceionius Commodus, who bore also the names of Aurelius and of Annius Verus. Roman nobles of this time often boasted a long string of family appellations. As a rule only two of these were employed, but the same individual might use a different pair at different times, or the son, for distinction's sake, might use one pair, while his father had used another. Partly for this reason, partly because his pedigree is not given, we do not know exactly who Commodus was. But he would seem to have been related on the one side to the Aurelian house, which drew its origin from Nimes in Southern Gaul, on the other to that of Annius Verus, which came, like Trajan and Hadrian, from Spain. Most probably he was related to Hadrian. Certainly he cannot have been selected on the ground of his personal merits. Commodus was a handsome and gentlemanly debauchee, who had never distinguished himself in any way whatever; and was moreover, at the time of his adoption, in the last stage of consumption. But Hadrian was strongly attached to him.

Gibbon and others have spoken of adoption as an excellent method for ensuring the succession of a competent Emperor. But the truth is that in almost every case it was a family arrangement, occasioned by the re-



markable childlessness of the Roman princes, and neither better nor worse than the rule of primogeniture, which would certainly have been always followed, if circumstances had made it possible.

Commodus died on New Year's Day, 138, and Hadrian, whose own end was approaching, was compelled to make new and speedy arrangements. He would naturally have selected the son of Commodus, but the younger Lucius Verus was a mere child of seven years. Failing him, he would have taken Marcus Annius Verus, but Marcus again was but sixteen. Accordingly he adopted as his son Titus Aurelius Antoninus, a dignified, excellent man, whose crowning merit was that his wife was Galeria Faustina, the paternal aunt of Marcus. Antoninus had been father of two sons, but both appear to have died before his adoption into the imperial family. He submitted cheerfully to Hadrian's condition that he should in his turn adopt the younger Lucius Verus and Marcus. Thus the succession might seem to be firmly established in the Spanish line. In July of the same year Hadrian died, Antoninus became Emperor, and Marcus crown-prince.

Marcus had lost his own father while still an infant, and appears to have been twice adopted before this. At first he had borne the names of Catilius Severus, and he speaks in the *Meditations* of a brother Severus, who was clearly much older than himself, and to whom he professes himself indebted for his republican opinions. He must, therefore, have been taken into the family of his maternal great-grandfather, Catilius Severus; a dis-

tinguished man, who had been Consul in 120, was a friend and correspondent of the younger Pliny, and had entertained the hope of being himself adopted by Hadrian. Soon afterwards, in the lifetime of Catilius, Marcus was again adopted by his paternal grandfather, Annius Verus, thus recovering his first name. In the house of Annius Verus on the Caelian hill, close by the Lateran, he had been born, and there he passed his early years, under the care of his mother Domitia Calvilla or Lucilla, a devout and accomplished woman. Catilius Severus also continued to watch over him. 'He sent me,' says Marcus, 'to the public courses of instruction, procured for me the wisest tutors at home, and taught me that on education we must spend with an open hand.'

At the same time Marcus was the darling of Hadrian. The cynical old Emperor, who had seen so much and believed so little, delighted in the precocious gravity of the ingenuous child philosopher, bestowed upon him the playname of Verissimus, 'my little Washington,' as we might say; gave him 'a public horse,' or, in other words, made him one of the old Roman Knights, at the age of six, and two years later created him Chief of the Salian priests, an ancient sacred college, filled with men of the highest birth, and specially devoted to the imperial family. The child took his dignities very seriously and performed all his religious duties with the utmost punctiliousness. He would preside at the famous Salian banquets, and dance through the city on the festival of Mars at the head of his colleagues, and he

knew by heart the hymns and formularies belonging to the cult, which were so old that no man knew exactly what they meant. At the age of fourteen Marcus assumed the *toga virilis*, and was betrothed, by direction of Hadrian, to the daughter of Lucius Commodus, his adopted son. About the same time he was appointed to preside over the *Feriae Latinae*, one of the most ancient and venerable of Roman holidays, which was generally conducted by the Consuls, the chief officers of the state. Finally at the age of seventeen, in 138, by special grace of Hadrian, he was promoted quaestor, and took his place in the Senate.

In July of this year Antoninus became Emperor, and thenceforth Marcus was invested with all those marks of observance which belonged to the heir apparent. One serious point in Hadrian's arrangement was changed. It had been directed that Lucius Verus should marry Faustina, the daughter of Antoninus, while Marcus was to take the sister of Verus, to whom he had been formally betrothed. The new emperor altered this, and married Faustina to Marcus. The reason for this change of plan may be found perhaps in the extreme youth of Verus, who was but eight years old. But the effect was to place Marcus distinctly above Verus in what we may call the Act of Settlement. It is probable that this was the design of Hadrian himself. He did not intend to divide the Empire; but the life of Marcus was precarious, and, in view of the possibility of his early death, it seemed desirable to provide beforehand against the risks of a disputed