

**SONNETS FROM
MARCUS AURELIUS**

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Sonnets from Marcus Aurelius by James Vila Blake

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JAMES VILA BLAKE

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Sonnets
FROM
Marcus Aurelius

James Vila Blake

THOS. P. HALPIN COMPANY
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

TO THE
REV. A. W. OXFORD, M. D.
LONDON, ENGLAND

The Quotations from Aurelius

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Quotation No. 2—Book II., 1.
Quotation No. 3—Book IV., 1.
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FOREWORD

When I had read the book of Marcus Aurelius many times, and was reading it after a long interval once again, which was also in company and aloud, I noticed the worthy matter for poetic treatment presented by the great Emperor's noblest and most characteristic sayings. I marked such passages, and they remained for many years marked and no more. Then I remembered them, recurred to them, and found my former impression confirmed. Hence these heroic hymns, as perhaps I may call them, the sonnet appearing to me the poetic form most suitable and germane. Do or can the lofty thoughts herein versed, gain from verse? The reader must judge, and possibly the fortunes of the present recital may afford some indication whether the stern and high terseness of the original can profit by the expansion, diction and imagery of verse. Certainly in clarity, no; but in persuasiveness, possibly yes. The question seems much like a query whether excellent drawing in ink can gain by brush and color. What is proper matter for poesy, is a question belonging to poetic technics, and there is wide space and a thousand species between a geometrical demonstration or a bit of chemical nomenclature, and the heroics of a ballad; but at first blush perhaps it may be surmised that whatever thought is big enough and humane enough, may lay all Nature under contribution, and need not disdain the warrant of poetic fancy, trope, form or diction. As to the diction, for

ought that appears, the word *rondure* which Shakespeare liked, is as good as roundness, or sphericity, or circularity, or curve, or curvature, or concavity, or convexity, or *circumbendibus*, and if this be granted, poetic language scores a point perhaps, though I have known poets and others look askance at "*rondure*."

The Greek and a prose rendering are placed together, and the sonnet opposite them. In the rendering I have not sought to give a literal transcription of the original, but rather the embosomed spirit and redolence of it. But it may be hoped this will be acceptable, since for those who might disapprove the Greek is added. The text is accepted from "*The Communings with Himself of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, Emperor of Rome, together with his Speeches and Sayings. A Revised Text and a Translation into English, by C. R. Haines, M.A., F.S.A.* London, William Heinemann. New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons."

J. V. B.

The Greek excerpts are taken by means of a photo-etching process. Of course the result would have been more elegant if I had employed a Greek compositor; but the virtue of the text is not affected, and I have done what I could under the conditions.

PROEM

Marcus, thy stoic wit lacks naught in-door;
Out-door methinks thou shouldst be more at play,
Hill, vale, wood, brook, be fellows by thy way,
And wider wanderings on the sea-green shore.
Thou shouldst a stilly meadow pool explore
For doubled lustres of the early day,
Or soft reflections of capacious gray
That hath the meadow's verdure tented o'er.
O if a rose had trembled to thy kiss
More than some culprit quailed before thy power,
Mayhap I had not now been writing this,
Thou being too great to gain thy day and hour.
Well, well, wide soul thou wert, kind heart, mind's
dower,
And to thee I am pious and submiss.

I.

Ἐωθεν προλέγειν ἑαυτῷ συντεύξομαι περι-
 ἔργῳ, ἀχαρίστῳ, ὑβριστῇ, δολερῷ, βασκάνῳ,
 ἀκοινωνήτῳ. πάντα ταῦτα συμβέβηκεν ἐκείνοις
 παρὰ τὴν ἀγνοίαν τῶν ἀγαθῶν καὶ κακῶν. ἐγὼ
 δὲ τεθεωρηκῶς τὴν φύσιν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ὅτι καλόν,
 καὶ τοῦ κακοῦ, ὅτι αἰσχρόν, καὶ τὴν αὐτοῦ τοῦ
 ἀμαρτάνοντος φύσιν, ὅτι μοι συγγενής, οὐχὶ
 αἵματος ἢ σπέρματος τοῦ αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ νοῦ καὶ
 θείας ἀπομοίρας μέτοχος, οὔτε βλαβῆναι ὑπό
 τινος αὐτῶν δύναμαι· αἰσχρῷ γάρ με οὐδεὶς
 περιβαλεῖ· οὔτε ὀργίζεσθαι τῷ συγγενεῖ δύναμαι
 οὔτε ἀπέχεσθαι αὐτῷ.

At early morning warn yourself thus: Today I shall happen on busy-bodies, ungrateful fellows, insolent boors, deceitful plotters, spiteful churls, unkind neighbors. All these ills have befallen them by reason of their ignorance of good and evil. But I have understood the nature of the good, that it is beautiful, and of the evil, that it is ugly, and of the ill-behaved man himself, that he is of the same source, kith and kin, with me—not of the same blood and flesh, but sharing in reason and a divine part; for which cause I neither can be injured by any one of them (since no one can wrap me up in baseness) nor can I be angry or hold bitter feeling against this kinsman of mine.